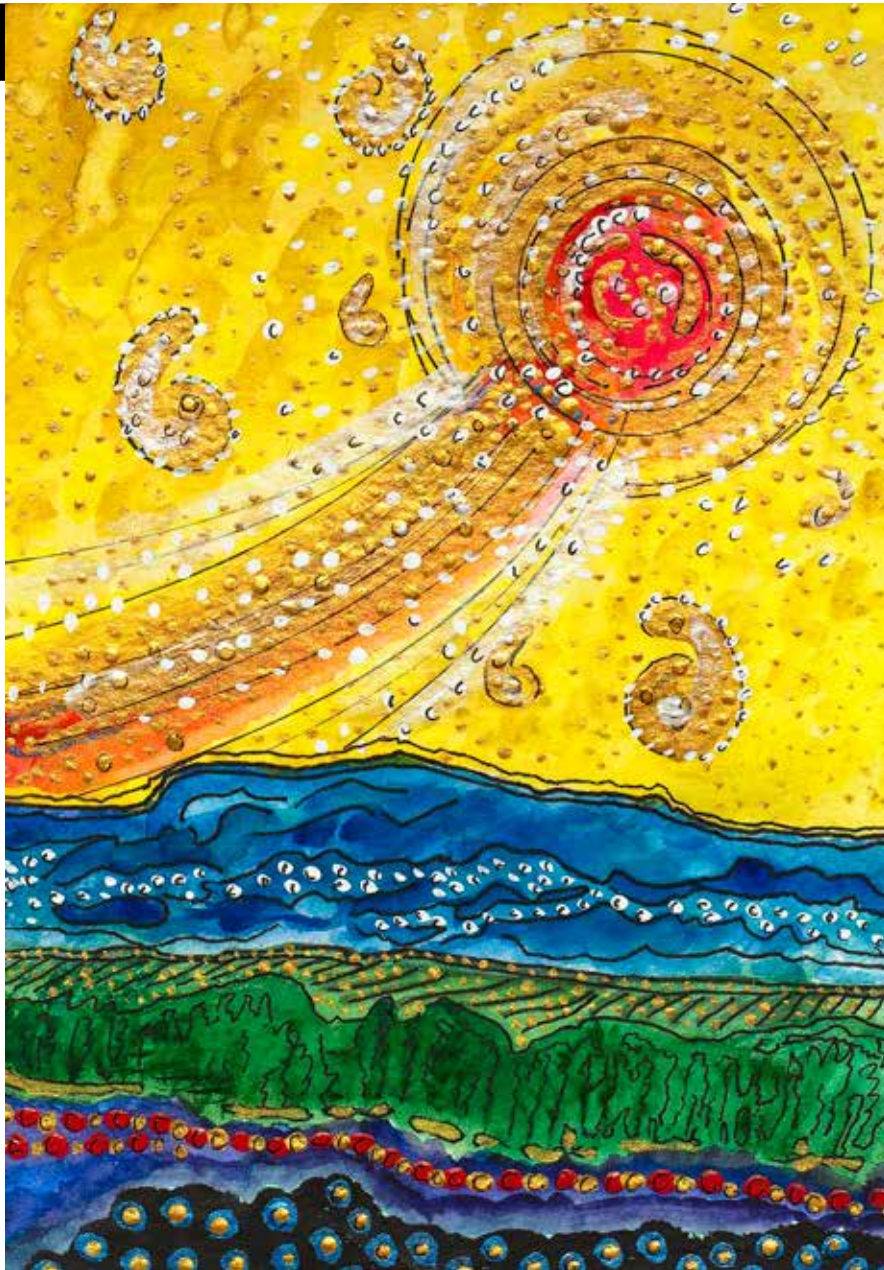


# BANNER

DECEMBER 2023



2023 Year-End

# Giving Guide

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## Calvin University

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## Resonate Global Mission

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These nine ministries recently joined together as Thrive to support congregations:

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- Disability Concerns
- Diversity
- Faith Formation
- Race Relations
- Safe Church
- Social Justice
- Pastor Church Resources
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## Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

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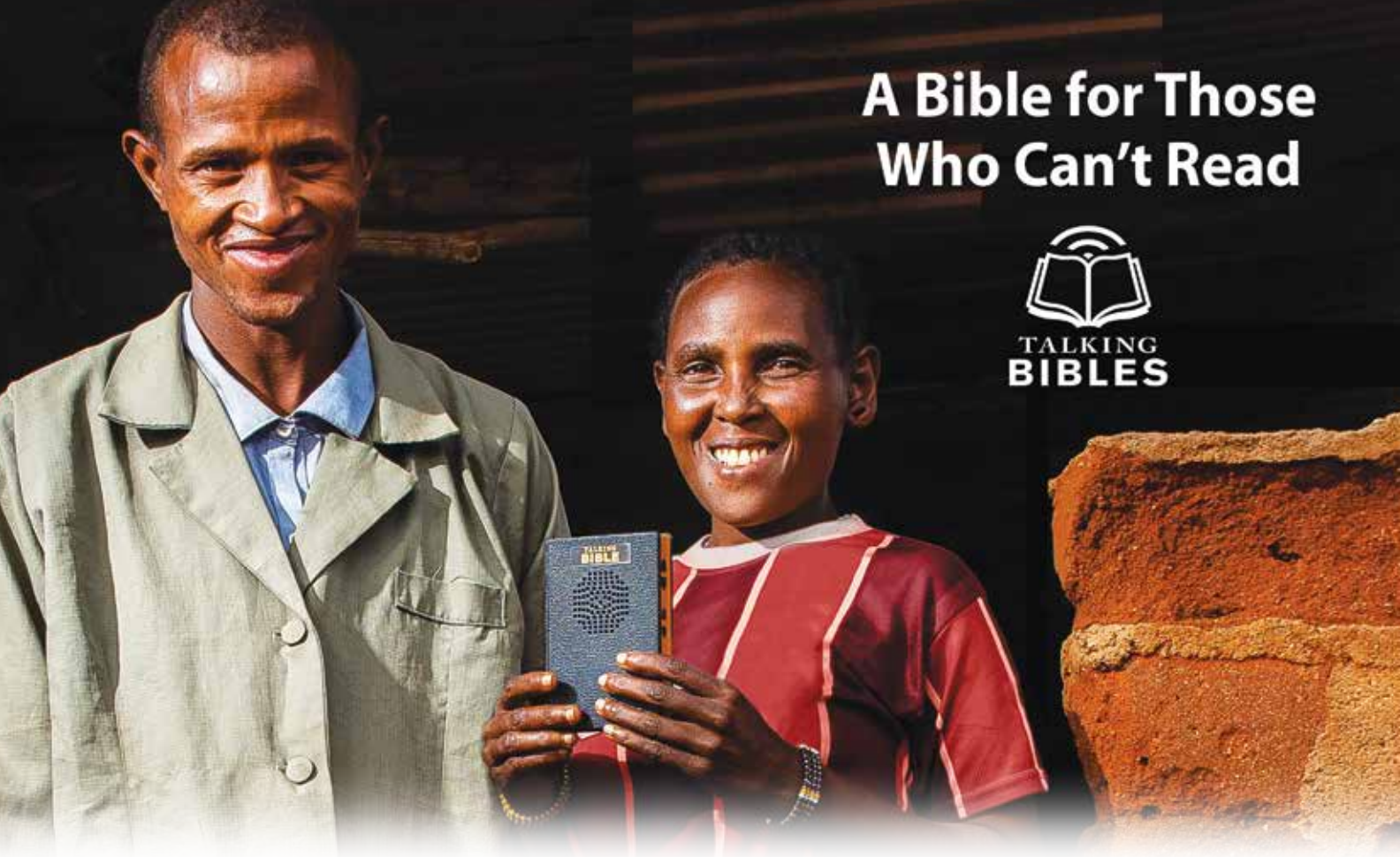
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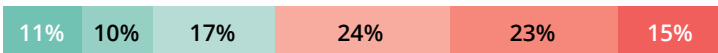
# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

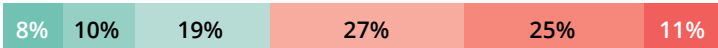
Many Christian Reformed Church members spend time in their congregations and in their communities volunteering for various projects. The 2023 CRCNA Congregational Survey asked participants to indicate how many hours they spent in a few different categories during an average month over the previous year. Here's how the time stacked up, by percentage of correspondents.

### Time Table

Volunteering at your church



Attending programs or events at your church (besides worship services)



Volunteering for another organization or program



20 plus hours   11-20   6-10   3-5   1-2   Zero

The survey was conducted in the spring of 2023 by DataWise Consulting, LLC with 1,530 respondents. Find the full survey at [bit.ly/CRCNA2023survey](http://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.)

- » Church Worldwide: Fixing Fractured Country Starts With Neighbors, Author Says
- » Book: *The Maid*, by Nita Prose
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*The Banner wishes all its readers a blessed Christmas!*



Cover: *Bethlehem Star* by James Fissel // © 2016 James Fissel|Eyekons

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**BANNER**

*The Banner* is the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church. Opinions expressed in *The Banner* are not necessarily those of the editor or the CRCNA.

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# Peace

Jesus not only  
brought us peace  
with God, but  
gives us the  
peace of God in  
our hearts.



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

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

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

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

**AS I WRITE THIS**, the Israel-Hamas war and the Russian-Ukraine war are ongoing. Other conflicts across the globe that may not be making headlines continue. Closer to home, there are mass shootings and killings. Political and ideological polarization threatens to divide nations. Our own denomination seems on the verge of tearing apart due to theological conflicts. Family conflicts abound. Many hearts, including mine, are not at peace.

From my seat as editor, I can see the deep divisions in our denomination. From the letters I receive and the comments to our readers' survey, some readers think I am "the best editor ever," while others think I am a "false teacher" and want me fired. Though a small example, it is still a reflection of the far bigger and more important issues that divide us.

Yet we are approaching Christmas, which marks the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). Jesus came and preached the "good news of peace" (Acts 10:36; Eph. 2:17). Even though our allegiance to Jesus may bring opposition (Matt. 10:34-35), we are called to be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9) and to strive for peace (Rom. 14:19). Peace, along with righteousness and joy, is an element of the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17). It is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

Jesus not only brought us peace with God (Rom. 5:1), but gives us the peace of God in our hearts (John 14:27). But to be honest, I am struggling to experience God's peace.


The Bible's concept of peace was derived from the Hebrew word *shalom*. *Shalom*, though often translated as "peace" in English, has a wide range of meanings, including wholeness, well-being, and harmonious relationships. Biblical peace, therefore, is not simply

the absence of conflict. It is not a trouble-free life. It runs deeper than that.

Can one have such things as well-being, wholeness, or even harmonious relationships in the midst of turmoil, confusion, and conflict? Such peace indeed "transcends all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). But I believe it is rooted in God's unfailing love for us.

Scripture called God the "God of love and peace" (2 Cor. 13:11). I believe God's promise to ancient Israel applies to us too: "'Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,' says the Lord, who has compassion on you" (Isa. 54:10).

The late Catholic priest Henri Nouwen once wrote, "Only those who deeply know that they are loved and rejoice in that love can be true peacemakers" (*Seeds of Hope*, p. 172). I need to remind myself of God's love for me. Indeed, I need to rejoice in it! I need to know, deeply and truly, that Christ loves me despite all my failures and sins—and that his love will not be shaken. Then I will experience God's peace. Then will I be free from my insecurities and doubts to serve as a co-peacemaker with Christ.

This Christmas, I pray that you all may deeply know that you are loved by God and freed to be Christ's peacemakers. "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you" (2 Thess. 3:16). 



## REPLY ALL

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

### Unity

I totally agree with the author that it probably displeases God when the body of Christ has been divided (“Will We Ever Learn What Unity Means?”, May 2023). Many have been encouraged through preaching about the importance of unity in God’s church, yet we keep on splitting up for reasons that we justify on our interpretation of his Word as revealed in Scripture. Lamentable, but probably necessary, was the schism of the Reformation. Today when the term is used, it means “Think like I do.” ... The author asks what makes the seventh commandment rise above the rest of the commandments. My answer would be that [violations of] all the commandments are ... still recognized as “sin.” What troubles me most is that those who practice homosexual acts refuse to acknowledge them as sin as clearly referenced in both the Old and New testaments. Then what comes into play is the almost-forgotten mandate to exercise church discipline and all of its consequences.

» Alex Krikke // St. Catharines, Ont.

In Ron Polinder’s article, he asks the question with regard to the 2022 Synod decision on human sexuality, “What makes the seventh commandment rise above the rest of the commandments?” It is a fair question, but I fear he has not given any gospel scrutiny to his own question. From the very beginning of the gospel story, the only offense most grievous to our Father is that willful, darling sin in each of our hearts that we cannot even bring ourselves to call a sin, let alone bring it to the cross and confess it. I long for the unity Mr. Polinder desires, but the pathway to it, as the human sexuality report clearly presents, can only be the path of self-surrender that leads to the cross: the good news. There, with each of our darling sins in our open hands, we can find unity. Anything else is something of our self-made imagination.

» Don Westhouse // Dorr, Mich.

A belated thank-you to Ron Polinder for this excellent article! I agree completely with his perspective that we need to work for unity. I am thankful, with Ron, for so many ways in which God is working in the Christian Reformed Church to build his kingdom. I also come out on the other side of this issue. Nevertheless, I would welcome the opportunity to gather at the communion table with Ron and all who are on that side of the issue. I would gather at that same table with a believer in a same-gender relationship.

» Roy van Eerden // Abbotsford, B.C.

### Relaxed and Reformed

In “Relaxed and Reformed” (June 2023), Rev. Al Postma makes a compelling argument for our responsibility in sanctification but that ultimately God does the work. However, his statement “We do the best we can” reminded me of my years working at a retail chain reporting directly to a very large and emotional president. Whenever something ran afoul, he would come storming into my office, and I learned very quickly not to use the “doing the best we can” line but instead to say, “We are working on it,” which I must have used hundreds of times as a way to ... assure him we would have a plan for improvement. Is that not what we should tell our God during prayer and confession as we live the Christian life? James 3:13 comes to mind. In fact, the entire book of James is about “working on it.”

» Jim Heida // Apex, N.C.

### Is Love a Salvation Matter?

My answer would be “Certainly!” (“Is Love a Salvation Matter?”, Sept. 2023). I think you tend to overtheologize a bit. Read the book of James. He tells us clearly that faith without deeds (which I would define as acts of love) is dead. Faith in Christ cannot be separated from love. As the old Sinatra song says, “You can’t have one without the other!” Thanks for your work as editor of *The Banner*. I appreciate your editorials. Blessings!

» Bruce Nikkel // Pella, Iowa

I would like to thank *Banner* editor Shiao Chong for his recent editorial “Is Love a Salvation Matter?” I have long felt the Christian church has emphasized faith at the expense of love despite the clear emphasis on love throughout Jesus’ teachings. Evidence of this can be found in the title of the editorial, which is framed as a question rather than a statement. I think there’s a strong argument to be made that

## The Therapy of Repentance and Forgiveness

a church of Jesus' followers would want members willing to make a "profession to love" rather than a "profession of faith."  
» Phil Bloem // Grand Rapids, Mich.

In the context of the Good Samaritan parable, when other people are in desperate need, like the man on the road, is when our love for neighbor is tested. But in the greater context of Scripture, love always operates within the boundaries of God's Word and the Holy Spirit's discernment (Phil. 1:9-10). The question "Is it a salvation issue?" seems like an easy way to dismiss a lot of what you don't agree with and gives an excuse for almost any behavior. In our current cultural setting, some are willing to compromise the teachings of Scripture for the sake of "loving" others. Biblical love doesn't tolerate false teaching or sinful behavior, but rejoices when God's Word is taught and obeyed. The most loving thing we can do for others is to live according to biblical truth (2 John 6).

» Ivan Mulder // Pella, Iowa

**I'VE ALWAYS FOUND** it interesting that Jesus started his preaching ministry with a call to repentance: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt. 4:17). Is this call to repentance, then, what Matthew characterizes just a few verses later as "the good news of the kingdom" (v. 23)?

How many of us honestly consider a call to repentance to be good news? Or perhaps a better question is: How is this not *bad* news?

Think about it: Calling people to repentance is calling them to look deep within themselves, to expose those sinful aspects of their lives we would all rather keep hidden from God. How is that good news?


It's good news because repentance is an opportunity to clear out the trash in our lives—those things that interfere with our relationship with God. The cold, hard fact is that we are all addicted to sin, and every one of us struggles for sobriety from it. Repentance offers a way to be free (1 John 1:9). That is the very definition of good news.

The Heidelberg Catechism tells us that when we are "genuinely sorry for sin and more and more hate and run away from it" (Q&A 89), a wonderful thing immediately occurs: we enter into a "wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a love and delight to live according to the will of God" (Q&A 90).

The spiritual fruit of our repentance and forgiveness is then forgiving others. And neither repentance nor forgiveness is a one-time act. Both are to be regularly repeated, a daily spiritual practice just like prayer. When Jesus was asked how many times we need to forgive each other, he replied, "not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matt. 18:22).

How many of us honestly consider a call to repentance to be good news?

Repentance and forgiveness are the doorway to experiencing in this life the true spiritual freedom that comes from God. Their practice is the soul's best therapy. It is a spiritual therapy that comes with the daily practice of getting sinful things out of the way and experiencing "wholehearted joy in God."

Each one of us can enter that doorway to experience fully this promised joy of God. After all, Jesus promised that our repentance is a pathway to experiencing the good news in the here and now. So let us fully experience that promise by regularly repenting and forgiving one another. 



Rob Braun is a member of Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Princeton, Minnesota. He's been married for 47 years to his wife, Tammi, and has three adult children and two grandchildren. He's a semi-retired freelance writer who pastored of an independent church for 15 years and worked in retail for over 50 years.

### As I Was Saying

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» When Loons Call: Reflections on Conversations with Our Creator

» A Bifocal View of 'No Human Remains Found'



# The Christmas Clock

By Linda Hanstra

**P**umpkins on the front porch are rotting. Thanksgiving leftovers are almost gone. It's time to crawl into the storage closet under the stairs to bring out our Christmas decorations. As is our annual habit, we replace our normal decor with festive trimmings.

We set up the freshly cut tree, and within hours it's bedecked with ribbon, lights, and ornaments. I hang the stockings just so on the mantel. Figures of snowmen with carrot noses and charcoal eyes bring cheer to our guest bathroom. We put away the everyday coffee mugs and replace them with cups of *Joy*, *Peace*, and other merry wishes.

With a nostalgic ache in my heart, I set up my Christmas village on the landing. The miniature house, store, school, and church—all purchased years ago from the gift shop at my parents' Christmas tree farm—remind me of days gone by. The farm is now out of business, but lights from the village's tiny windows still illuminate our stairway as we retire for our long winter's naps. With a lump in my throat, I imagine my parents smiling down from heaven.

In the music room I unpack the beaded ornaments my great-aunt gave us as

a wedding gift. I set up the angels on their designated shelf and the carolers atop the upright piano.

Finally, out comes the Christmas clock. As annoying as it can be with its twangy electronic tunes and mini flashing lights, the kids—now all young adults—insist on its presence. I unpack the heavy molded-plaster piece, brushing styrofoam beads from the clock's hands and Santa's workshop elves. I open the back and install three AA batteries—two for the music and lights and one for the clock—and set the time. Never failing to surprise me, even after a quarter of a century, it still works.

Every hour on the hour throughout the holidays, the electronic chimes play one line of a Christmas carol followed by another line of a different carol. It's clear that the elf who lined up the music was not a church musician, as the first line of "Angels We Have Heard on High" follows "Up on the House Top." More pious folk might raise their eyebrows or consider it tacky, but in our home, the Christmas clock remains.

Not only do our kids expect the clock to chime its merry tunes each year, but we've made a sort of game around those tunes. After hearing the first lines of two random carols paired

together every day for a month, year after year, the whole family has subconsciously learned which tune follows another. Now, after the first line plays, we sing the next line before the clock reveals it. Bragging rights go to the first one to do so.

The presence of the Christmas clock and the tunes it plays are as predictable as the changing seasons and our holiday traditions. They remind us we can count on certain things. Time passes. Fall becomes winter. Christmas follows Advent.

Each year, the comfort of the next thing—our Savior's birth—follows our time of waiting. As we move from childhood to adulthood, the repetition builds expectation, and with it comes the peace of knowing all will be well.

## When the Clock Stops Ticking

Still, expectations often lead to disillusionment. The Jews were waiting with great anticipation for a messiah. They expected a mighty king to deliver them from the hands of their enemies. They did not expect a helpless baby, born to a commonplace couple, lying in—of all places—a feeding trough!

What happens when our expectations turn to disappointment? When the predictable patterns of the past cease, like a clock with dead batteries? When

somber silence replaces the upbeat tunes and ticking?

At one time or another, we've all been robbed of Christmas joy through unfulfilled expectations or altered traditions. Layoffs result in lost wages and fewer presents under the tree or less food on the table. Inflation pinches our pocketbooks. Earthquakes and hurricanes steal homes, possessions, and the lives of loved ones. Our circumstances force us to change traditions—to forgo our expectations.

A young woman who had hoped for a ring at Christmas instead finds herself single and scrolling through dating apps. A little boy asks his mom why Daddy doesn't live with them anymore. Relationships that were meant to last don't. Brokenness leaves heart-break where once there were hopes and dreams.

Hospitals don't close on Christmas. The patients in those beds would rather be home with their families. In war-torn countries like Ukraine, little remains that resembles past Christmases. Traditions? Expectations? All but gone.

I think of my good friends who every year around Christmas mark the loss of their son to cancer. I remember my widowed mother-in-law, sister, and friends, whose moments alone weigh heavily on their spirits. And I remember losing my father, and then my mother, within nine months of each other. Their passing left a double void in our family's traditions.

How can we face the music of Christmas when it seems the music has stopped?

### **Finding Joy in the Midnight Hour**

After placing the Christmas clock in its spot on the piano, I notice the wall above and remember there is more.

What happens  
when our  
expectations  
turn to  
disappointment?  
When the  
predictable  
patterns of the  
past cease, like a  
clock with dead  
batteries?

Although many of our decorations reappear each year, occasionally we add some new ones.

After losing my parents, I inherited four prints they had displayed year-round in their home. I replaced the broken frames, cleaned the protective glass, and now hang them on my walls at Christmastime—two in the family room and two above the piano.

The prints, depicting families cutting their Christmas trees and gathering around them in their villages and homes, remind me of years of repeated traditions, realized expectations, and the love that grew from them.

They also remind me of the moments I spent helping to care for Mom. During her last months on this earth, those prints hung on the wall above her bed. Gazing at them now, they bring to life all that was hard and all that was good.

A mix of sadness and of joy, of loss and of love.

The tension of Advent is that we're stuck between the here and now and the not yet. Though the world is broken, we still live in the hope that comes from a most unexpected event: the birth of a baby centuries ago and laid in a manger.


As I take in the scene—twinkling lights on the tree, glowing windows in the miniature village, beaded ornaments from an almost-forgotten great-aunt, and artwork that brings memories of the farm and my parents—the Christmas clock chimes the twelve o'clock hour.

I hear the first tune and the words run through my mind:

It came upon the midnight clear,  
that glorious song of old,  
from angels bending near the earth,  
to touch their harps of gold.

And I know which tune will come next. This time, the clock-making elf got it right:

Joy to the world, the Lord is come:  
let earth receive her King!

Whether we're struggling through loss, heartache, illness, or brokenness, we can rest in the hope of great expectations—that in the darkness of the midnight hour, the Lord has come and will come again, bringing joy to all who receive him! 



Linda Hanstra, a retired speech-language pathologist, writes at [lindahanstra.com](http://lindahanstra.com) and on Substack about what brings joy to her empty nest. The author of *Lent through the Little Things*, Hanstra and her husband, Tom, attend

Church of the Savior Christian Reformed Church in South Bend, Ind.

## BIG QUESTIONS

### Digital Life

#### I'm a boomer who has started to use emojis. Is that a bad thing?

Not unless you are using the wrong ones!

Each generation, it seems, has a preferred way of communicating. Researchers call people born between 1928 and 1945 the Silent Generation because they have traditionally limited their communication. But Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are more inclined to use a telephone and email. Generation X (1965 to 1980) grew up with technology and are good with email, phone, text, or social media, but seem to prefer the authenticity of face-to-face communication. Millennials (1981 to 1996) have had the internet their whole lives and would rather use any technology other than a phone, which just takes too much time.

But back to emojis. Ninety-two percent of the world's online population use emojis to help all kinds of communication, and 6 billion emojis are sent every day. That's a lot.

Emojis got their start with emoticons. Remember them? On September 19, 1982, Carnegie Mellon professor Scott Fahlman invented the first one: the humble smiley: :-)

About ten years later, a Japanese cell-phone company released a set of 176 emojis for mobile phones and pagers. ("Emoji" is a blend of two Japanese words meaning "picture" and "letter.")

Today there are 3,663 emojis available, but according to statistics collected by the Unicode Consortium, the nonprofit organization responsible for managing emojis, "tears of joy" 😄 accounts for over 5% of all emoji use. The only other character that comes close is



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

the heart ❤️. The heart I understand, but given what I see of the world, most days I don't feel like crying tears of joy. Is this our way of cheering each other up?

But to your question: Yes, use emojis. Emojis are efficient and can add a level of nuance to our communications. Stick with hearts and tears of joy, though, until you have a solid handle on the language of emojis.

News flash: As I was writing this, a British news site reported that Gen Z-ers think the thumbs-up is the worst one to use: "Sending a thumbs-up can be seen as passive aggressive and even confrontational, ... and some claim they feel attacked whenever it is used."

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of *The Banner*. Refuse to use emojis? Tell him why at [dean.heetderks@gmail.com](mailto:dean.heetderks@gmail.com).

### Church Matters

#### Who goes to synod as voting delegates? What change did Synod 2023 adopt?

Synod, the annual assembly of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, includes four delegates from each of the 49 regional classes. Historically, each classis sent two ministers and two elders, but Synod 2015 changed the requirement to "one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer" (Church Order, Art. 45) in response to two study

committee reports that encouraged greater use of the office of deacon. While delegating deacons to classis meetings had been optional since 1997, Synod 2015 mandated that all classes include deacon delegates, with one minister, one elder, and one deacon from each church (Art. 40). This was to include full representation of the offices in the discussions and decisions of the broader assemblies (classis and synod), just as occurs in local church councils, which honors the parity of offices in our polity.

The 2015 provision was implemented variously. Some classes had already been including deacons, others found deacons reluctant to volunteer, and some resisted the idea and even allowed churches exceptions to the rule, going against the Church Order. Those results extended to synod as well. Some classes rejoiced in sending deacons to synod, some had difficulty finding volunteers, and others resisted the idea altogether. So some classes did not send full delegations to synod. Synod 2023 was missing 11 delegates, eight of them deacons. Classes B.C. South-East, Hanmi, Hudson, Kalamazoo, Ko-Am, Lake Superior, Northcentral Iowa, Northern Michigan, and Rocky Mountain did not send full delegations.

But Synod 2023 adopted a change to Article 45 that should lead to full delegations from all classes next year. The word "ordinarily" was inserted before the requirement for "one minister, one

elder, one deacon, and one other office-bearer,” and a sentence was added that no more than two officebearers from any office would be allowed from a classis. The intent is still to have all three offices represented, but classes will have more flexibility in choosing their delegates.

Having full delegations is the goal! But will there be fewer deacons at synod in the future? And what impact will this change have on synod’s decision-making process and the life and ministry of the CRC? That remains to be seen.

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 Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

### Bible/Doctrine

## If God loves the world (John 3:16), why are we told not to love the world (1 John 2:15)?

It is clear that “the world” (*cosmos*) is being used in different ways in these two passages: “the world” as created order versus “the world” as a fallen kingdom. In the first sense, God loves every created thing and is moved by all he has made (Ps. 145:9). The famous verse from John’s gospel is the big story of the Bible in miniature: the God who made the world in love became incarnate within it and will one day bring healing to all things.

But we are still living in the middle of the story, in a world that is also damaged by evil. We have turned away from God and have tried to build kingdoms apart from him. The result has been devastating for us and the rest of creation. It is because God loves the world (as his creation) that God is opposed to the world (as fallen kingdom).

This is why the epistle of John describes the world as composed of “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). We are called to resist these things, to refuse to give our hearts to these things, because they cannot give us life. Concretely, 1 John is encouraging believers to be free and generous in their love for others (1 John 3:16-18) rather than clinging to the “things of this world.” Indeed, when we hoard God’s gifts, we turn them into idols that poison our hearts, pushing out “the love of the Father.”

But our great hope is God’s great love for us. We anticipate a day when “the kingdom of the world” will become “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). The created but fallen world will be healed! Until that day comes, we seek to love as we have been loved (1 John 4:19).

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

### Vocation/Calling


## Someone I care about is unemployed and looking for work. How can I best help them?

Looking for work is often exhausting and discouraging. Caring for someone means giving space for them to talk about the challenges of their situation and even what they might be learning in this season. Caring for someone might also mean taking time to do something enjoyable with them and giving them space not to talk or even think about their job situation. As disappointing as it might be, you might not be the best person for them to talk to or even to help them. Depending on your relationship, it might be too easy for the person you want to help to feel as if they are a problem or project

that needs to be fixed instead of being a uniquely gifted person whom you care about.

In terms of practical help, God might be inviting you to help them out financially or to connect them to other financial help. You might also be able to connect them with people who are able to employ them or help them find employment. It might also mean wondering together how God might be inviting them to use their gifts in different ways, perhaps even in ways that might not be in full-time work or a typical job but still would allow them to contribute to society in a meaningful way.

We may often feel defined by our job, and thus not to have a job can make someone feel less worthy. Find ways to let others know that they are loved by God, by you, and by their community. Encourage them by reminding them of their gifts, including gifts that might be unrelated to any kind of job they might have. Last, pray for them—not simply that they find a job, but that they might experience God’s love and the love of the community throughout the whole season of looking for work and discerning what God might be inviting them into next.

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

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

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# CRC Partners With TENx10 Initiative to Reach 10M Young People Over Next Ten Years

## NEWS

**For more news** and longer stories about the churches and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church, visit *TheBanner.org*. Or get the free app by searching for “CRCNA Banner” in your app store.

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Know of a noteworthy event or accomplishment in the life of a CRC member? Have details about an interesting ministry in a CRC congregation? Send your news tip to [news@TheBanner.org](mailto:news@TheBanner.org).

More than 100 organizations have partnered with Fuller Theological Seminary to address the loss of 1 million young people from faith each year. The Christian Reformed Church of North America, the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, and the Reformed Church in America are among them.

Called TENx10 (pronounced “ten by ten”), the initiative launched Oct. 10, 2023, in Chicago and has a stated aim of “making faith matter more to 10 million young people over the next ten years.”

Ron DeVries, youth and emerging adult ministry consultant with the CRCNA’s Thrive ministry, attended the launch and is the point person for the CRC’s engagement with TENx10.

He said that Fuller has spent the last five years bringing together denominations, ministries, agencies, and church organizations with a youth ministry focus and asking questions like, “How can we work together? How can we set aside some of our doctrinal differences for the sake of the kingdom, for the sake of the saving grace of Jesus Christ?” These conversations led to TENx10.

“I believe the biggest strength of the initiative is the collaborative effort,” said Fig VanderMolen, a youth pastor at Messiah CRC in Hudsonville, Mich., who also attended the launch. “One of the largest stones in the hands of the disenfranchised youth in this generation seems to be the fact that churches don’t often like to work together.”

VanderMolen is also grateful for TENx10’s prayer effort. “There is a large amount of prayer happening out there centered around the next generation of Christians,” he said. “It has been a joy to participate in these prayers and a great encouragement to see so many people involved.”

DeVries, who said the CRC was invited because “we have a relational connection to some of the authors from Fuller and from organizations like Youth Alpha,” recognizes “this is a long-term goal, and we’re in it for the long run.”

Brian Bork, campus ministry coordinator with Resonate Global Mission, attended the launch. Though Resonate isn’t an official TENx10 partner, Bork said the agency is exploring ways to participate. “There’s a unifying power to a shared project like this,” Bork said. He also noted “the breadth and diversity of voices represented.”

“This was one of the most diverse church gatherings I’ve ever attended,” Bork said. “I’m excited about the possibilities of using it as a spark for interagency collaboration in the CRC.”

DeVries too imagines denomination-wide involvement. There are people in our churches who genuinely want to walk alongside our young adults, he said, “so what would it look like for all our churches, all our 1,000 congregations, to model that in some way?”

TENx10 is planning more gatherings for its partners and is equipping participants with resources to support them in reaching young adults. Youth pastors and senior leaders can take a quiz on the TENx10 website, [tenx10.org](https://tenx10.org), to learn more about what specific tools may be helpful in their contexts.

—Kristen Parker



## CRC Churches Support Grand Rapids Neighborhood Tree Lighting



Photo by Anita Ensing Beem

Three Grand Rapids, Mich., Christian Reformed churches—Fuller Avenue, Oakdale Park, and Boston Square—have been a big part of establishing and continuing the Boston Square neighborhood’s Community Tree Lighting. 2023 marks the tradition’s third year.

The first public tree lighting in the neighborhood happened in 2021, an event that Sheryl Luth, ministries coordinator for Fuller Avenue CRC, said she and her daughter initiated. They both live in the area. “Fuller’s congregation loves an opportunity to come alongside neighbors and community,” Luth said.

Oakdale Park pastor James Jones said the event has helped to reestablish relationships between residents, businesses, and churches. “It is important for Oakdale to be a part of something that is positive in our community,” Jones said.

In 2022 the city of Grand Rapids contributed \$5,000 from its Neighborhood Match Fund to support the event, and 46 other sponsors, including Amplify GR, the churches, and Modern Hardware, supplied more financial support, volunteer hours,

### Residents of Grand Rapids’ Boston Square neighborhood at the Dec. 3, 2022 tree lighting.

and tables, chairs, tents, and portable heaters. Boston Square businesses provided hot drinks and food that reflected the area’s diverse cultures: ribs, plantains, tacos, and more. Last year’s Christmas tree, a cut tree between 15 and 20 feet tall, was from a tree farm in Rockford, Mich.

Mark and Kathy Oostinde, who live in Boston Square and attend First CRC, were two participants at the 2022 Tree Lighting. They said they appreciate community activities that have begun to bring the neighborhood together, including campfires and music events in the small park, block parties, and a pop-up market.

The 2023 event was scheduled for Dec. 2.

—Anita Ensing Beem

## Noteworthy

***The Banner* earned fourth place in its category in the 2023 Evangelical Press Association’s Best in Class contest.**

Publications of similar circulation were evaluated on design, use of imagery, quality of writing, and overall editorial punch for a single submitted issue.

*The Banner* submitted its December 2022 issue. **Judges’ comments**

**included: “Strong denominational magazine, with a**

**beautiful cover and some excellent writing.**

Standout stories were “Christmas Trees” (definitely not your usual lame Christmas story; very moving); ‘Conflict: A Bridge to Love;’ and ‘Love in the Face of Differences.’ ... Overall, *The Banner* serves the Christian Reformed Church well with a combination of features and denominational news.” *Christianity Today*, *Alliance Life*, and *Israel My Glory* earned first, second, and third in the same category as *The Banner*. *The Chosen People* was fifth in that category.

### **The Friendship Club at Second CRC in Grand Haven, Mich., celebrated its 40th birthday Sept. 19**

with singing and a slide presentation of the years of friends, their mentors, and activities. The club began in 1983 after Love in the Name of Christ of the Tri-Cities recommended creating a worship ministry for people with developmental disabilities in the area.



Photo by Harley Dyk

## Classis Watch: Fall 2023

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, or regional assembly. The following are some of the actions taken by classes, guided by articles of Church Order, since May 2023.

Candidates **examined and approved for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** (Arts. 6 and 10): Kevin Kornelis, Cameron Oegema, Joshua Carpenter, John VanderWindt, Matthew Guichelaar, Benjamin Snoek, William Jones, Kurtis Ritsema, Brad Diekema, Jeremy Engbers, Zachary Toth, Joseph Hwang, Tomas Axeland, Wendy Werkman, and Eunice Kim.

Ministers welcomed to CRC ministry **from other denominations** (Art. 8): Revs. Jefferey Kempton, Myung Kang, and Wilson Cunha, professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Studies at Calvin Theological Seminary, appointed by Synod 2022.

**Ministers released from a congregation** (Art. 17-a): Revs. Pete Byma from Westview CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.; Ruth Folkerts from Connections Church in Highlands Ranch, Colo.; George Saylor from Connections Church in Highlands Ranch, Colo.; Marc Holland from City Life Church in Sacramento, Calif.; Kiseok (Daniel) Kang from his on-loan call to the Korean United Church of Modesto, Calif.; Sung Chul Lee from All Nations Church in Bakersfield, Calif.; Woodrow Dixon from Jubilee Fellowship CRC in St. Catharines, Ont.; and Tom Kok from Family of Faith CRC in Kennewick, Wash., which disbanded in March 2023.

### Leaving Ministry in the CRC

*Classes may end a pastor's ordained ministry status, guided by Church Order articles 14 and 17, and indicating a designation reflecting the manner and spirit in which the minister acted during the time leading up to and including leaving office.*

Dayna Vreeken, Brian Turnbull, Kyle Sandford, and Mark Pluimer were **honorably released**.

Bruce Leiter and Daryl Meijer were **released** (Art. 17-c); Jongpil Oh was **dismissed** (Art. 14-b); In Ho Jang was **deposed** (Arts. 82-84, 14).

**Ministers retiring** (Art. 18): Revs. Willem (Kobie) du Plessis, Pete VanderBeek, Neil Jasperse, Dirk van der Vorst, Steve Rusticus, Steve Boersma, Darren Roorda, Lambert Sikkema (effective Dec. 1), Russell Boersma (effective Jan. 1, 2024), Larry Doornbos (effective Feb. 11, 2024), and Verlan Van Ee (effective June 8, 2024).

### Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors called to specific roles within their classes** (Art. 23): Bryce Langley (Illiana), Israel Ledee (Chicago South), Ben Buckley (Columbia), Russel Kent (North Cascades), Arturo Rojas (Holland), Jon Keyzer (Heartland), Victor Piscoya (Hackensack), David Shen (Central California), Sang Gyoo Kim (Greater Los Angeles), Marja Fledderus (Hamilton), Mark Tiemersma, Sam Ashmore, and Gail Ashmore (Iakota), and Fernando Carranza, Guadalupe Carranza, and Ana Carranza (Rocky Mountain).

Doug Kennedy (Rocky Mountain), Chris Avery (California South) and Mike Brummel (North Cascades) were **honorably released** from ministry as commissioned pastors (Art. 24-d). (Brummel has moved to Classis Columbia, where he's expected to be recommissioned in spring 2024).

Sean Taylor (North Cascades) was **released in the status of one dismissed** (Art. 24-d).

**Commissioned pastor emeritus status** (Art. 24-e) was granted to Michael Gulotta (Columbia) and Norman Viss (Hackensack).

### New Ministries and Ministry Changes

*An emerging (unorganized) church does not have its own council and is under the care of the council of a neighboring CRC. An organized church has its own council (Art. 38).*

Korean CRC of St. Louis (Mo.), Napa Valley (Calif.) Community Church, and New Hope Community Church of Shafter (Calif.) received **organized status**.

Hope Church, a Korean-speaking congregation in El Paso, Texas, was recognized as **emerging**.

Orangewood Christian Reformed Church in Phoenix, Ariz. **dissolved**. (That congregation disbanded in 2015, and in 2020, Orangewood Community Church, a joint church plant with the Reformed Church in America, was recognized as a new ministry.)

West Olive (Mich.) CRC **disaffiliated** from the CRC.

The following congregations **disbanded**: Covenant Hope CRC in Battle Creek, Mich., Trinity CRC in Broomall, Pa., and Crossroads CRC in Ajax, Ont. (effective Dec. 31).

### Other Matters

**Classis Illiana noted it has two pastors and two commissioned pastors who are currently involved in churches associated with the recently formed Alliance of Reformed Churches.** Synod 2023 of the CRCNA adopted a "church in cooperation" status with the ARC. Classis Illiana will continue to hold those pastors' credentials while Church Order arrangements for an "orderly exchange" of office-bearers between the CRC and the ARC are finalized.

**Classis Lake Superior noted a growing partnership between Covenant CRC in Winnipeg, Man., and Amber Church, a recently planted ministry focused on reaching Brazilian immigrants in that city.** The classis voted to support the Latin America Mission Canada-planted Amber Church with \$60,000 over three years.

**Classis Grand Rapids North, recognizing the death of active and beloved pastor Jerome Burton, passed a Resolution of Respect for the pastor of Coit Community CRC (now called Radical Grace CRC) in Grand Rapids, Mich.**

**Classis Lakota adopted a process for the resolution of potential confessional difficulty gravamina** (formal expressions to a council) that includes disallowing officebearers who have submitted a gravamen to be delegated to greater assemblies and limiting the time that an officebearer could hold an unresolved gravamen.

As it relates to gravamina regarding the definition of unchastity, which synods 2022 and 2023 agreed includes homosexual sex, Lakota requires that officebearers “resolve their difficulty by affirming the standards, resigning, or being suspended from office by the end of the year in which the (gravamen) was filed.”

Lakota instructed church councils “to begin special discipline of officebearers who are suspended from office at the end of 2023 if they refuse to adhere to the definition of unchastity reflected in the standards.”

**Classis Central California concurred with the decision of the council of Fairfield CRC to suspend the honor, title, and authority to perform official acts of ministry from David G. Zandstra** (Arts. 82-84) until there is a court judgment on crimes he has been charged with and confessed to (see “Retired CRC Pastor Arrested, Confesses to 1975 Pennsylvania Murder,” September 2023, p. 20).

## Synod

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

**Classis Chicago South, noting “the ongoing gravity of this issue,” will ask Synod 2024 to “reaffirm the declaration from the 1996 report ‘God’s Diverse and Unified Family,’ ‘that to be in Christ is in principle to be reconciled as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people and that to ignore his calling to turn this principle into experienced reality is sinful according to God’s Word and the Reformed confessions’ (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 513).”**

**Classis Rocky Mountain will forward a communication to Synod 2024 advocating to keep the gravamen process as currently described in Church Order** (Supplement to Art. 5) and not to impose a six-month timeline as proposed by the majority report from the 2023 synodical advisory committee.

**Classis Zeeland sent a communication** to the Office of General Secretary and the director of synodical services **to request some time-saving measures for Synod 2024**, “including the election of officers via Zoom, ... online Advisory Committee meetings prior to Synod, (and) distribution of various addresses by video.” General Secretary Zachary King told *The Banner*, “We are always grateful to receive the input of the church with regard to supporting synod and other governance functions.” He said the Council of Delegates leadership will discuss these suggestions and determine how to respond.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Ezra Shui  
Cheung Ng*

1937-2023

A man of humility and integrity, Ezra Ng will be remembered as a caring, diligent shepherd who related to everyone with the heart of a father, teacher, and friend. Ezra died Nov. 1, 2022, just a few weeks before his 85th birthday.

Born to a Christian family in Shanghai, China, Ezra graduated with a degree in mathematics from Shanghai Teachers College before studying at China Theological Seminary in Hong Kong. He was then involved in various ministries, including 16 years in Christian radio, and pastored churches in the Philippines and Hong Kong before being ordained in the Christian Reformed Church and serving Immanuel CRC in Richmond, B.C., from 2000-2010.

Ezra engaged with young people by playing chess. He organized a tea fellowship for Asian immigrants new to Canada in which they gathered to make friends, share stories, and have discussions over cups of tea. These interactions evolved into faith conversations and Bible study.

After retirement, Ezra remained active as an advisor to a Mandarin-speaking Chinese evangelical congregation near Vancouver’s University of British Columbia campus and to a Mandarin Christian church plant on Vancouver’s North Shore.

Ezra is survived by his wife, Phoebe, a son and daughter-in-law, and a grandson.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## Council of Delegates Meets, Ministry Boards Take Action on Canada / U.S. Issues

At the October meeting of the Christian Reformed Church's Council of Delegates, the Canada Ministry Board set the topic for its next Canada-wide Conversation, the U.S. Ministry Board granted its executive team power to accept a sale offer or make a purchase offer for the Grand Rapids, Mich., denominational building, and the full Council oriented itself to a new committee structure and to its role in ecclesiastical governance.

The Council acts on behalf of synod, the annual general assembly of the CRC, between meetings of synod. The U.S. and Canada ministry boards, which are made up of the U.S. delegates and Canadian delegates, respectively, function as organizational governance for ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in North America in each country. (For more on the distinction, see "Council of Delegates: New Committees, Ecclesiastical Distinction" at [thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org).)

Following are some of the decisions and actions of the two boards and the Council of Delegates.

### Canada Board Takes Action on Conversations, Letter

The Canada Ministry Board received reports from its transitional executive director (Canada), Al Postma, and chief administrative officer (Canada) Terry Veldboom, and it approved a church planting theme for the next Canada-wide Conversation, a gathering of Christian Reformed members from the Canadian classes, on January 27.

Canada Ministry Board president Greta Luimes, an at-large Canadian member, told delegates that from previous gatherings convened in September 2022 and January 2023 "there is an expectation



from the classes that the conversations would continue." The board accepted its executive committee's proposal of church planting as a helpful theme.

The conversation will not entertain discussion of a distinct and separate Canadian CRC, something a group of Canadian pastors and leaders had sought from the board by way of a letter.

"Our mandate is to serve Canadian churches," Luimes said, recognizing that it would be inappropriate to allow a group outside of the board to impact the plans for the January Canada-Wide Conversation. However, "We don't want to bury our heads in the sand to what else is going on in the CRC," Luimes said. The Canadian Ministry Board voted to engage with the letter's signatories.

The letter was not released, but Luimes told delegates it was signed by 56 people, mostly pastors and other leaders. Luimes said the board is taking two tracks: It wants to serve what it assumes to be the majority of the Canadian churches, but also "to continue in discussion with the group that signed this letter. Part of our mandate is to serve them too."

### U.S. Board Grants Officers Sale and Purchase Powers

The U.S. Ministry Board spent a fair portion of its meeting discussing the sale of its Grand Rapids office building, where the meetings of the Council of Delegates and both ministry boards were being held. Board officers were given authority both to accept an offer of sale and to make an offer of purchase should the opportunity arise.

The building at 1700 28th St. SE was listed in September after it was determined to be the best way forward for the now ill-suited facility. "The amount of unused space in this building right now is staggering," said U.S. Ministry Board chair Michael Ten Haken. "The fact that this building no longer serves our needs is indisputable."

While the board readily supported moving on a building sale, it had more discussion about empowering the officers to act on the potential purchase of a new building.

Jesus Bayona, Classis Southeast U.S., questioned whether buying was necessary and suggested looking for another way to house ministries that would be "less regionally homogenous."

“There is a culture that’s being developed that’s not really reflective of the whole of the CRC. I’m concerned that this not be continued,” Bayona said.

Tyler Wagenmaker, Classis Zeeland, himself from western Michigan, said, “In terms of ministry and in terms of culture, I think it would be a mistake to hunker down in West Michigan. Our growth seems to me to be in the south, not in Grand Rapids. We should go more where a lot of the mission is.”

Dan DeKam, director of U.S. ministry operations, said the search’s parameters—initially focused on the “bigger East Beltline corridor” in Grand Rapids—are not hard and fast walls but represent preferences at this time. “I have appreciated the comments regarding Grand Rapids,” he said. DeKam lives in Muskegon, just over 40 miles northwest of Grand Rapids. He said denominational staff are excited to work on what God is doing. “We want to work on building trust,” DeKam said, emphasizing that staff is “working their best to serve the church to the best of their ability.”

The U.S. Ministry Board also reviewed its role in organizational governance; approved a new Joint Ministry Agreement document for Thrive, which the Canada Ministry Board also approved; and approved “designating the approximately \$2 million expected from the Employment Retention Credit (ERC) for capital expenses” to ensure that operations are not encumbered through the Grand Rapids office relocation process.

“This designation would serve as ‘bridge financing’ and would be re-evaluated by the Directors once the relocation is complete and an assessment of our finances can be conducted,” the board minutes said. U.S. Ministry Board members briefly discussed this before passing it, with some questioning why the (U.S.) federal funding had been applied for.

Shirley De Vries, chief administrative officer within the Office of General Secretary, said the program was available to employers who retained employees through the COVID-19 pandemic and continued paying taxes on their behalf through that period.

## Other Council of Delegates Actions

- » Recommended that Synod 2024 extend the Our Journey 2025 Ministry Plan to 2030.
- » Heard progress on synodical assignments, including the Global Vision team, a team preparing a statement on medically assisted death, and the teams addressing membership decline.
- » Received ministry updates from ReFrame Ministries, Resonate Global Mission, and Thrive, including the note that the new agency encompassing nine previous ministries lost eight staff since January 2023 and that Elaine May, previously a women’s leadership developer in the CRC, is the new lead for Church Renewal.
- » Entered into executive session to hear an update from staff on the charges against David Zandstra (a former CRC pastor who confessed to and will be tried for the 1975 murder of 8-year-old Gretchen Harrington) and the response of CRCNA staff and classes to the affected parties. The Council also spent time in prayer of lament and healing.

The Council of Delegates has 49 delegates, one from each classis (regional group of churches) plus up to 10 at-large delegates. The next meeting will be in February 2024, conducted by video conference.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

## IN MEMORIAM



### *Rev. Jack James Matheis*

Rev. Jack James Matheis

Jack Matheis had a kind and gentle spirit and to his final days continued to affirm God’s faithfulness and grace to him and his family. Jack, 99, died Sept. 6.

After enlisting in the Army Air Force at 18, Jack trained to be a navigator on a B-24 bomber. On his 27th mission, having been promoted to the lead plane, his craft was hit by enemy fire. Although injured, Jack navigated his squadron safely back to their base in southern Italy. He subsequently was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross, a Silver Star Medal, and a Purple Heart for his act of heroism.

Honorably discharged in 1943, Jack graduated from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, was ordained in 1955, and served Faith Christian Fellowship, Everson, Wash.; Hope CRC, Hull, Iowa; and First CRC, Edmonton, Alta. He then taught at two Christian high schools in Washington state, retiring in 1986.

Jack was an accomplished artist, an avid reader, and the author of two books of fiction.

Predeceased 10 years ago by his wife, Jean, as well as by two sons and two grandchildren, Jack is survived by five children and their spouses, 11 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Theodore (Ted)  
Verseput*  
1927-2023

During the 40 years that Ted Verseput was a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church, he also served for 30 years as chaplain for the U.S. Army National Guard. Ted, 96, died Sept. 19.

After graduation from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and ordination in 1953, Ted pastored Park Lane CRC, Evergreen Park, Ill.; South Kendall Community CRC, Miami, Fla.; Hillcrest Christian Church, Denver, Col.; and East CRC, Muskegon, Mich. He then served two years at Hope Rehabilitation Network in Grand Rapids, Mich. Ted was the first director of the CRC's Committee on Disability Concerns. His passion for disability advocacy began after a car accident left his 2-year-old daughter with brain damage and quadriplegia. She died in her late 40s.

After retiring in 1992, Ted remained open to ministering to others and preached his last sermon at age 88. He enjoyed playing Scrabble each week with his eldest daughter and won his last game just days before he died.

Predeceased in 2005 by his first wife, Arlene, in 2007 by his second wife, Anne, and by a son, daughter, and grandson, Ted is survived by seven children and their spouses, 16 grandchildren, and 29 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Frederick F.  
Heslinga*  
1946-2023

Fred Heslinga was modest, humble, gentle, and extremely organized. He had a great sense of humor and a wonderful ability to laugh at himself. Although he had endured cancer for nine years with periods of remission, Fred's death Sept. 26 was the result of a brain bleed after hitting his head in a fall. He was 77.

A former roommate from seminary days said in tribute, "We called him 'Steady Freddy.' He was a man you could count on." Another friend said, "I appreciated his just being there and his interest in others, including myself. His patience with others—strugglers or achievers—exhibited a Christ-like commitment."

After graduation from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and ordination in 1972, Fred pastored Athens (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church; Kelowna (B.C.) CRC; Orangeville (Ont.) CRC; First CRC in Hamilton, Ont.; Ottewell CRC in Edmonton, Alta.; and Essex (Ont.) CRC. His retirement didn't last long; in 2013, Fred became part-time pastor of visitation at Grace CRC in Chatham, Ont. He was still serving there at the time of his death.

Predeceased in 2018 by his wife, Ella, Fred is survived by his three children and their spouses, seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## Iowa Prison Church Celebrates Baptisms, Hopes for More Space

New Life Church, a congregation of the Christian Reformed Church within the Newton (Iowa) Correctional Facility, is celebrating joys and feeling growing pains after returning to worship 12 months ago.

Pastor Rick Admiraal and his wife, Rose, were grateful for what they called an "overwhelming reception" to their return, but the 33-month pause forced by the COVID-19 pandemic meant some changes to their worship space and practice.

Admiraal meets with his inside congregants for an hour on Tuesday evenings in a small, classroom-like chapel that fits just over 30 people. It's more spartan than the church's previous setup in the prison's gym, where Admiraal said he could "bring in a large praise team, including acoustic guitar, bass guitar, drums, keyboard and vocalists." During that time the church was able to use an immersion tub for baptisms.

The chapel has one wall of bookshelves, Admiraal said, "with a pretty good collection of religious books including authors like Tim Keller, Philip Yancey, Joyce Meyer, Max Lucado, N.T. Wright, (and) C.S. Lewis."

New Life Church's worship services still include prayer and singing, which the men help lead. And people are still being baptized—just not by immersion.

The church celebrated the baptism of 13 men in July. Admiraal said the men responded to questions "to indicate their faith in Christ and follow him from this day forward." Then Admiraal cupped his hand to pour water from a small container onto each man's head, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As with previous baptisms, the men received certificates to mark the occasion. Admiraal said that many men keep this remembrance even after their time in prison and proudly share it.

A current staff shortage at the Newton prison and a statewide change in rules for the number of hours that volunteers can be present (due to violence at another prison in Iowa that led to the death of two staff) limit some activities of New Life Church. However, Admiraal said they are waiting to "see what God will do" with their hope of increasing their meeting space. They've asked to use the Prison Release Center, a minimum-security facility right next to the medium-security facility.

—Kyle Hoogendoorn



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Equipping and  
Encouraging  
Congregations

## The View From Here

# The Fullness of Time

**I LIKE GETTING** what I want fast.

Maybe you do too. As a culture, we are addicted to speed. We grow up fast, we work fast, we learn fast, we drive fast, we cook fast, we eat fast, we communicate fast. Unless you spend some significant time outside of Western culture, it is easy to see fast as normal. It's not.

In its defense, fast has its advantages. If we're injured or sick, fast saves lives and limbs. If we're traveling, fast gives us more time to work and play. If we're in danger, fast preserves us from harm. Fast expands our horizons, allowing us to see and do more with our time.

But fast also warps us in profound ways. Fast makes it difficult to forge meaningful relationships with God and with each other. Fast deludes us into believing that we are independent agents in control of our own destiny. Fast exhausts us, emptying us of the energy we need to laugh, love, and linger over what is beautiful. Fast is a harsh taskmaster.

In Galatians 4:4-5, Paul wrote, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." A millennium had passed since Moses first promised that God would "raise up a prophet" from Israel to speak God's word definitively (Deut. 18:18). The people of Israel had grown tired of waiting for God's promised Messiah. But God wasn't in a hurry.

God awaited the "fullness of time," patiently aligning conditions and environment. Jesus was born during the reign of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1), when Rome had built a vast network of roads. Jesus was born into Hellenistic society, where Greek was spoken in every city and country. Jesus was born at a time when the Jews were scattered from Spain to Persia and

Advent teaches us that the fullness of time is a pretty good thing.

everywhere in between. Paul and the other apostles—traveling on Roman roads, speaking the Greek language, and supported by scattered Jewish enclaves—proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ to many nations. We enjoy the blessings of Jesus today because God made his people wait.

Advent teaches us that the fullness of time is a pretty good thing. It is rarely easy to wait. When we're anxious, we want God to answer and act right away. By slowing us down, God makes space for us to develop a relationship with him. God cultivates our faith and character. And finally, God brings about the right conditions for us to grow.

May God grant you "the fullness of time" to reflect on the blessing of Jesus' birth this Advent season. May God grant you the patience to persevere as you wait for his answer. May God give you space to laugh, love, and linger over all that is beautiful this Christmas. **B**



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

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

## 때가 차는 것

저는 원하는 것이 있을 때 빨리 갖고 싶어 합니다. 여러분도 마찬가지일 것입니다. 문화적으로 우리는 속도에 중독되어 있습니다. 우리는 빨리 자라고, 빨리 일하고, 빨리 배우고, 빨리 운전하고, 빨리 요리하고, 빨리 먹고, 빨리 소통합니다. 서구 문화권 밖에서 상당한 시간을 보내지 않는 한, "빠른 것"을 당연하게 여기기 쉽습니다. 그러나 그렇지 않습니다.

물론 빠른 것에는 장점이 있습니다. 다치거나 아플 때 빠른 속도는 생명과 사지를 구합니다. 여행 중에 빠른 속도는 더 일하고 더 놀 수 있는 시간을 벌어 줍니다. 위험에 처했을 때 빠른 속도는 해를 당하지 않도록 지켜줍니다. 빠른 속도는 우리의 한계를 확장 시켜 더 많이 보고 더 많은 일을 할 수 있게 해줍니다.

하지만 빠른 속도는 왜곡을 가져오기도 합니다. 빠른 속도는 하나님과 그리고 서로 간에 의미 있는 관계를 맺는 것을 어렵게 만듭니다. 빠른 속도는 자신의 운명을 스스로 통제할 수 있는 독립적인 주체로 믿도록 우리를 속입니다. 빠른 속도는 웃고 사랑하며 아름다움을 향유하는데 썩어 할 에너지를 고갈시키며, 우리를 지치게 만듭니다. 빠른 속도는 우리를 혹독하게 몰아붙입니다.

갈라디아서 4장 4-5절에서 바울은 이렇게 말합니다. "때가 차매 하나님이 그 아들을 보내사 여자에게서 나게 하시고 율법 아래에 나게 하신 것은 율법 아래에 있는 자들을 속량하시고 우리로 아들의 명분을 얻게 하려 하심이라." 하나님께서 이스라엘 중 "선지자 하나를 일으키고" 분명하게 하나님의 말씀을 말하게 할 것이라고 모세가 처음에 약속했던 때로부터 천년이 흘렀을 때였습니다 (신 18:18). 이스라엘 사람들은 하나님이 약속하신 메시아를 기다리는 것에 지쳤습니다. 하지만 하나님은 서두르지 않으셨습니다.

하나님은 주어진 여건과 환경 가운데 끈기 있게 "때가 차기까지" 기다리셨습니다. 예수님은 로마가 대규모의 도로망을 건설했던 디베로 황제의 통치 시기에 태어나셨습니다(눅 3:1). 예수님은 모든 도시와 국가에서 그리스어를 쓰는 헬레니즘 문화권에서 태어나셨습니다. 예수님은 유대인들이 스페인부터 페르시아까지 온 세상으로 흩어졌던 시대에 태어나셨습니다. 로마의 도로로 여행하며 그리스어를 사용하고 흩어진 유대인 이민자의 지지를 받았던 바울과 다른 사도들은 예수 그리스도의 복음을



## 대림절은 우리에게 성령의 충만함을 가르칩니다. 시간은 꽤 좋은 것입니다.

많은 나라에 선포하였습니다. 하나님께서 그의 백성들을 기다림 속에 두셨기 때문에 오늘날 우리가 예수님의 축복을 누리고 사는 것입니다.

강림절은 우리에게 때가 차는 것이 아주 좋은 것이라고 가르쳐 줍니다. 기다림은 결코 쉽지 않습니다. 불안할 때 우리는 하나님께서 곧바로 응답을 주시고 행동하시기를 원합니다. 하나님은 우리의 속도를 늦추셔서 우리가 하나님과의 관계를 발전시킬 여지를 만드십니다. 하나님은 우리의 신앙과 성품을 다듬고 자라게 하십니다. 그리고 마지막으로 하나님은 알맞은 조건을 만드셔서 우리가 성장하게 하십니다.

이 강림절에 하나님께서 여러분이 예수님의 탄생의 축복을 목상하는 “때가 차게” 하시기를 원합니다. 하나님의 응답을 기다릴 때 끈기 있게 버틸 수 있는 인내심을 하나님께서 주시기를 기도합니다. 이번 성탄절에 웃고 사랑하며 모든 아름다운 것을 오래도록 음미할 수 있는 여유를 주시기를 기도합니다.

재커리 킹 목사는 북미주 개혁교회의 사무총장이다. 미시건 주 그랜드래피즈의 풀러 애비뉴 CRC 교회에 출석하고 있다.

## La plenitud del tiempo

**ME GUSTA CONSEGUIR** lo que quiero con rapidez. Quizá a usted también. Como cultura, somos adictos a la velocidad. Crecemos rápido, trabajamos rápido, aprendemos rápido, conducimos rápido, cocinamos rápido, comemos rápido, nos comunicamos rápido. A menos que uno pase mucho tiempo fuera de la cultura occidental, es fácil ver la rapidez como algo normal. Pero no lo es.

En su defensa, la rapidez tiene sus ventajas. Si nos accidentamos o enfermamos, la rapidez salva vidas. Si estamos de viaje, la rapidez nos da más tiempo para trabajar y jugar. Si estamos en peligro, la rapidez nos protege. La rapidez amplía nuestros horizontes y nos permite ver y hacer más cosas con nuestro tiempo.

Pero la rapidez también nos deforma profundamente. La rapidez dificulta forjar relaciones significativas con Dios y con los demás. La rapidez nos engaña haciéndonos creer que somos agentes independientes en control de nuestro propio destino. La rapidez nos agota, vaciándonos de la energía que necesitamos para reír, amar y disfrutar de lo bello. La rapidez es un severo capataz.

En Gálatas 4:4-5 Pablo escribió: "Pero cuando se cumplió el plazo, Dios envió a su Hijo, nacido de una mujer, nacido bajo la Ley, para rescatar a los que estaban bajo la Ley, a fin de que fuéramos adoptados como hijos." Había pasado un milenio desde que Moisés prometió por primera vez que Dios "levantaría un profeta" de Israel para que hablara la palabra de Dios de manera definitiva. (Dt. 18:18). El pueblo de Israel se había cansado de esperar al Mesías prometido por Dios. Pero Dios no tenía prisa.

Dios esperó la "plenitud del tiempo", alineando pacientemente las condiciones y el entorno. Jesús nació durante el reinado de Tiberio César (Lucas 3:1), cuando Roma había construido una

## El Adviento nos enseña que la plenitud de el tiempo es algo bastante bueno.

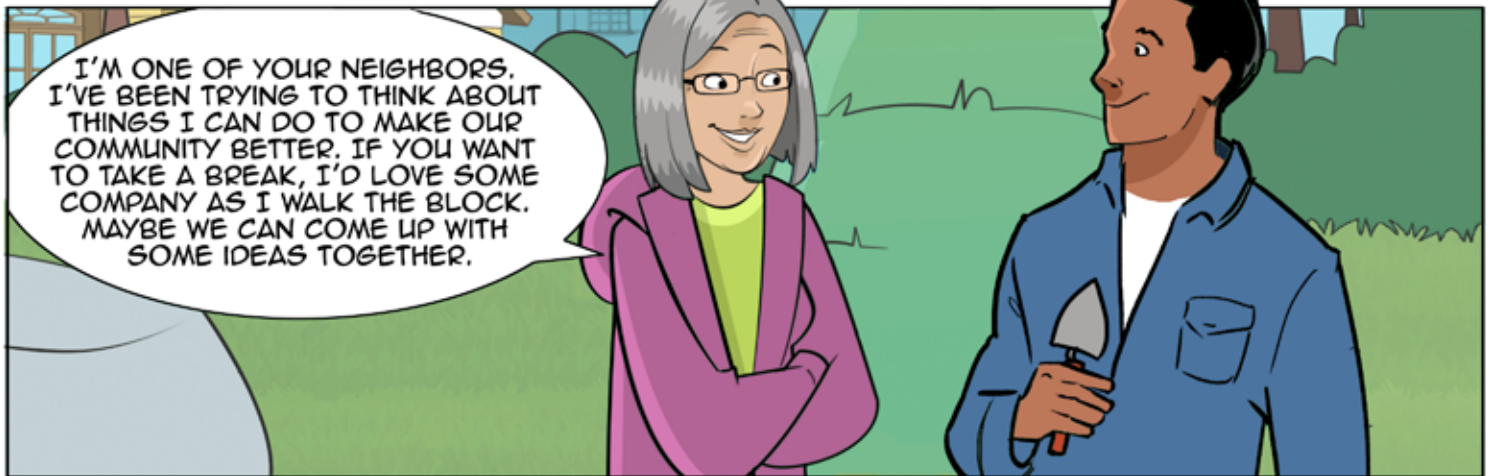
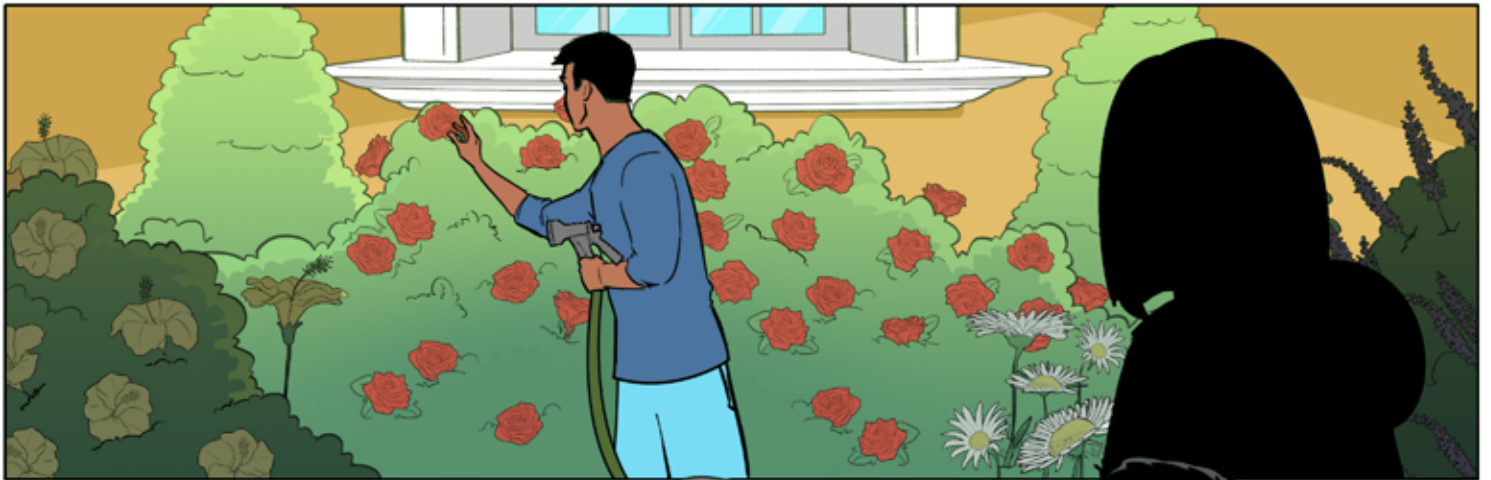
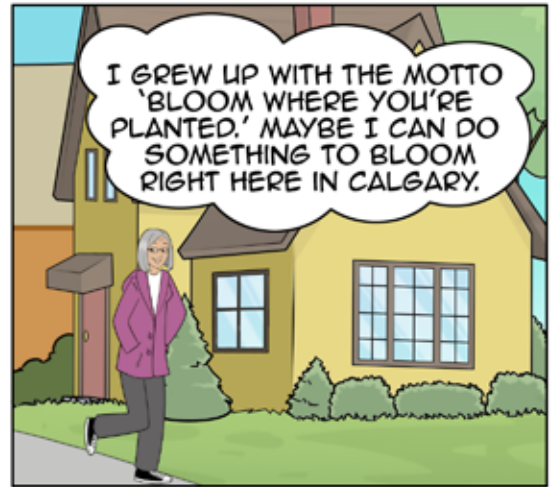
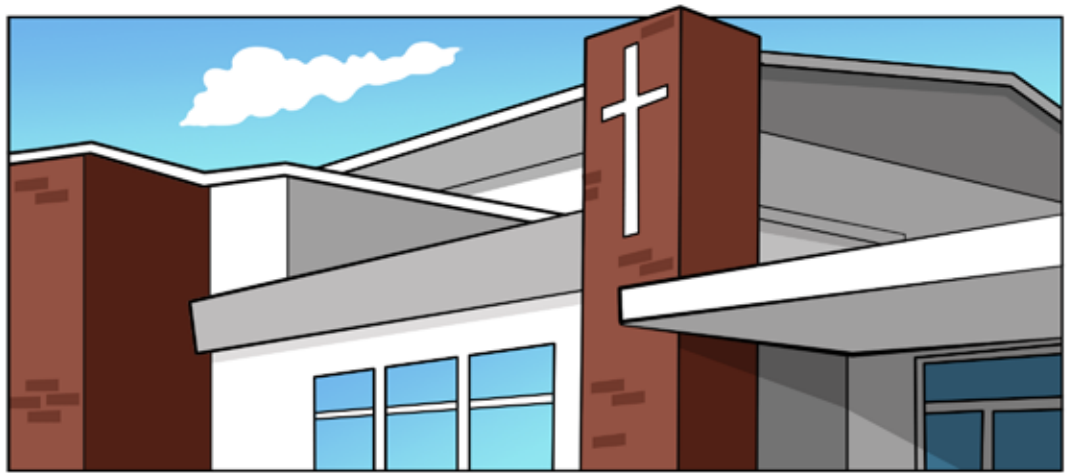
vasta red de carreteras. Jesús nació en la sociedad helenística, en la que se hablaba griego en todas las ciudades y países. Jesús nació en una época en la que los judíos estaban dispersos desde España hasta Persia y por todas partes. Pablo y los demás apóstoles—viajando por calzadas romanas, hablando la lengua griega y apoyados por enclaves judíos dispersos—proclamaron el evangelio de Jesucristo a muchas naciones. Hoy disfrutamos de las bendiciones de Jesús porque Dios hizo esperar a su pueblo.

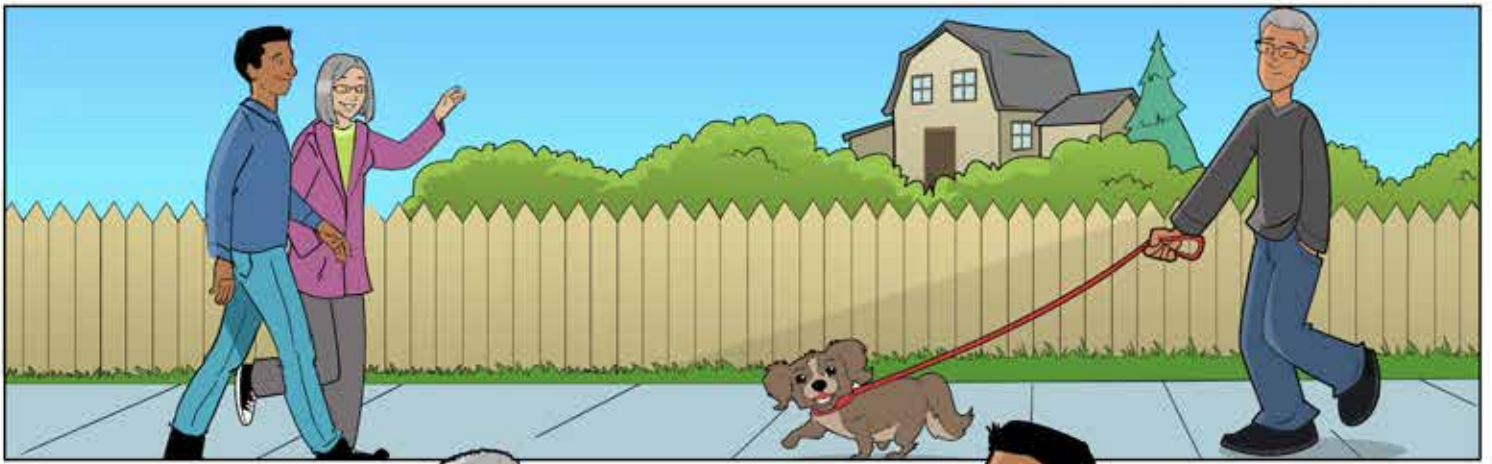
El adviento nos enseña que la plenitud del tiempo es algo muy bueno. Rara vez nos es fácil esperar. Cuando estamos ansiosos, queremos que Dios responda y actúe de inmediato. Al desacelerar, Dios deja espacio para que desarrollemos una relación con él. Dios cultiva nuestra fe y nuestro carácter. Y, por último, Dios crea las condiciones adecuadas para que crezcamos.

Que Dios les conceda "la plenitud del tiempo" para reflexionar sobre la bendición del nacimiento de Jesús en esta temporada de adviento. Que Dios les conceda la paciencia para perseverar mientras esperan su respuesta. Que Dios les dé espacio para reír, amar y contemplar todo lo que es bello en esta navidad.

El Rev. Zachary King es el secretario general de la ICRNA. Es miembro de ICR Fuller Avenue en Grand Rapids, Mich.

**This is the**  
**WAY;**  
Walk in it.





YOU KNOW, I'VE BEEN WANTING TO JOIN A BOOK CLUB, BUT DIDN'T WANT TO COMMIT TO DRIVING THAT FAR. MAYBE WE COULD DO ONE IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD.



IN CALGARY, ALTA., GRACE STOLTE NOW GOES ON ONE-ON-ONE WALKS WITH NEIGHBORS OR VISITS THEM AT HOME. SHE HAS ORGANIZED SEVERAL GROUPS, INCLUDING A COFFEE TIME, A BOOK CLUB, AND A GROUP TO PRACTICE TAI CHI. GOD IS AT WORK IN EACH CONVERSATION AND GATHERING.

# Ministry in the Midst of War

In February 2022, Russian troops invaded Ukraine's Kyiv region. The violence and chaos that was to follow forced 6.2 million Ukrainians to flee the country and another 5.1 million to be internally displaced.

Lika Roman, a staff member of ReFrame Ministries, fled Kyiv and found shelter in Poland.



I can't imagine what it would be like to go through this without knowing God.



I'm sorry that I can't offer food or shelter, but can I pray with you and hear your story?



A few days later...

Let me finish posting this video devotional to my Instagram feed. Oh wait, a call...



Our bus was in an accident on our way to Finland. Because of what you said, I knew God was with us and I could feel him keeping us safe.



I'm so glad. But what a tragedy for you to go through. I think I know some people in your area, let me see if I can get a pastor to come pray with you at the hospital.



Whether in person or via social media, Lika Roman's messages have reached people caught in the crosshairs of war—those in Ukrainian bomb shelters and those who have fled.



# Expressing Faith in Jesus

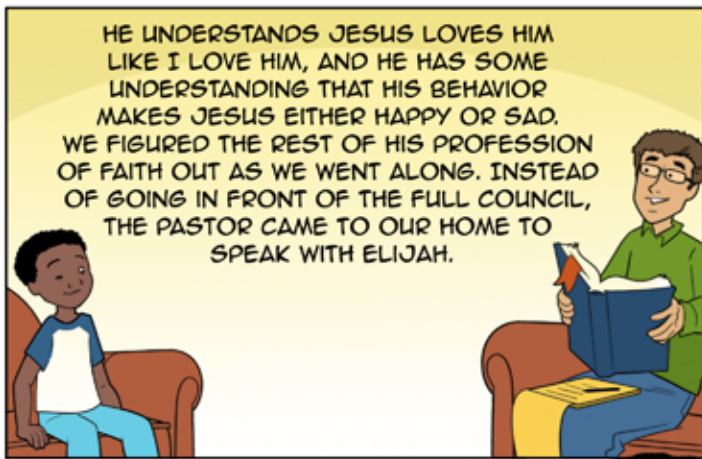


I WANTED TO TELL YOU ABOUT MY SON, ELIJAH. HE'S 18 NOW AND HAS AUTISM AS WELL AS DANDY-WALKER SYNDROME. HE RECENTLY MADE PROFESSION OF FAITH AT OUR CHURCH!

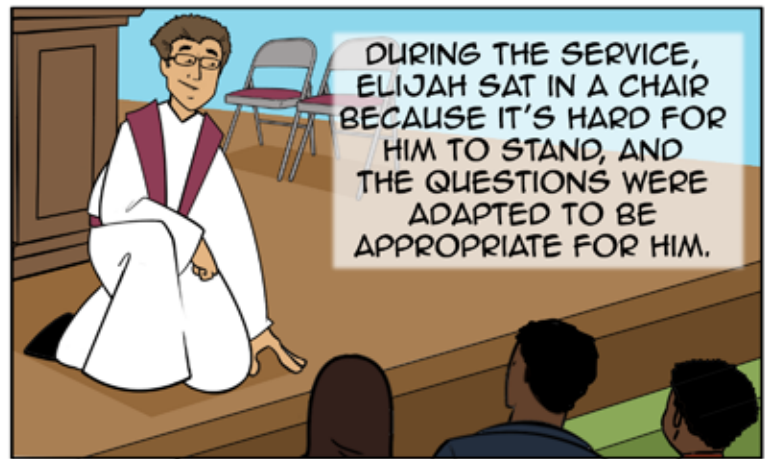


WHEN HE WAS 10, ELIJAH BECAME BLIND. WHEN HE HEARS MUSIC HE'LL ASK WHO'S DOING IT. HE'S BECOME KNOWN IN OUR CHURCH FOR ENCOURAGING MUSICIANS AFTER A SONG BY TELLING THEM THEY DID A GOOD JOB.

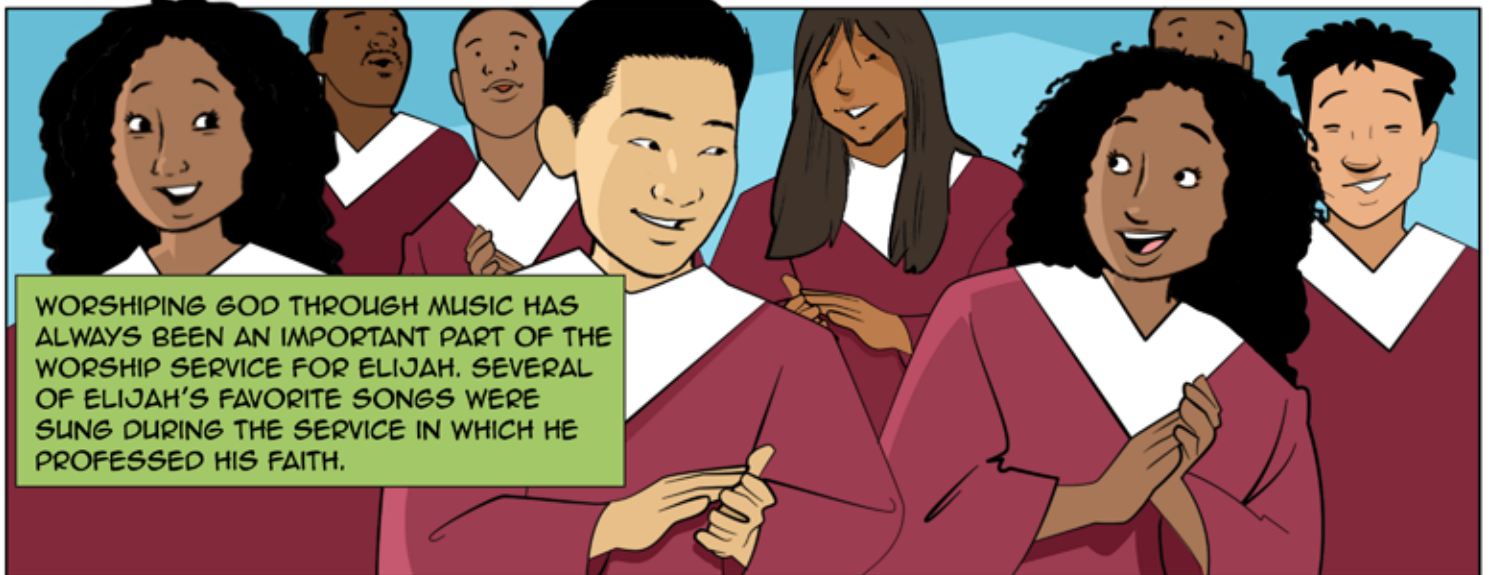




HE UNDERSTANDS JESUS LOVES HIM LIKE I LOVE HIM, AND HE HAS SOME UNDERSTANDING THAT HIS BEHAVIOR MAKES JESUS EITHER HAPPY OR SAD. WE FIGURED THE REST OF HIS PROFESSION OF FAITH OUT AS WE WENT ALONG. INSTEAD OF GOING IN FRONT OF THE FULL COUNCIL, THE PASTOR CAME TO OUR HOME TO SPEAK WITH ELIJAH.



DURING THE SERVICE, ELIJAH SAT IN A CHAIR BECAUSE IT'S HARD FOR HIM TO STAND, AND THE QUESTIONS WERE ADAPTED TO BE APPROPRIATE FOR HIM.



WORSHIPING GOD THROUGH MUSIC HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE WORSHIP SERVICE FOR ELIJAH. SEVERAL OF ELIJAH'S FAVORITE SONGS WERE SUNG DURING THE SERVICE IN WHICH HE PROFESSED HIS FAITH.



BECAUSE PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNION AT FELLOWSHIP CRC IS FOR THOSE WHO HAVE PUBLICLY PROFESSED THEIR FAITH, IT WAS SO SPECIAL TO TAKE COMMUNION WITH HIM FOR THE FIRST TIME.



ELIJAH IS A GOOD REMINDER THAT SERVING OUR CHURCH CAN COME IN MANY FORMS AND THAT PROFESSING OUR FAITH CAN COME IN MANY FORMS, TOO. THANK YOU FOR MAKING RESOURCES TO HELP CHURCHES WELCOME PEOPLE LIKE HIM.

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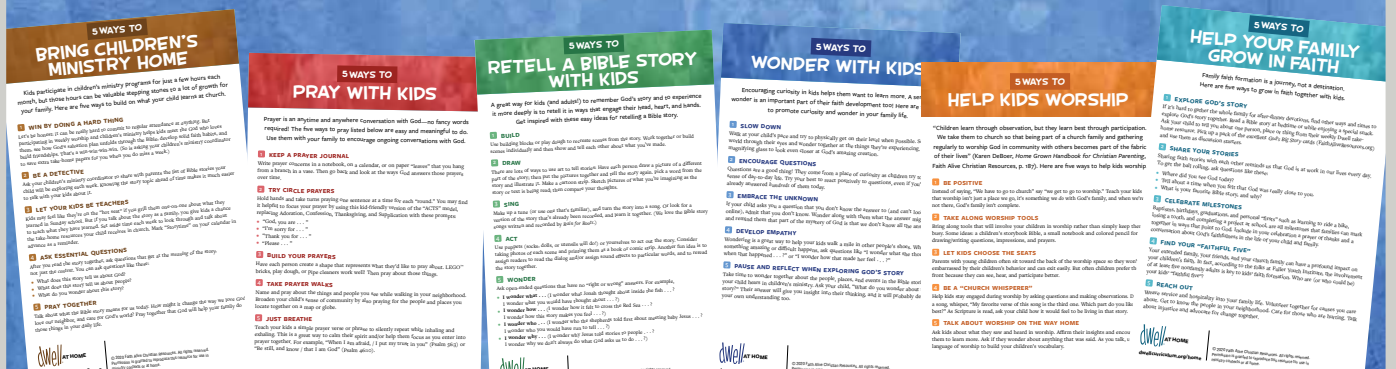
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## Free Family Faith Formation Resources



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Check out *Dwell at Home's* "5 Ways" series at [DwellCurriculum.org/Home](https://DwellCurriculum.org/Home).

These FREE one-page tip sheets give parents and caregivers practical, creative ideas for nurturing faith at home.

They're perfect for sharing with families via email, social media, and your church's website.

Or download and print them to hand out.

For more ways to connect children's ministry and family faith formation  
check out [DwellCurriculum.org/Home](https://DwellCurriculum.org/Home)





# Eggs

**HAVE YOU EVER** come across a nest that looks like it's been all broken up with nothing left but egg shells? This is part of God's design for birds to protect themselves.

The United States and Canada are some of the few places in the world where people refrigerate eggs. The government's food safety rules require eggs to be washed to make sure the eggs we buy in a store are clean and free from the potential contaminants that can exist where a chicken lays.

But when we wash eggs, we're disrupting God's intentional design. God designed birds to excrete an oil around eggshells. This oil protects the eggs from microbes penetrating the shell. It's a natural barrier to contamination.

We can understand why God designed eggs this way when we think about the way a bird lays its eggs. When it's time for a bird to lay eggs, it will usually lay one egg a day, which would be an issue if they hatched in order. In that case, chicks would hatch in anywhere from four to 12 days, but not all at once. For ground-nesting birds like chickens, ducks, or geese, this would give predators a chance to notice the freshly broken eggshells and discover the hatchlings.


But that's not how God designed eggs. As long as the eggs are kept cool, they don't begin to develop. But when a bird is done laying all its eggs, it will finally sit on the eggs to warm them. This

means they'll all begin to develop and incubate on the same day at the same time, regardless of when they were laid. This allows all the eggs to hatch on the same day.

But don't the earlier eggs start to go bad while they wait for the other eggs to be laid? No! Those natural oils on the eggshell protect it from the microbes that could make an egg start to spoil. Because of this design, a bird can lay an egg and then leave the nest. The next day it can come back, lay another egg, and leave the nest again.

It's an amazing design. Imagine a predator out and about looking for food. A nest full of broken shells, freshly hatched chicks, and unhatched eggs would be an inviting smell! But because all the eggs hatch on the same day, ground-nesting birds and their hatchlings all leave the nest shortly after the eggs hatch. All that's left is the nest and the eggshells. The mother and the hatchlings head for new territory, be it another field, meadow, river, pond, or lake.

This reminds me of the spiritual practices we should have in our lives. Spending time in God's Word, in prayer, and in our Christian communities helps protect us from the "microbes" of the world. Surrounding ourselves with these things helps give us the needed defense to resist temptation and walk the path God has created us to walk.

Be like an egg: use the protection God has given us! 



Clayton Lubbers teaches science at Byron Center Christian School and has been teaching for over 25 years. He loves the outdoors and commonly meets and sees God while hunting, fishing, and exploring creation.





Photo by Mira Kemppainen/Unsplash

# Wintering Wisdom: Five Ways to Make the Most of the Coldest Months

By Lorilee Craker

I was having brunch with my cousin Leah recently when she mentioned that she had accepted a job in Ottawa, Ontario, but would be working remotely from the certifiably coldest big city on Earth: Winnipeg, Manitoba, our mutual hometown.

While Ontario climes would be balmer, Leah was firm: She could never leave Manitoba because, she said wistfully, “I would really miss the winters.”

Like many citizens of my beloved “Winterpeg,” Leah embraces the bone-cracking cold with as much zest as the most blissful, palm-tree-loving snow-bird experiences Florida. Though I have lived in comparatively clement Michigan for these 30 years, I marvel as parka-clad Winnipeggers innovate under a polar air mass, creating opportunities to nuzzle winter even as winter nips at their noses.

“Winter is here anyway; we may as well welcome it,” goes the thinking in Winnipeg. It may be most people’s least favorite season—my cousin Leah notwithstanding—but it does offer some singular gifts. According to Katherine May and her bestselling book *Wintering: The Power of Retreat and Rest in Difficult Times*, the coldest season offers benefits the three warmer divisions do not. “Wintering brings about some of the most profound and insightful moments of our human experience,” she writes. “Wisdom resides in those who have wintered.”

Here are five ways to delve into the icy months and glean the most reward and meaning out of the season even as we look forward to spring:

In winter, we can  
slow down, rest,  
and reflect.

## Consider the Animals

Like animals, we can learn to adopt a more expansive vision for winter, growing more mindful, resilient, and present, all the while knowing that spring is coming.

“Plants and animals don’t fight the winter; they don’t pretend it’s not happening and attempt to carry on living the same lives that they lived in the summer,” May writes. “They prepare. They adapt. They perform extraordinary acts of metamorphosis to get them through. ... That’s where the transformation occurs.”

## Winter Can Be Life Affirming

One of my favorite aspects of winter is walking outside, all bundled up, enjoying the crunch, crunch of the snow and the vivifying cold air on my face. One may wildly prefer the heat of summer, but there’s nothing particularly bracing or enlivening about a sluggish, humid day. Winter affirms that we are alive, vital, quick, inhabiting God’s world. “Extreme temperatures benefit the mind, as it forces us to be awake and live in

the present,” writes May. “In fact, low temperatures can have immense benefits on the human body. For example, swimming in cold water can increase dopamine, the happiness hormone, by up to 25%.”

Personally, I did not notice an appreciable uptick in happiness when I jumped into freezing Portage Lake a few years ago. However, the experience was extremely life affirming.

## It’s Time to Get Cozy

As the sweater weather of fall melts into the blanket weather of winter, it’s time to sink into the healing tonic of coziness. There’s no better time than winter to enjoy plenty of soothing, comforting, and stress-relieving “cushion time.”

In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, poet Maya Angelou paints an inviting portrait of coziness.

“Pots rattled in the kitchen where Momma was frying corn cakes to go with vegetable soup for supper, and the homey sounds and scents cushioned me,” she wrote.

Angelou chose the word “cushioned” to describe her emotional condition because the coziness she was experiencing went deeper than just a mellow moment before dinner. “Cushioned” evokes a sense of softening, shelter, and protection, of the hard edges being absorbed.

This is the idea behind *hygge* (HUE-ga), the Danish concept of an unbuyable sense of comfort created by spending time in a cozy environment, seizing contentment in the midst of harsh weather outside.

Whereas *hygge* is creating coziness within frigid conditions, the Norwegian concept of *koselig* (KOOSH-lee) is about bundling up in warm clothing and facing the elements as a group, finding warmth in the togetherness. *Koselig*, as Jason Wilson writes in an article for *Reader's Digest*, is "celebrating what winter is, instead of longing for all the things it isn't."

Darkness and solitude can be honored because they provide the need for us to seek relief from them. The act of creating our own glow and warmth produces calm and contentment.

In her podcast *The Thin Place*, Bailey Suzio says these coziness-making practices can be "a way to emphasize Paul's instruction to Timothy that we live quiet lives worthy of admiration. It is a way we take captive our thoughts and life and fight against that age that clamors for our attention."

### **A Time for Reading**

Every fall and winter, I get reacquainted with my slow cooker as together we concoct simmering soups and stews—just the ticket for frosty evenings. And while food is slow cooking is the perfect time to burrow into a ponderous book. Summer may be the time for page-turning beach reads, but in winter, May writes, "I want concepts to chew over in a pool of lamplight—slow, spiritual reading, a reinforcement of the soul. Winter is a time for libraries, the muffled quiet of book-stacks and the scent of old pages and dust. In winter, I can spend hours in silent pursuit of a half-understood concept or a detail of history. There is nowhere else to be, after all."

This winter, I plan to finally plunge into *Kristin Lavransdatter*, a trilogy of historical novels written by the Norwegian Sigrid Undset, who won the 1928 Nobel Prize in Literature for her powerful descriptions of Northern life during the Middle Ages. It's the ideal winter read.

### **Candles Point to Christ**

There is nothing like surrounding darkness to reinforce the coziness of a warm fire or a wood-burning stove, or candles lighting the shadows.

On the Christian calendar, Candlemas, Feb. 2, marks the feast day commemorating Jesus' presentation in the temple in Jerusalem and Simeon's song of joy as he cradled the baby. "He will be a light to shine on the people who are not Jews," the account in Luke 2 reads. "He will be the shining-greatness of Your people the Jews" (NLV).


In *Seasons of Wonder*, Bonnie Whitehouse Smith suggests marking Candlemas this way: "Light all the candles you can find in your home, and say a small prayer of thanksgiving for the wax, the bees, the soy plants, the wicks, and most of all the light," remembering the baby brought to the temple, the "shining greatness" of the world.

Lighting candles places you in good company. As early as the second century, Christians have lit candles not just to banish the darkness, but also to represent Christ, the uncreated and everlasting Light.

### **Inviting Winter In**

After we've learned from the animals, affirmed our existence, read the books, and lit the candles (surrounded by *hyggelig* blankets, hot cocoa, and a crackling fire), perhaps we can settle into this unwanted season in a new, meaningful way.

In winter, we can slow down, rest, and reflect upon our lives and on the light of God that shines on us even on the gloomiest of days. We can get to know ourselves and God a little bit more and grow into the next season heartier, more resilient, and peaceful.

Ultimately, "we must learn to invite the winter in," May writes. "We may never choose to winter, but we can choose how." 



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*.

1. How do you feel about winters? Describe your experience with the winter season.
2. What are some of your favorite cozy things to do in winter?
3. What are some examples of "celebrating what winter is, instead of longing for all the things it isn't"?
4. What are some suggestions from the article that you would like to try or practice this winter to help make the most of winter?

## Underrated

I discovered  
a treasure in  
this underrated  
fifth book of the  
Pentateuch.



Kerri Howard and her husband, Wade, serve as home missionaries at Trail's End Ranch, a Bible camp near Ekalaka, Mont. They have been members of Christian Reformed churches in Lynden, Wash., and Lodgepole, S.D., and currently attend Ekalaka Bible Church.

**WHEN MY MENTOR** suggested we study the book of Deuteronomy, I thought, "Really? Deuteronomy? Isn't that one of the books that makes people quit their Bible-in-a-year reading plans? Isn't it a dry list of Levitical laws that don't apply to the church today?"

My hesitations aside, we dove in, and I discovered a treasure in this underrated fifth book of the Pentateuch.

The word Deuteronomy is Greek for "second law" or "copy of the law." It is a retelling of the law and the instructions God gave Moses in previous books, now in a short and sweet memo for Joshua and the Israelites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. But this brief is also rife with reminders, promises, warnings, and lessons that still apply to us today.

A few key words by the number: Moses uses the word "listen" 18 times, "remember" or "do not forget" 21 times, and "obey" 30 times. Did you get that? Through Moses, God is making a very clear point: listen to my words, remember/do not forget my words, obey my words! Not much has changed in 3,000 years.

What is God so desperate for God's people to know? Twelve times God tells Joshua and the people "Do not be afraid," "Do not be terrified," "Do not be discouraged," "Do not be fainthearted," and "Do not panic." But why shouldn't they be panicked or fainthearted about their dangerous present and uncertain future? Because "The LORD your God himself will fight for you" (Deut. 3:22). Because "The LORD your God ... will be with you" (20:1). Because "The LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (31:6). Because "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you" (31:8).

Of all the imperatives and minutiae of Levitical laws and details of worship, the critical thing God wants his children to remember as they enter the

Promised Land is that God is with them. Without that, none of the rest of the law matters.

But God doesn't just leave them to take God's word for it (remember, those who actually saw God triumph over the Egyptians were long gone). Over and over God reminds them of what God has already done. Want an extensive coloring experience? Try highlighting every time in Deuteronomy that God did or promises to do something. Chapter 1 alone recounts: "I (the LORD) have given you this land" (v. 8); "The LORD your God has increased your numbers" (v. 10); "See, the LORD your God has given you the land" (v. 21); "The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you" (v. 30); "The LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son" (v. 31); and "The LORD your God ... went ahead of you on your journey ... to show you the way you should go" (vs. 32-33). Reminder after reminder after reminder.

But not all reminders and assurances are comforting. Moses also notes, "When the LORD heard what you said, he was angry" (vs. 34) and "He paid no attention to your weeping and turned a deaf ear to you" (vs. 45). The consequences of not listening, remembering, and obeying are dire. Again, not much has changed.

Sadly, we know that the Israelites did not always listen, remember, and obey. But God through Moses preserved this message for more than just Joshua and his contemporaries. The Levitical law doesn't apply to the church today, but the promises of a God who never changes still hold for you and me. Our faithful, omnipotent God who rescued, redeemed, punished, forgave, and guided the Israelites is still invested in our rescue and our redemption. God still desires our love and obedience, and God still goes with us every step of the way. That is just one of the precious treasures hidden in the underrated book of Deuteronomy. **B**

## Managing Emotions

We cannot erase our emotions, but we can learn to lower their intensity.

**ELIZABETH IS A 40-YEAR-OLD** woman currently going through a divorce after her husband left her for another woman. Elizabeth has been married for 15 years. She has been actively involved in her church community. Elizabeth is feeling depressed and guilty for not being able to make her marriage work. She has thoughts of being a failure and that people in her community are going to judge her. Elizabeth starts to struggle to get out of bed and leave the house. She feels overwhelmed at times with her emotions. She feels she cannot stop thinking about her perceived failure and what will happen in her future.

Intense emotions can toss us around and make us act differently. Sometimes we feel as if our emotions are controlling us. Like Elizabeth, maybe we feel stuck in thought loops that paralyze us. But such emotions do not last forever. Eventually they subside.

Emotions are natural. In fact, God created us to have emotions for a reason. Emotions act like signals. They can communicate to us, mask another emotion, or motivate us to take action. Elizabeth's emotions may have been communicating to her that she needs to pay attention to her core beliefs, or that her depression is covering up another emotion of guilt. To work through this, Elizabeth can reflect on whether her sense of guilt fits the facts of her situation. Was the divorce completely Elizabeth's choice? Guilt can fit the facts when one's actions do not match up with one's values.

Focusing on her thoughts can also lead Elizabeth to more sad thoughts and unhealthy behaviors, such as isolation. How she acts out her emotions is important. By isolating herself and not leaving the house, she is acting out her emotions in a way that is not helpful for her. If Elizabeth can work to act in

opposition to her urges to isolate, she then can take steps to challenge her emotions. We might have urges that come with our strong emotions, but we do not have to act on the urges. We can just notice that the urges are there.

In the Bible, Job struggled with depression as he experienced great loss. The more Job thought about his painful circumstances, the more likely it was that he would feel sad and depressed, which could have led to isolation or self-harming behaviors. Yet his depression may have signaled Job to pay attention to God and listen to God's counsel. How Job behaved in response to his depression is what is important. He cried out to God rather than hurting himself or others.

It is also important to remember that we are not our emotions. Just because Elizabeth is feeling depressed does not mean that she is a depressed person. We all have thousands of thoughts each day. What can happen over time is that our brains get wired to think in certain ways. My brain can learn to filter in anxious or self-critical thoughts and filter out positive and uplifting thoughts (or vice versa). These thoughts then influence how I feel. If I am thinking more about how I am not good enough, then I am more likely to feel insecure or sad. Therefore, the more Elizabeth dwells in her thoughts, the more likely she is to wire her brain to think sad and guilty thoughts.

Emotional regulation is learning ways to manage and cope with emotions. We cannot erase our emotions, but we can learn to lower their intensity so they become more manageable, which can help us not to act out our emotions in unhelpful ways.

It is important to learn what triggers our emotions so that we can learn to manage the triggers. I've noticed that



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Photo by Claudia Wolff/Unsplash

big emotional triggers often are people or situations outside our control. Learning to accept a situation as it is in the moment without trying to change it can help alleviate the intensity of emotions as well as prevent rumination. This strategy is called radical acceptance. One of the goals of radical acceptance is to keep emotional pain from turning into suffering. This means giving situations over to God, trusting that God has a plan for everything and that God generally does not leave us without any resources to manage our emotions and circumstances. Once we learn to let go of things outside our control, we are free to choose paths we can control. Other people's emotions and behaviors, for example, are outside our control. Our reactions, choices, and behaviors are inside our control. Radical acceptance does not mean that we approve


or condone situations, but that we acknowledge what is in God's hands.

Here are some tools and strategies to help with managing emotions:

1. We can trust in God. If we worry about the future or constantly ask "what if," we can give these thoughts to God and trust in God's promises. Jeremiah 29:11 talks about God's plans to give God's people hope and a future.
2. We can pray to God. In prayer we can voice our worries, share our deepest thoughts, and express our sadness. God listens. Remember, God created emotions and feelings.
3. We can be mindful in how we choose to act on our emotions. We can STOP: **S**top, **T**ake a break from what we are doing, **O**bserve how we are feeling on the inside and

outside and what is going on in our environment, then **P**roceed mindfully (choosing how we want to act and respond). We can do this by praying, by asking what Jesus would do, and by weighing the long- and short-term consequences of our urges.

4. We can take moments of reflection and study God's Word to us. Some questions to consider might be: What triggers your emotions? What barriers are there to "letting go and letting God"? What is one thing you can do differently to help manage your emotions? How can I trust God with emotions and situations I do not understand?

If managing emotions is something you struggle with, do not hesitate to reach out to a counselor—ideally a Christian counselor. A counselor can help you learn tools and strategies for coping in healthy ways. Life is worth living even if there is pain in it, when God is our hope. 

1. Have you ever experienced (or do you know of someone who has experienced) emotional struggles similar to Elizabeth's? Can you describe those experiences?

2. Would you say that Christianity affirms the goodness of our emotions? Why or why not?

3. What are some things that might trigger your emotions? How might recognizing those triggers help you?

4. What will you take away from this article about managing your emotions?

# Inspiring Children to Create, Not Just Consume

**2023 HAS BEEN** a surreal year for children's author Stephanie Kammeraad, who also acts as part-time director of children's ministry and administration at the North campus of Madison Church, a Christian Reformed church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

In January, Kammeraad and her husband and coauthor, Kevin, lost their beloved 18-year-old son, Carlos, to an accidental drug overdose. Carlos struggled with mental illness and addiction as a teen but had been in rehab around the time of his death. Tragically, the drugs he took were laced with fentanyl—something that happens “far too often,” according to Kammeraad.

But there was joy in 2023 as well: On July 18, the couple and their co-creator Michael Hyacinthe saw the release of their first nationally released book, *Wimee Creates with Vehicles and Colors* (Zonderkidz).

“This year my worst nightmare happened and my dream (of being an author) came true,” Kammeraad said in an interview. “July 18 was the release date chosen by the publisher one year before the book came out—they had no idea about the significance of the day.” That date is Carlos’ “Family Day,” the anniversary of the day he was adopted.

For the Kammeraad, who live with their 16-year-old, Mac, God was in the details of the release date. “It felt like Carlos was a part of our big day,” she said.

Wimee, the loveable robot featured in the book and the star of the PBS Kids show *Wimee’s Words*, was dreamed up a few years ago during the pandemic shutdown.

“Michael and Kevin worked together to create this robot character,”



Kammeraad said. “Then they started taking Wimee into preschool classrooms, and he

was a hit, inspiring kids to be creative with rhyming and wordplay.”

Soon the trio of creatives was bringing their vision to life on television. The first episode of *Wimee’s Words* was filmed in the Kammeraad’s attic, but PBS quickly distributed it to stations nationwide. A subsequent collaboration with Zonderkidz birthed two book series: *Wimee Creates*, for ages 3-6, and *Wimee Learns*, for ages 4-8. (*Wimee Learns About Money* will debut on January 2, 2024, and is available for preorder.)

“We hope Wimee will inspire kids and be a springboard for their own ideas,” Kammeraad said. “What fun and silly things can they come up with out of their own brains?”

In *Wimee Creates with Vehicles and Colors*, children learn about shapes, colors, rhyming, and imaginative wordplay. Vibrant illustrations accompany simple rhyming sentences, such as “A green wagon wheeled behind the blue dragon” or “A purple balloon bumped against the red baboon.”

The book ends on an active note: “Go make things that are from you!”

Both the book series and the TV show cultivate the Kammeraad’s vision that children “can be producers of content, not just consumers,” Kammeraad said.

As she produces content for the show and books, Kammeraad reflects on how God gifted her to do this work. “God has given me the ability to be creative,” she said. “He has wired me to be an educator and writer, and I glorify him by inspiring kids to be who they were created to be.”

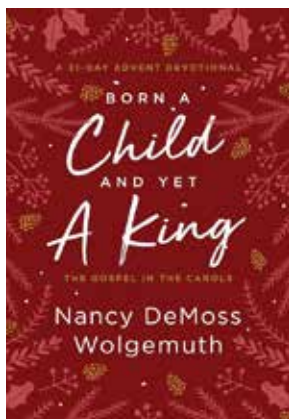
Though many days are overwhelmed with grieving their son, Stephanie and Kevin are thankful for the “creative outlets that push us forward.”

“We trust him with all of it, with the writing of our story, even in the hard,” Kammeraad said. “Some days it feels really good and beautiful and fun, and some days it is hard and we are going through the motions. But we are grateful for the doors he has opened for us, and we just keep walking through them.”



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*.





## Born a Child and Yet a King: The Gospel in the Carols

By Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In 31 Advent devotions, author Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth examines Christmas carols and uses them “as a treasure map that leads us to an even richer worship of Jesus.” As DeMoss Wolgemuth studied carols, she noticed that, though they vary in many ways, “the best of the carols seek to accomplish two things. They speak to us of (1) who Jesus is and (2) why He came.”

The devotions survey six themes, including our desperate need for Jesus (“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”) and our desire for his appearing (“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”).

Each chapter in this engaging, challenging devotional includes a Scripture passage, a brief meditation, a prayer, suggestions for further Bible reading, and reflection questions. Recommended as a worthy resource for a meaningful Advent season. (Moody)



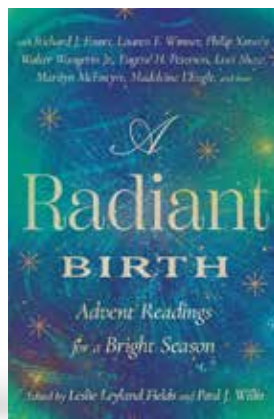
## Charles Cornell YouTube Channel

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

I don’t play piano, but I wish I did—especially after watching Charles Cornell’s YouTube channel. Cornell’s unrestrained enthusiasm for music means even casual observers can get lost for hours watching him break down the intricacies of TV theme songs, video game melodies, movie scores, pop music, advertising jingles, ChatGPT-generated jazz chords, and internet memes.

Cornell got his start around age 4, when his mom overheard him playing the doxology on the piano by ear after church.

In 2019, Cornell posted his first video to YouTube, went to bed, and woke up a viral sensation with over 20 million views. He was able to convert that immediate success into a YouTube channel that is all about loving music and teaching people how they can love it too.



## A Radiant Birth: Advent Readings for a Bright Season

Edited by Leslie Leyland Fields and Paul J. Willis

Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

Leslie Leyland Fields and Paul Willis edit a collection of Christmas readings, each one written by a member of the Chrysostom Society, including Lauren Winner, Philip Yancey, Walter Wangerin, Madeleine L’Engle, and more. Readings span 42 days and vary in length. They encompass various genres from essays and narratives to short scripts and poems.

In the foreword, Richard Foster explains that this work moves readers from Advent to Epiphany while underscoring the theme of “God is with us.”

The collection is divided into three sections: Jesus, Born in Bethlehem; Jesus, Born in Us; and Jesus in Us for the World.

With fresh takes and fine wordsmithing, this collection will serve individuals and churches well in a season that can get too familiar. (IVP)

### The Lowdown

**Epiphany:** In this short volume, priest and theologian Fleming Rutledge expounds the primary biblical texts and narrative arc of Epiphany, inviting us to discover anew “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (IVP)

### Musical Adaptation:

A musical adaptation of *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker’s novel about the life-long struggles of an African-American woman living in the south during the early 1900s, hits theaters Christmas Day. (Warner Bros.)

### Based on the

**Bestselling Book:** In *Black Cake*, Eleanor Bennett loses her battle with cancer but leaves her children a flash drive holding untold stories of her journey from the Caribbean to America. The stories shock her children and challenge everything they know about their family’s origins. (Hulu)

### The Mystery Guest:

A new mess. A new mystery. It’s up to Molly the maid to uncover the truth in this standalone novel from the author of the *New York Times* best-seller *The Maid*. (Dec. 12, Penguin Random House)

## How Can God Be Three in One?

God is not a definition, an equation, or an explanation.

**ON THE NIGHT OF** Dec. 6, 1273, priest and theologian Thomas Aquinas had a mystical vision of God. It was such a life-changing, category-breaking, perspective-altering experience that Aquinas never wrote another word. His greatest work—*Summa Theologica*, which he had been working on for 20 years—was left unfinished. Months after his vision, as his health was failing, he pointed to a bookshelf holding volumes of his written works and said, “After what I have experienced, everything I have written is straw.”

When we talk about the Trinity, we may feel like Aquinas: human language begins to feel like straw, flimsy and easily scattered by the slightest breeze. Even our very best words fail to capture the power, beauty, and glory of the uncreated and everlasting God.

When we consider the strange truth of God’s trinitarian nature—one God in three persons—we are attempting to peel back and peer into a special way of being that is utterly unique and beyond comparison to anything we know. Some have tried to find simple ways to describe the Trinity, such as a three-leaf clover, or water’s three forms of liquid, solid, and vapor. But these kinds of illustrations easily veer into the three common heresies of modalism, subordination, and tritheism. All three heresies articulate untrue things about God because they pull apart two fundamental and orthodox beliefs about the Trinity that need to be held together in tension: that God is one and yet, at the same time, is three distinct, equal persons.


The creeds of the church are helpful as we wade into these mysterious waters because they succinctly summarize the essentials of orthodox trinitarian belief. One of the most important summaries is found in the Athanasian Creed, named after Athanasius of

Alexandria (293-373), a champion of orthodoxy against the trinitarian heresies of his day. The Athanasian Creed stays faithful to God’s self-revelation in Scripture when it says:

We worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence. For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.

God has created human beings to be persistent seekers of truth. Built into our very nature is an insatiable hunger to know more deeply. Our seeking to understand is not a mere intellectual endeavor, but a whole-hearted quest to know and be known in relationship.

When our finite minds hit a roadblock to knowledge, love can lead the way. This is how the apostle Paul prays for the church in Ephesians 3:14-19 (notice the Trinity): “For this reason I kneel before the Father. ... I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, ... (that you) grasp how wide and long and deep is the love of Christ, and (that you) know this love that surpasses knowledge.”

The creeds of the church are essential, but in the end, God is not a definition, an equation, or an explanation. God is a living being who blazes with glory, goodness, and grace. We might never completely understand how God can be both one and three at the same time, but we can grow in our knowledge of God by loving him and loving those around us. 



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

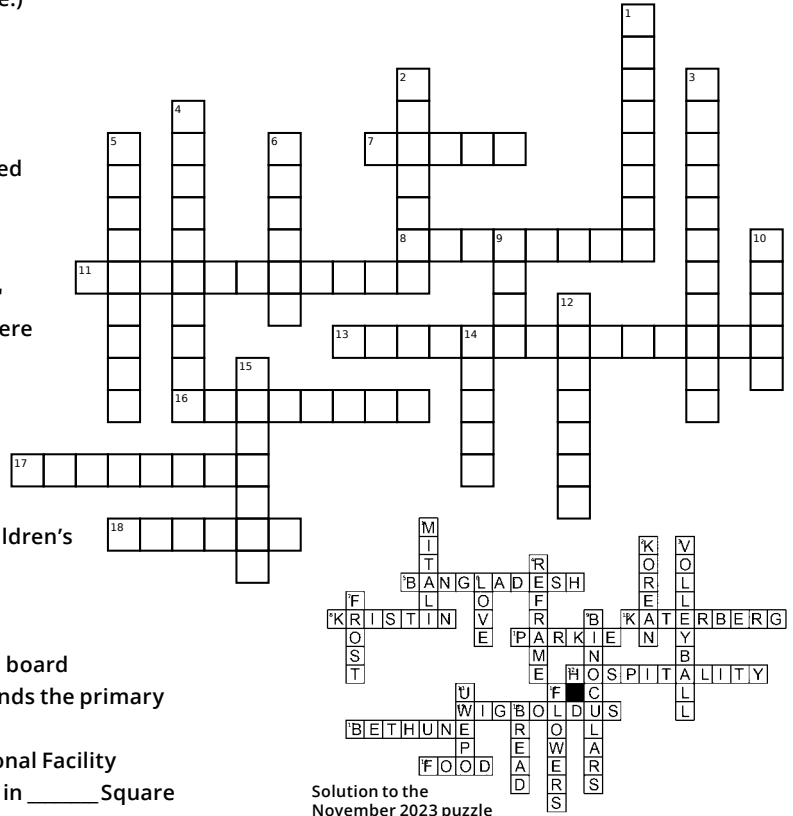
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!  
(Word Play appears monthly except for the July/August issue.)

**Down**

1. God created us to have these for a reason
2. One God in three persons
3. The \_\_\_\_\_ Press Association's Best in Class Contest named *The Banner* fourth in its category
4. Jesus started his preaching ministry with a call to this
5. A nickname for Winnipeg
6. The Hebrew word often translated into English as "peace"
9. The United States is one of the few places in the world where people refrigerate these
10. The Bible uses this word in at least two different ways
12. A \_\_\_\_\_ *Birth: Advent Readings for a Bright Season* is a new seasonal devotional

**Across**

7. A keen wordsmith, \_\_\_\_\_ the robot stars in a series of children's books by a CRC couple
8. Jesus was born during \_\_\_\_\_'s reign of the Roman empire
11. In Greek it means "second law"
13. The Council of Delegates is the CRC's \_\_\_\_\_ governance board
16. In \_\_\_\_\_, priest and theologian Fleming Rutledge expounds the primary biblical texts and narrative arc of Epiphany
17. Pastor of New Life Church in the Newton (Iowa) Correctional Facility
18. Neighbors have begun an annual Christmas tree lighting in \_\_\_\_\_ Square



Solution to the November 2023 puzzle

# Don't Wait!

Your IRA gift must be received by December 31.

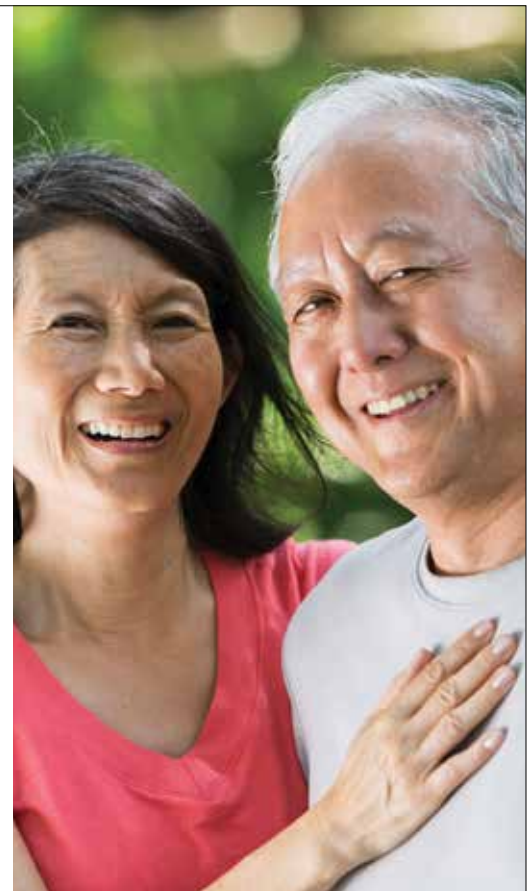
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### Anniversary

#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS

**KREDIT**, Ken and Dee (DeanAuralee Van Dyke) will celebrate 70 years of marriage on Dec 22. After their wedding day in Chicago, IL on Dec 22 1953, they lived some years in Kansas, then in Corsica, and then made Platte, SD their home for 60 years. Through the years they faithfully served their church, community, Gideons, and state, enjoying many travels as well. Praising God, and celebrating with them, their family: Karen & Tim Schaid (Ken (Sarah), Phil (Andrea), & Kimberly); Lois & Dale Leister; Laura & Mike Meyer (Rachael (Josh Downey) & Jennifer (Ben) Davis); Roger & Nikki (Vermeer) (Claire (Jonah) VanderKooi, Isaac, Jeremiah, Precious, & Josiah); Ken's brother Gordon & MaryLou Kredit. Ken & Dee welcome greetings at 5915 Sutton Place, #119, Urbandale, IA 50322.

#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 50 YEARS

**KIMM** Bill and Marian (Schutter) celebrated 50 years of marriage. Children, Jason & Yvonne Kimm; Mark & Erika Kimm; Jodi & Alan Venema; Lori & Brian VanEps; and 14 grandchildren gifted them with a beautiful celebration at Bethel CRC, in Churchill, Montana. This was where they were married on June 21, 1973. We are thankful for our family, friends, and for God's faithfulness through all of our years together.

### Obituaries



**BUUS**, Sheila E (1922-2023). Sheila Emily (Drost) Buus, aged 101 (born May 23, 1922) peacefully passed away September 30, 2023, in Tucson, AZ. She was a woman of great character, known for her unwavering faith, deep love for her family, and commitment to serving others. Sheila graduated from Calvin College. Her unwavering devotion to her hus-

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band, the late Reverend C. Oliver Buus, was evident in their shared ministry and the love they bestowed upon their congregations. Sheila is survived by 3 sons, 3 daughters-in-law, 13 grandchildren, and 19 great-grandchildren. Predeceased by one daughter. Funeral service and burial will be at 1:00 p.m. October 21 at Lakeshore Memorial Funeral Home, 11939 James St., Holland, MI

**EVENHOUSE**, Dr. Gwenyth was born to Vernon Meehl and Jean Laidlaw on January 16, 1937, in Brisbane, Australia. Early in life she took an interest in Midwifery practice and was fascinated by the history of her aunts, midwives who told many interesting stories to a young girl. After graduating from high school, she enrolled in Queensland University and graduated with a medical degree. Next, she traveled to London, England, and gained her Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynecology certificate. Upon completion of her studies, she returned home to Australia by way of Nigeria where she visited the mission station of the Christian Reformed Church and met her future husband, Aldrich Evenhouse.

After seven years the family, now with two young boys, moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, where Gwen did a year of senior residency, a requirement for a license to practice medicine in Michigan; and for fourteen years she maintained a solo Obstetrics practice at St. Mary's Hospital. Upon closing that office, she served in various hospitals in Cleveland and Columbus, OH., in Middlesboro, KY, Tahlequah, OK, and Wolf Point, MT. In 2001 Gwen retired, and the couple moved back to Grand Rapids where she died Friday, October 13.

**KUIPER**, Jack Warren of Holland, MI passed away peacefully on October 23, 2023 at age 97. He was born in Grand Rapids in 1926 to Jay and Della (Zuidema) Kuiper. Jack was a WWII veteran serving from 1945 to 1947 in Kanazawa, Japan. Following the war, he attended Calvin College, graduating in 1950. In the 1950's Jack joined Keebler Bakery, which led to a 36 year career in bakery management. He retired in the mid 1980's. Retirement was a happy time in Jack's life because he met Joanne Stob. They married in 1984 and spent 39 years together. There was time spent between Spring Lake, MI, and Clearwater, FL. He was committed to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and was active in his church (Western Springs CRC and Ferrysburg CRC) and the Gideons. He sang in choirs and even played the accordion as a child. Jack was loved by two families: KUIPERS/HUBERS. He was preceded in death by his first spouse,

Marilyn Kuiper (Huber); brother Dan Kuiper; sisters-in-law, Betty-Lou Kuiper (Wiersma), Carolyn Huber, Barbara Posthumus (Huber); and brother-in-law, Donald Posthumus. He is survived by his son, Scott Brian Kuiper; nieces and nephews, Doug (Aubrey) Kuiper, Melissa (David) Wikkerink, Paula (Blake) De Jonge, Jack (Laurie) Posthumus, Sandee (Mark) Holtsclaw, and Sheri (Keith) Covell. OLTHOFF/STOBS. He is survived by his wife, Joanne (Olthoff, Stob), brother-in-law Kenneth Olthoff, stepchildren, Laura (Tim) Uselton, Greg (Tracy) Stob, Phil (Janis) Stob, Jeff (Dawn) Stob and Cynthia (Eric) Schallenmuller and many loving nieces, nephews, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Donations in Jack's honor appreciated to Calvin University or World Renew..

**WASSENAR**, Jean Lois, nee Zeilstra, age 93, went home to be with her LORD on October 25th, 2023. 129 W. Monroe St, Villa Park, IL 60181. Beloved wife of 71 years of the late Dr. Robert Wassenar; loving mother of Sharon (Jack) Eriks, Sandra (Andrew) Kranenborg, Dr. Ronald (Cathy) Wassenar, and Linda (Verle) Norris; devoted grandmother of Lisa (Mike) Dekker, Jennifer (Scott Stebbins) Eriks, and Elizabeth (Mark) Van Holstyn, Brian (Miranda) Kranenborg, Amy Kranenborg, and Steven (Krysta) Kranenborg, Rachel (the late Kyle Huizinga) Wassenar, and David (Sharon) Wassenar, and Drew (Kaitlin) Norris, Gretchen Norris, and Sarah Norris; devoted great-grandmother of Annika, Abby, Jacob, Zachary, Max, Olivia, Lucas, Kenna, Kate, Case, Camden, Jasper, Alaina and Henry; fond sister of Dorothy (the late Maynard) Hoff, the late Evelyn (the late Henry) Tazelaar, the late Charles (Carol) Zeilstra; aunt of many nieces and nephews.

## Employment

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*Isaiah 7:14*

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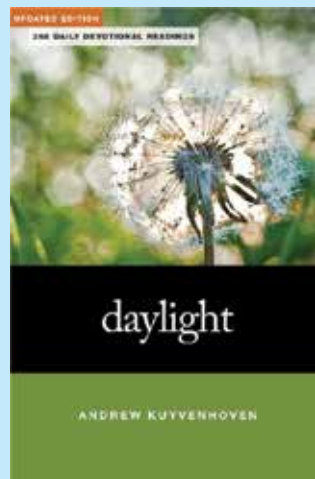
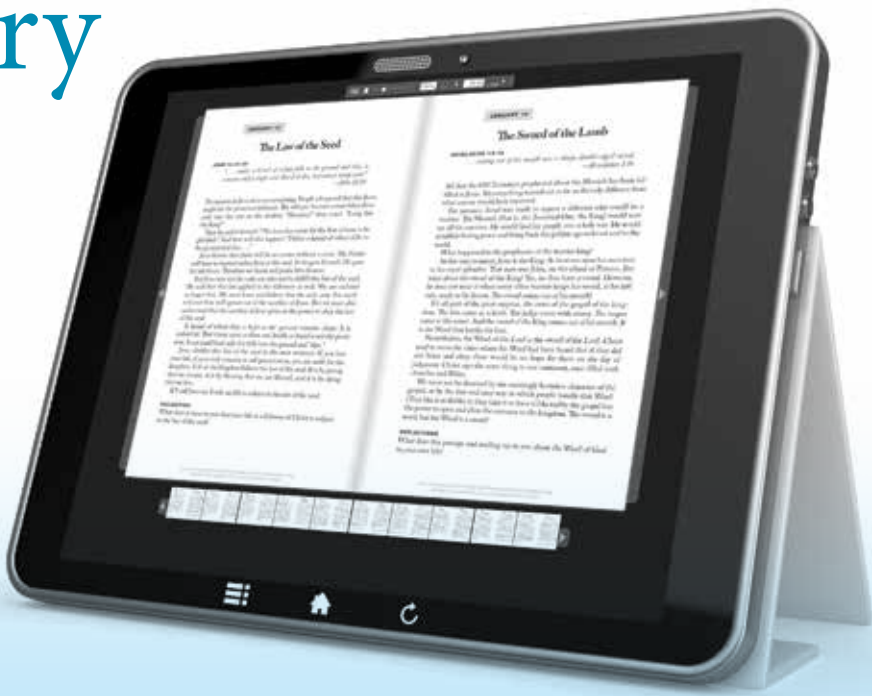


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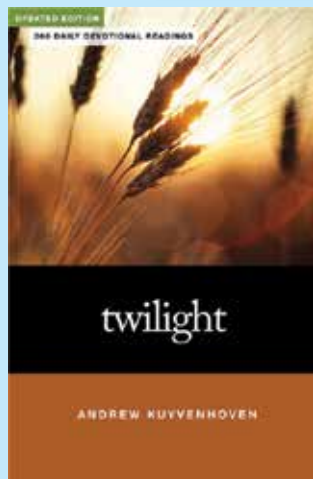
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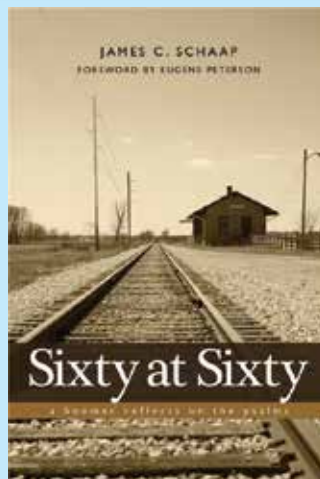
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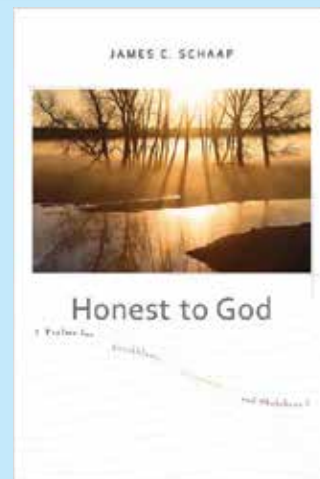
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## Being Korean American in the CRC

I didn't fit the perceived template of a Korean student.



Daniel Jung is a graduate of Calvin Seminary and lives in Honolulu, Hawaii, with his wife, Debbie, their two children, and their long-haired chihuahua. Together, they serve at HCPC Living Stones EM ([livingstonesem.com](http://livingstonesem.com)). Jung also writes media reviews for *Think Christian*.

**IT'S SEPTEMBER 2010**, and the smell of old books and new laptops filled the air at Calvin Theological Seminary. At the time, I was a first-year seminarian who had never lived outside of California, and here I stood, in the middle of the student center, about to eat lunch after spending all morning in classes for Gateway, the seminary's orientation for new students.

I did not want to eat our seminary-provided Jimmy John's sandwiches alone, so I looked around for a friendly conversation with even friendlier faces. As I made my way through the rows of tables, two of the friendliest words caught my ear: fantasy football. I turned around and saw four men seated around a table, sandwiches in hand, talking about Brett Favre's outlook in his second year with the Minnesota Vikings. It's almost as if God had ordained this table for me—which, I would later come to learn through my systematic theology course, he did.

"Mind if I sit?" I was 12 years old again, looking for a seat on the first day of school.

I was welcomed by a young, bearded man with a warm smile. "Sure, brother; grab a chair."

"My name's Daniel. Nice to meet you. I heard 'fantasy football.' Y'all interested in starting a league?" (I was already in six leagues, but if this would help me bond with new friends, I would gladly join a seventh.)

The young bearded man responded, "Oh, we already drafted. But that's so cool that you know about fantasy football! Do they play in your country?"

"Oh, ha ha, I'm from California, and I play in a couple of leagues. I actually don't like Brett Favre's chances of repeating what he did last year. I don't think he'll have much help outside of Adrian Peterson."

As I continued explaining Favre's miserable touchdown-to-turnover ratio, I saw Young-Bearded-Man's face growing more and more puzzled. I couldn't put my finger on it at the time, and it wasn't until my wife—who grew up in West Michigan as only one of two Korean Americans at her middle school—explained the situation to me. "They're probably not used to seeing Korean Americans," she said. "There are Korean international students, and there are white Americans. You're neither."

Regardless of whether Young-Bearded-Man's bewilderment was due to my binary-busting identity as a Korean American or if he was simply mesmerized by my fantasy football acumen (I'm still holding out hope for the latter), repeated encounters like these throughout my time in Grand Rapids led me to believe the former. Over time, these ambiguously uncomfortable encounters left me feeling deficient, that my place within the denomination was undesired.

CTS boasts of enrollment from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, and Koreans make up a sizable portion of that population. But most of the Korean students were pursuing master of theology degrees, with limited lived experiences in America and English often being a second language. I was a Bay Area kid who grew up learning my times tables from *Sesame Street* and binge-watching ABC's family-friendly Friday night sitcoms. I didn't fit the perceived template of a Korean student because I was too American.

I left West Michigan in 2015 and was ordained outside the CRC in 2018, and I can't help but wonder: has more space been made for Korean Americans at the denominational table? I am hopeful that the opportunity to write this reflection is a small but significant affirmative answer to that question. B

# A Santa Christmas

This was simply outrageous.

**I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT.** About 50 years ago, my wife, Celia, and I had been walking through a shopping center in South Vancouver. As we returned to the entrance, our eyes were drawn to a variety shop displaying everything Christmassy. Though it was nearly hidden in the bewildering mishmash, I spied a nativity scene complete with Joseph, Mary, baby Jesus, the invariably out-of-time-sequence wise men, shepherds, several sheep that had followed their herders into the stable, and Santa Claus.

Santa Claus?

Yes, there was Santa, worshiping Jesus. I was already disgruntled about the annual hoopla surrounding the birth of the Savior, but Santa really did me in. This was simply outrageous. We walked back to the parking lot. Celia got in the car, but I turned and went back into the mall. Perturbed though I was, I just had to look at that scene again. For reasons I could not explain to myself, I wanted it!

The set cost \$35, well beyond our budget, and I did not purchase it. Yet over the years, sometimes my thoughts have strayed back to that strange nativity scene, and for the umpteenth time I would wonder what had driven its creator to include Santa.



Frank DeVries is a past principal of Christian schools in Wyoming, Ontario, Texas, and British Columbia. He and his wife, Celia, attend Fleetwood Christian Reformed Church in Surrey, B.C.

In mid-fall each year, notices appear on TV and in store windows reminding everyone that Christmas is a-coming, and stores launch their annual Christmas jingles to their unsuspecting customers. One November while I was at the supermarket, the reason for including Santa in that nativity scene became crystal clear to me. The creator of that scene must have had an epiphany. Fully accepting Jesus as Lord of all (Acts 10:36) and worthy of worship, the creator chose to include in the holy scene even the legendary person of Santa.

You and I know well that God's laws enforce the stars in their courses and make the sun in its orbit obediently shine. We know that mountains, rivers, and the depths of the ocean declare him divine (Katherine Davis, "Let All Things Now Living," *Lift Up Your Hearts* #5). But perhaps there's more. Could it be that at Christmastime God simply ordains that all his children, whether they believe in God or not, knowingly or unknowingly will celebrate the birth of his Son, the Christ?

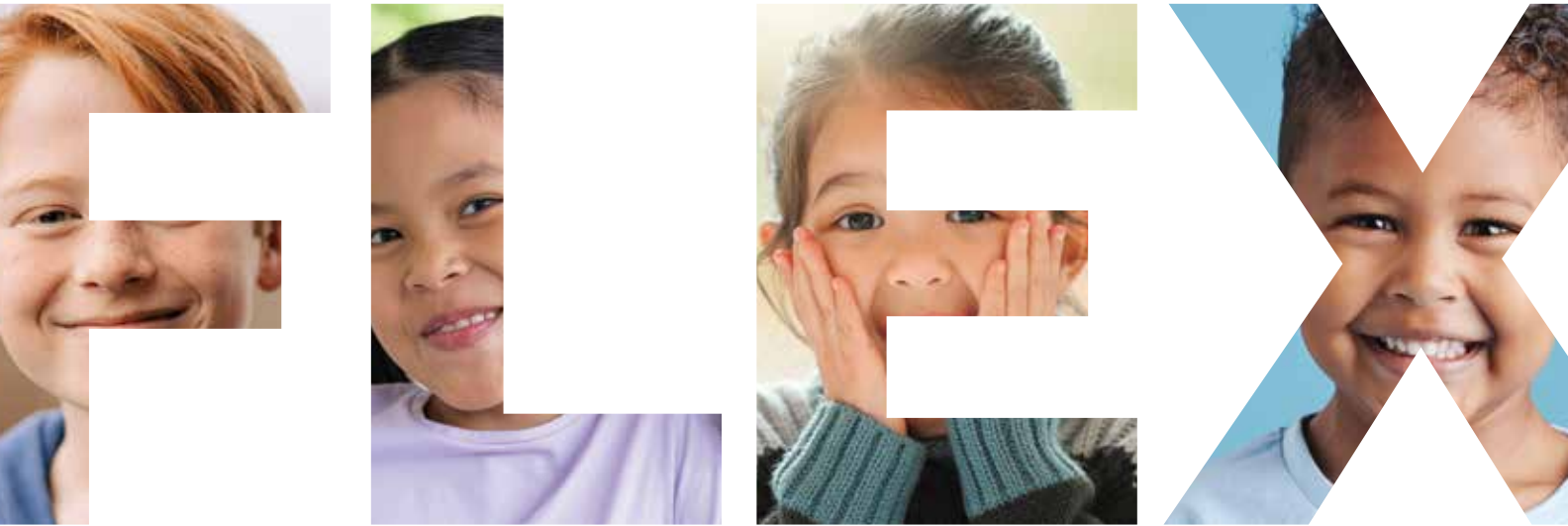
Already long ago a monk divided world history into B.C. and A.D. so it would forever revolve around the birth of Christ. And today we see not only churches, but Hindu temples, gurdwaras, and many homes of agnostics, humanists, Buddhists, and atheists alike lit up in festive explosions of Christmas lights and color. Everyone tries to outdo one another in offering kindness, giving presents, preparing foods, and caring for the needy during this season. Everywhere you hear songs commemorating the birth of Jesus and, most interestingly, everybody talks about "having the Christmas spirit" even though most are not aware of what is really going on: God's will at work!

And God just smiles, I think, waiting for people to wake up to the fact that unto them is born a Savior, God's one and only Son, and that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Yes, the creator of that nativity scene with Santa had it right.

Although he might have included a Christmas tree. **B**

# Dwell Flex Brings Kids Together



*Dwell Flex* has been developed with **small, or multi-age children's ministries** in mind. It's perfect for programs that need to combine multiple ages (5- to 10-year-olds) in a group.

This edition of the popular *Dwell* curriculum is created to work in a variety of contexts, and it features stand-alone sessions that require minimal preparation.

## ***Dwell Flex* is . . . flexible!**

- **Flex with attendance**  
Adaptable to a variety of ages and group sizes.
- **Flex by theme**  
Each lesson stands on its own. Pick and choose to parallel a sermon topic or a holiday observance.
- **Flex to your setting**  
Use it on Sunday mornings, for midweek ministries, or for at-home faith formation.

All 100+ *Dwell Flex* multi-age sessions and family resources are available as part of a church's *Dwell Digital* subscription and are **free to CRCs**, thanks to ministry shares.

Call 800.333.8300 to gain access,  
or visit [DwellCurriculum.org](http://DwellCurriculum.org) to learn more.

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