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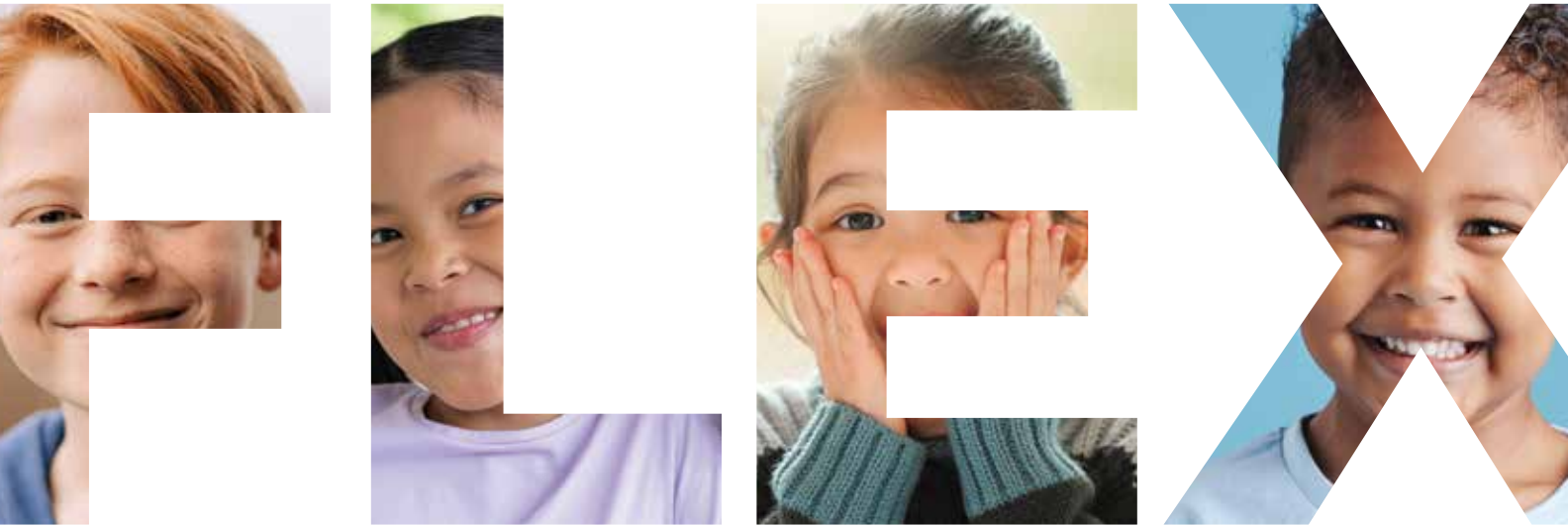
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BY THE NUMBERS

Once a year members of the Christian Reformed Church in North America are asked to respond to the denomination's annual survey covering things from giving and diaconal work to prayer and spiritual disciplines. A different set of congregations, representing 20% of the denomination, is asked to participate each year, but any member is welcome to submit a response in any year. Two hundred churches were asked to participate in 2024 and submit responses by March 31.

Having Your Say

In the past five years, responses were received from:

1,530 people from 197 churches (2023)

1,535 people from 151 churches (2022)

2,116 people from 143 churches (2021)

1,632 people from 110 churches (2020)

1,161 people from 90 churches (2019)

See crcna.org/survey for survey results.



Cover: Si Dye vle means “if God wills” in Haitian Creole. Now many Haitian immigrants are living out their faith in Florida. Page 22

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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.

Editor Shiao Chong
Associate Editor Sarah Heth Sundt
News Editor Alissa Vernon
Mixed Media Editor Lorilee Craker
Art Director Dean R. Heetderks
Designer Pete Euwema

Contact Us 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407 info@TheBanner.org
Address Changes and Subscriptions 800-777-7270 or visit TheBanner.org
Classified Advertising 616-224-0725 classifieds@TheBanner.org
Display Advertising 616-224-5882 ads@TheBanner.org
Editorial 616-224-0824 editorial@TheBanner.org
News news@TheBanner.org

Published monthly (except August). Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Mich. Postmaster, send address changes to: *The Banner*, 1700 28th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49508-1407. Canadian publications mail agreement #40063614. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: *The Banner*, 3475 Mainway, PO Box 5070, STN LCD 1, Burlington, ON, L7R 3Y8. Copyright 2022, Christian Reformed Church in North America. Printed in U.S.A. *The Banner* (ISSN0005-5557). Vol. 159, No. 4, 2024.

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Doubt and Patience

I think God can use critical thinking, and even doubts, to help us grow.



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

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

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

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

MY TIME AS A CAMPUS MINISTER

taught me that one of the best tools we have for dealing with people's spiritual doubts is patience. I met many young adults who had doubts and tough questions about their Christian faith. My approach was to let them voice those doubts and wrestle with those questions rather than march in with quick answers and proof texts. Only when they were ready to hear did I offer some of the various answers Christian thinkers have proposed to those tough questions. I left it to them to decide which answers resonated with them, if any. My pastoral posture was not one of having biblical answers to solve all their problems. Rather, I chose a humble posture of journeying with them as they sought the Holy Spirit's answers to their doubts.

To use another metaphor, I am not the one creating the new life of faith in those who doubt. I am merely the midwife who supports them in their faith-birthing labors as the Holy Spirit works within their hearts and minds. It helps shield me from a "savior complex." I am not the one who will save them from their doubts. It is always only God.

Of course, this requires a lot of patience on my part. A midwife has no control over how long the labor will last. I see this midwifery as a demonstration of love, as love is patient (1 Cor. 13:4). If I truly love others, I will be patient with their doubts, questions, and struggles. I won't impose some artificial timeline on their resolution. I have to exercise my faith and trust in the Holy Spirit's work and timing. It is not easy, and there's always tension.

Some think that doubts or questions about God's Word are inherently bad. After all, didn't Satan tempt Eve by casting doubt on God's Word when he said, "Did God really say ...?" (Gen. 3:1)? Hence the knee-jerk rushing in to dispel doubt

and impose answers. But spiritual certainty, if it is unthinking acceptance of God's Word, is not inherently godly either. Satan used a literal interpretation of God's Word (Psalm 91) to tempt Jesus (Matt. 4:5-6). My point here is simply that neither critical doubting nor uncritical proof-texting is inherently bad or good. Both postures can be the devil's tool to lead us astray.

Doubting and critical thinking tend to go together. Therefore, there is a tendency among some Christian circles to be suspicious of critical thinking and asking tough questions, especially concerning the Bible. But I think God can use critical thinking, and even doubts, to help us grow. Jesus rarely spoon-fed his truths and insights to anyone. Reading the gospels, we find that Jesus often asked questions to make people think. He told parables, used metaphors and enigmatic phrases (e.g., "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35)), and challenged conventional beliefs (e.g., "You have heard that it was said ... But I tell you..." (Matt. 5:21-22)). All of this caused people to think and ask questions themselves. Jesus rarely imposed answers or shut down conversations.

An ex-Christian student once told me that he might still be a Christian if his youth pastor was as patient as I was with all his questions and doubts. I lament that our impatience with questions might have pushed some young people away from church. Do they experience our impatience as a lack of love? **B**

Watch for our annual appeal in your mailbox or inbox. Please consider a donation so we can keep the conversation going. Thank you!

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REPLY ALL

The Good Samaritan

“Love and do what you want.” That’s from St. Augustine and shows the need for context. Clearly Augustine has in mind the answer given in Luke to the legalistic inquirer. A careful reading of the Good Samaritan story would certainly include love as essential to a person seeking eternal life, but Jesus’ answer to this included “with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.” Faith is in that mix for sure. The September editorial (“Faith and Love”) might have been sidetracked by Jesus’ story, which was an attempt to show the questioner where he was falling short. Of course I would be remiss if I denied that love was the key to salvation!

» Tom Posthumus // Sebringville, Ont.

Disagreeing Well

In reading Roxanne Van Farowe’s article “They Disagreed Well” (January 2024), I was (struck by) the comment ... that serving on Committee 7 was “one of the best experiences of my life in terms of feeling God’s presence.” I think the experience of Committee 7 is church—that is, the body of Christ is experienced most

fully in places of uncomfortable differences. Malawian missiologist Harvey Kwiyani, in quoting his elders, shares it this way: “It is not possible to know God without communion with a different ‘other.’” I hope and pray that the Christian Reformed Church goes forward in keeping together within these uncomfortable spaces of differences, made more uncomfortable with synod’s decisions. I hope that those who hold traditional views, those who are undecided, and those who are affirming try to stick it out in this uncomfortable place, embrace it, and recognize, like those who experienced Committee 7, that the Holy Spirit works best in those spaces.

» Dustin Zuidhof // Edmonton, Alta.

Just as synod’s Advisory Committee 7 found beauty in listening across differences, I believe there is a similar need for the youth of the church. As a high school student, even going to a Christian school and regularly attending church, there are precious few places for my peers and me to be given the chance to ask the controversial questions that routinely plague us about our turbulent doubt, our LGBTQ friends, persistent anxiety, death, and other things no one wants to talk about. In my experience, these rare conversations are most meaningful and create the relationships we yearn for the most. I would encourage all churches to create intentional spaces—especially for youth—to listen, to ask questions, and, by trying to respond, to grow together as the body of Christ.

» Annika Fortna // Uxbridge, Mass.

Journey to Healing

As the mother of a survivor, I feel “The Journey to Healing After Abuse” (January 2024) left out key points. Survivors must always be believed. Over 90% of abuse reports end up proven true. Abuse reports must be handled quickly and appropriately for the survivor’s sake and also for the church body. We all need to know that reports will be believed and that church is safe. We must remain diligent and informed. When abuse is uncovered, prayer and lament are appropriate. However, church safety going forward and ongoing support for the survivor are essential commitments to a survivor whose faith journey seems shattered. I am grateful. My daughter’s abuser was convicted, and our church responded appropriately. But the outlash from others, including the abuser’s family, left scars only heaven can heal.

» Kelly Gullixson // Woodville, Wis.

Chains of the Past

I am writing in response to Daniel Friesen’s “A Journey to Chains of the Past” (February 2024). I was touched by this article, most notably the humility expressed. As someone who has worked in child welfare in several countries on the continent of Africa, I related to the absolute devastation Friesen experienced when visiting Bunce Island. I had a similar experience when I visited one of the “slave castles” on Cape Coast, Ghana. I stood in dirt holding cells where I know many perished, and I saw the luxurious living quarters of Europeans who kidnapped and sold men, women, and children. I walked through the “door of no return.” The tears started and

Unity in Lego

AS I SAT CROSS-LEGGED on the living room floor with a vibrant array of Lego bricks spread out before me, I felt a surge of joy at the prospect of building something special with my son. The colorful bricks scattered around us seemed to hold endless possibilities, and as we started piecing them together, I found myself reflecting on the concept of Christian unity.

With each snap and connection of the Lego bricks, I marveled at their diversity. Some were large and square all-purpose blocks; others were small and intricate pieces with a specific purpose. Yet they all came together seamlessly, just like the believers in the body of Christ. Each one, with its unique shape and color, played a vital role in the grand design we were creating.


As we constructed, the words of the apostle Paul echoed in my mind: "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:4-5). The Lego bricks were becoming a tangible representation of this truth—diverse yet interconnected, with each piece contributing to the beauty of the whole.

Lost in the rhythm of construction, I gathered my thoughts on inclusivity. I noticed a few pieces scattered across the floor—stray bricks, orphaned and seemingly out of place. They made me think of those who might feel isolated or overlooked, and brought to mind the words of Jesus: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). I collected those pieces and integrated them into our growing creation as a small reminder of the importance of recognizing and including every individual in the tapestry of faith.

I marveled at the metaphor unfolding.

As the Lego creation took shape before us, its complexity growing, I marveled at the metaphor unfolding. The intricate structure we were building would not have been possible without the contribution of each unique brick, much like the unified body of Christ. Despite our differences in background, beliefs, and experiences, we were all crucial components of the greater whole.

Snapping on the last piece, my son and I gazed at the masterpiece we had created, at once diverse and harmonious. It hit me then that, just as the Lego set requires every piece to be whole, the body of believers needs the collective efforts and unique qualities of each member to truly thrive.

Like Lego bricks, we are all interconnected, integral to a larger purpose. I looked at my son, grateful for the simple yet profound lessons learned while building something beautiful together. 



Dan Veeneman works in the dairy industry as a ventilation specialist. He lives in Abbotsford, B.C., with his wife and three children. He is a member of Gateway Community Church.

soon turned to weeping. I couldn't stop. Friesen is right on when he points out that human trafficking is alive and well in 2024. Lord Jesus, help us to see and intervene for the hurting, vulnerable, and exploited among us.

» Sara Ruiter // Douglas, Mich.

Unarmed Truth

I loved your editorial in the February 2024 issue of *The Banner* ("Unarmed Truth"). I think wise King Solomon would agree. Proverbs 15:1: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Would that more of our U.S. leaders and political candidates could agree with you.

» Bruce Nikkel // Pella, Iowa

As I Was Saying

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- » God Values the Ordinary
- » An Invitation to Fasting and Prayer Ahead of Synod 2024
- » What Can I Do?



Hymns for Life

By Robert J. Keeley

I was planning the music for a church service a few weeks back. I lead a small ensemble and was thinking about the flow of the service centered on Psalm 129. Everything was in place except for a postlude that would fit the joyous theme. As I looked through our hymnbook, I saw “There Is a Redeemer,” by Melody Green. That would be a great choice, I thought.

That Sunday, after the closing song, the congregation was dismissed with God’s blessing, and the ensemble began to play and sing “There Is a Redeemer.” There are always a few people who stay to listen to the postlude, but this week something else happened. Twenty or so people remained and soon started singing

along. We did not have the number from the hymnbook listed, nor were the words projected on the screen, but we soon heard people joining us on the chorus: “Thank you, O my Father, for giving us your Son and leaving your Spirit ‘til the work on earth is done.” Many of the congregants knew all three verses too.

“There Is a Redeemer” has a rich text and a memorable melody. When leading this song, I always want to slow down a bit on the third verse so we can savor the words “When I stand in glory, I will see your face.” Singing that song with my brothers and sisters in Christ, many of whom I’ve now known for decades, often brings a lump to my throat.

Songs do that. Artfully composed texts matched with beautiful melodies speak to us in a unique way. The message of Scripture expressed in song sticks with us often more easily than in any other form. Many of us can sing multiple verses of Christmas carols, for example, without looking at the words or the music. Hearing these songs over and over through the years has placed them firmly in our minds and our hearts. There is a good chance that you can sing much of “Joy to the World” without looking it up. The message of Psalm 98—the basis of that carol—is in your memory whether you realize it or not.

That’s the power of song in the Christian life. It is a true gift to be able to carry these songs with us! As I

reflect on the songs that have shaped me, I find that I often turn to them to comfort me or to lift me up when I need to be reminded of something. The often-beautiful texts remind me of how dear certain Christian truths are.

Thinking about why certain hymns are important to me has helped me come to love them even more, so I offer this short list of songs, old and new, that live in my memory. I encourage you to make your own list and to think or write briefly about why certain songs have meaning for you.

‘Great Is Thy Faithfulness’ (words by Thomas Chisholm, music by William Runyan, 1923): As I get older, I recognize the importance of God’s faithfulness in my life and in the lives of those I love. The repetition of the title in the chorus and the musical phrases rising along with the words lift the message up and invite us to proclaim it loudly. Many Christians, regardless of denomination, know this hymn well, and it’s great for singing with a group.

‘I Sought the Lord, and Afterward I Knew’ (words by Jean Ingelow, 1878; music by Jean Sibelius, 1899): Like many hymn tunes, Sibelius’ FINLANDIA has been used with more than one text, but this is the one I grew up with. The hymn helps me articulate the complex story of how we come to faith by succinctly expressing the mystery of how our search for God begins with God’s Spirit moving in us first. As with “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” the language is not modern, but its beauty coupled with the lilting melody adds weight.


‘In Christ Alone’ (words and music by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, 2002): Compared to the previous songs on this list, this one is quite new. It is well known, though, because the melody is easily singable by a congregation and the text speaks powerfully

It is a true gift
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of one of the most comforting messages of the gospel: “No power of hell, no human plan can ever pluck me from his hand.” Almost as soon as this song came on the scene 20 years ago, people recognized what a gift to the church it was.

‘My Soul in Stillness Waits’ (words and music by Marty Haugen, 1982). This is another relatively recent song (if you can consider 45 years ago recent!). It’s usually sung during Advent. I remember singing this at a worship conference, and each time we sang the refrain “For you, O Lord, my soul in stillness waits; truly my hope is in you,” we waited longer on the word “waits” each time we came back to it. I’ve never forgotten that, and it has placed that refrain in my mind, especially during Advent when I read Psalm 130 (“I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning”) or when I struggle to understand what God is doing. The haunting melody reinforces the idea of a God who moves in mysterious ways yet is the One in whom my hope is found.

I could go on and on, but space limits me to listing just a handful of the hymns I carry with me. How did all these songs get into my heart? Simply through repetition. I have been singing some of them for as long as I can remember. Others have been added to my life more recently. I did not try to memorize any of them. But I sang them often enough that I started to learn them. Over the years those memories are refreshed, and now I hardly have to look at the hymnbook or screen.

There is a lesson here for those of us who help select music for worship. We are tasked with choosing songs that fit what is going on liturgically, but we also want to pick songs with rich texts that will endure in the lives of our congregations—regardless of the song’s age. If the churches I have belonged to sang only old songs, I would not have learned two of the songs on my short list. We shouldn’t sing only the old hymns. On the other hand, if my churches constantly added new songs to their repertoire, I would not have sung any of them enough to have learned them well. It’s a tricky balance, and with the flurry of new songs being written for congregational singing over the past few years, it is becoming more challenging for worship leaders to choose well. 



Robert J. Keeley is a professor of education emeritus at Calvin University and leads music at 14th St. Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich.

BIG QUESTIONS

Digital Life

We continue to fight with our teenagers about being on their phones when we're together. My husband's constant glancing at his phone isn't helping. Is this just a modern problem I need to learn to live with?

A while back I learned two new words: "portmanteau" and "phubbing." I found "portmanteau" when I was looking up the meaning of "phubbing." A portmanteau is a new word created by combining the sounds and meanings of two others. In the case of "phubbing," the combined words are "phone" and "snubbing." What's happening in your home—and in the homes of everyone I know—is that we're all snubbing the people around us because of our addiction to our phones.

Some will say we've always had distractions. Remember Dad hiding behind his newspaper, or the brothers forever watching TV, or the sister who wouldn't take her nose out of a book? And really, isn't this just the usual suspicion of any new technology rearing its head? Maybe. But the cellphone just turned 50, the smartphone is several decades old, and modern hyperdistraction took hold when social media came of age around 2009. So it's not a new problem, and we now have solid research that suggests our phone use is making us—especially young people—more lonely, more depressed, and less trusting of each other.

In my house growing up, everyone knew the TV was off during mealtimes. It was so clearly communicated and consistently applied that we never



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohórquez

thought to question it. Maybe a place to start is establishing a new rule for your household: no phone use by anyone during mealtimes.

When the use of something interferes with everyday life, something's not quite right and deserves attention—your undivided attention.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the Christian Reformed Church and art director of *The Banner*. What have you done (or wanted to do) to deal with the distracted people you live with? Tell him at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.

Church Matters

Is it wrong to continue asking God for something over and over again? Is it a sign that the answer is "no" if you haven't yet received it?

There are many reasons why we might continue to ask God for the same things. First, we have ongoing needs. Every day we wake in the world as vulnerable creatures who need many things simply to make it through the day. So we pray as our Lord taught us: "Give us today our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11).

Indeed, in the Lord's Prayer we find a pattern of requests to be made again and again. A second category of repeated petitions comes in the line "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). This cuts two ways. It reminds us that we are not in control of all outcomes and that we cannot bring about the

kingdom by our own strength. But it also means that we will have a role to play in testifying to the coming kingdom in action and prayer. For example, we continue to pray for peace in areas of the world afflicted by war. The fact that peace does not arrive as we pray does not mean that our prayers have no effect, nor does it mean that we should stop praying. Jesus promises that the kingdom will come in accordance with what we are praying: "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?" (Luke 18:7).

Third, there are requests we make repeatedly because they weigh heavily on our hearts. Perhaps we have a child who is struggling or a loved one who is ill. When we bring these requests before the Lord, we bring him our hearts. We cast our cares on him because we believe he cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). As we do, our desires are named, reoriented, and even redirected. To stop praying for things that we have not received is to miss the opportunity to be challenged and consoled by a God who loves us more than we can imagine. God's mercies are new every morning, and they flow to us whether or not we ask for them. But as C.S. Lewis once wrote in *The Magician's Nephew*, "He likes to be asked."

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

I'm in a job that I never planned to be doing. I feel I should be thankful to have a job, but I'm not really sure how I feel about it or whether I should do anything about it.

It can be upsetting when you realize that your life doesn't look the way you expected it to. When that happens, it is good to lament that you're not using the gifts God has given you in the ways you'd hoped. It is also good to remember that many people are disappointed by their jobs. Immigrants especially know how it feels to let go of work they loved to take up something else that might feel like a poor fit. Because God can and does work through all things, God can also work good through the unexpected. Perhaps your current job creates space for other things that matter to you, such as caring for loved ones or volunteering. Or perhaps the job you now have is actually a better fit for your skills and personality than the job you'd planned on doing. There can be mismatches among our expectations, what jobs are actually available, the skills needed for each job, and/or how much time needs to be invested toward getting and keeping a certain job.

Your disappointment in your current work might also be God's way of nudging you. I have unmarried friends asking similar questions. Even if they hadn't expected to be single at this season in their lives, they have learned to find joy in their lives as they are now—and wonder if God might be inviting them to imagine something else. It helps to talk to people who have had similar experiences. They can connect you with others or advise you on training or other steps you can take to make changes. In talking to others, you might decide that your job really

is the best for you in this phase of your life, or you might get the help you need to move forward in a new direction.

In the meantime, make sure you pay attention to how your discontent might be affecting those around you. Don't take out your disappointment on your loved ones or treat your co-workers poorly.

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

Science/Environmental

I've heard Christians say that COVID vaccines are "against their religion." What do they mean? Does the Christian Reformed Church have a position on vaccines?

Religions such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientology oppose some or all medical treatment as part of their core teachings. But Christian teachings and virtually all denominations, including the CRC, see medical treatment as a blessing from God and a way to obey Jesus' command to care for the sick (Our World Belongs to God, Art. 50).

Vaccines are public medical interventions that are proven to be effective. An estimated 4 million deaths worldwide are prevented by childhood vaccination every year. In making a decision about vaccination for yourself or your child, ask your doctor to explain the risks and benefits of vaccination and the risks of the disease. Vaccines are not entirely risk-free, but for most people the vaccine poses much lower risks than the disease.

Unfortunately, views on COVID-19 vaccines became highly polarized due to the contentious political environment and misinformation on social media. Some people had honest

concerns about vaccines; others opposed them as a culture-war statement. Schools and hospitals with vaccination rules often allow a religious exemption, so some parents and health care workers claimed that exemption for the COVID vaccine even when their own religion didn't teach against it.

Despite what you might have heard, vaccines do not contain cells of aborted human fetuses. Some vaccines are produced using laboratory stem cell lines (which started decades ago from a fetus that was aborted or miscarried), but no new fetuses are aborted to produce vaccines. The mRNA COVID vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer do not use stem cell lines even in production, making them an excellent choice.

COVID-19 has become the third-leading cause of death in the United States and the fourth-leading cause in Canada. Sadly, the percentage of people who die from COVID has been much higher for those who are not vaccinated. Today's vaccines continue to reduce the risk of serious illness and death (you might still get today's COVID variant, but you probably won't get as sick). Vaccines also somewhat reduce the chance you'll infect someone else, so many Christians embrace vaccines as a way to love their neighbors—especially those with weakened immune systems.

We've provided a list of resources with the online version of this article on thebanner.org.

Deborah and Loren Haarsma are longtime members of the CRC. Loren is a professor in the physics and astronomy department at Calvin University, and Deborah is president of BioLogos.



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

Calvin University President Resigns; VP of Advancement Named Interim President

NEWS

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Calvin University’s Board of Trustees announced the resignation of president Wiebe Boer in a Feb. 26 statement after receiving a report alleging Boer “engaged in unwelcome and inappropriate communication and attention toward a non-student member of the campus community.”

Gregory Elzinga, who was vice president of advancement at Calvin, is now serving as interim president.

The board said Boer admitted to “sending communications that were inappropriate and inconsistent with the high standard of conduct and character expected of the President of Calvin University.”

“The report (against Boer) did not include allegations of sexually explicit communication or physical contact, but the alleged conduct is concerning and inappropriate,” the board’s public announcement said.

The university’s Safer Spaces policy, posted on its website, “applies to all University community members, including students, employees, faculty, administrators, staff, applicants for admission or employment, and third parties, such as trustees, volunteers, vendors, independent contractors, visitors, and any individuals or entities regularly or temporarily employed, studying, living, visiting, conducting business, interacting with a member or members of our community, or having any official capacity with the University or on University property.”

Calvin was founded by the Christian Reformed Church in 1876. Though it maintains a special relationship with the denomination, Calvin has its own board separate from that of the CRCNA. Trustees are nominated by denominational classes (regional groups of churches) and

appointed by the CRC synod. The university president used to be appointed by synod as well, but bylaw changes in 2022 (ratified by that year’s synod) changed the process so that the university board could appoint its president directly.

Boer was named president in 2022 after the retirement of Michael Le Roy. In his tenure as president, Boer was vocal in efforts to maintain strong ties between Calvin and the CRC, calling Calvin “your university” in presentations to the CRCNA synod and the Council of Delegates.



Wiebe Boer



Gregory Elzinga

Zachary King, general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church, said strengthening the relationship between the CRCNA and Calvin University “wasn’t just President Boer’s vision, but the desire of the Calvin board to grow that relationship. I expect and hope that we will continue in that direction as Calvin’s mission of Reformed higher education benefits our denomination immensely.”

Interim president Elzinga is a member of Cascade Fellowship CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., and serves as the vice chair of its council.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

Al Postma Named CRCNA's Executive Director-Canada

The Canada Ministry Board of the Christian Reformed Church in North America announced in February that transitional executive director Al Postma would take the role of executive director-Canada.

Postma served in the transitional position since May 2022, nearly a year after the Canada Ministry Board (then called the CRCNA Canada Corporation) had parted ways with the previous interim executive director-



Al Postma

Canada, Darren Roorda, and in the midst of restructuring the Canadian and U.S. ministry relationship in the CRC. The board intentionally designed the transitional position as a two-year post, planning for a "formal search process at the end of the two-year term for the sake of transparency and integrity," said Greta Luimes, president of the Canada Ministry Board, when announcing the search process in November.

"Al has served the Canadian CRC with diligence and wisdom in these last two years, and we are looking forward to what God will do through him in the coming years," Luimes said in the board announcement of Postma's appointment.

Postma begins the permanent role at a time of continued uncertainty. Some leaders and members of Christian Reformed churches in Canada have formed "Toward CRC Canada," a group seeking an independent Canadian CRC. The group hosted "Kitchen Table Conversations" in online gatherings through November and December and continues to host video conference meetings to further discuss themes from the first conversations.

"None of us knows exactly what is ahead," Postma said, "but the Canadian churches have a robust history of supporting collective ministry in Canada and around the world. I only see that commitment strengthening, especially since we have some new organizational structures, including new Canada-specific staff positions, that we are living into right now. One of my primary responsibilities as executive director is to ensure that, no matter what, Canadian churches are being well served and supported for the whole variety of challenges and opportunities they experience. I'm grateful to work with competent and passionate staff who are making this happen for churches all across Canada."

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

Wisconsin Churches Offer Free Treats at City Ice Fest

The outreach team of First Christian Reformed Church in Waupun, Wis., participated in its city's first annual Ice Fest in February, joining with four other area organizations to run a free warming and dessert station.

Main Street Bistro allowed the ministries to use its space free of charge. Volunteers from three churches, a men's ministry, and a pregnancy resource center shared hot chocolate, mini donuts, and other small desserts while engaging community members in conversation. The goal, according to outreach team leader Mike Vander Berg, was "to show acts of kindness to the community while collaborating with other churches and organizations rather than competing with them." All other stations participating in Ice Fest charged for food and beverages.

About 200 community members came through the station, Vander Berg said.

The small town of Waupun, population 11,500, created this weekend festival to draw tourists and to encourage residents to get outside during winter. The two-day event included live music, contests, scavenger hunts, ice skating, and wagon-drawn ice sculpture tours to the 50 ice sculptures displayed around town.

Waupun CRC chose a lighthouse as its representative sculpture, which was placed just outside the bistro.

Ice Fest is one of several outreach events for Waupun CRC. Church volunteers also host an annual block party, a car wash and bratwurst fry, and a live nativity scene. "We are reaching out to community members who don't have a home church or who may have a negative view of churches in general in order to show them love and simply engage with them," Vander Berg said.

—Sarah DeGraff



A lighthouse was one of 50 ice sculptures displayed in the town of Waupun, Wis., for the city's first Ice Fest.

Council of Delegates February Meeting

Meeting by video conference Feb. 14-16, the Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church in North America took several actions in its role as the interim committee of synod, the annual general assembly of the CRCNA.

“Gather”

The Council approved a first step in the general secretary’s assignment “to work with the Council of Delegates, each agency, and churches and classes to develop a comprehensive unified strategy and plan to arrest and reverse the trend of decline and bring about a positive trend of membership growth to our denomination” (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 976).

“Our plan is to **convene 10 regional gatherings with lay and ordained leaders throughout the United States and Canada**,” staff wrote as a summary for the Council. “Each two-day event will include prayer, worship, fellowship, storytelling, and facilitated dialogue. Throughout these events, we will be identifying what is happening on the leading edge of missional ministry, how God is renewing his church, and what our role in that work should be.”

The initiative is called “Gather” and is being led by Elaine May, congregational renewal leader with Thrive, the agency formed last year from nine previously individual ministries. The first of the sessions is scheduled April 19-21 in Minneapolis with the Huron, Hackensack, Lake Erie, Lake Superior, and Columbia classes.

Ministry Shares

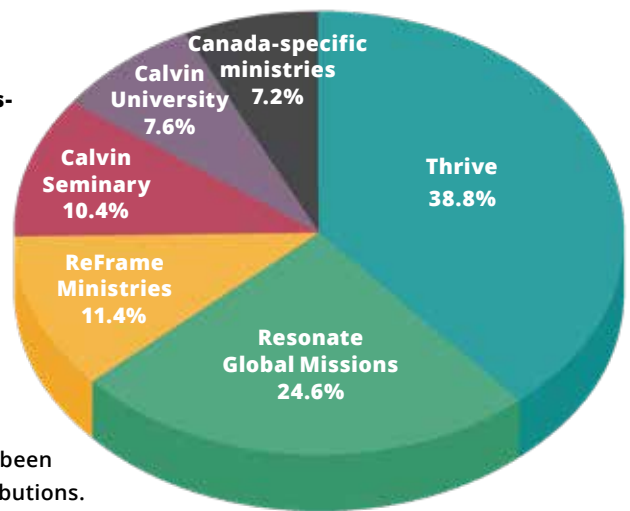
The Council of Delegates approved a proposed ministry share distribution for 2024-25 budget making.

Ministry shares are pledged contributions from member churches toward denominational expenses, including shared ministry and operating costs such as the services needed for synod, communications, and other functions. As churches have been shrinking, so too have contributions.

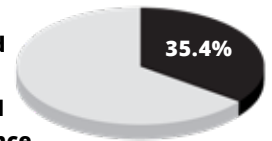
The decrease in this revenue stream has prompted an increased focus on advancement (promotion and fundraising), particularly for the CRC’s newest agency, Thrive.

In the approved distribution, Thrive is allotted 38.8% of the portion of ministry shares distributed after governance costs are covered. Canada-specific ministries will receive 7.2%; Resonate Global Missions 24.6%; ReFrame Ministries 11.4%; Calvin Seminary 10.4%, and Calvin University 7.6% of the portion of ministry shares remaining after 35.4% is taken from the initial total for governance costs—the services in the Office of General Secretary and U.S. and Canadian ministry boards.

“Because governance costs are a necessity for a denomination, we recommend that they be taken out of the expected ministry shares,” reads the proposal from the general secretary, the chief administrative officer, the transitional executive director-Canada, and the U.S. ministry operations director. “The



35.4% of expected ministry share giving is allocated towards governance costs. The remaining ministry share distribution is shown above.



remaining will be distributed based on the percentages (above). Any reduction in governance costs will enable more ministry shares to be distributed based on these same percentages.”

Some delegates were concerned about treating the governance functions as fixed costs.

“We’re asking those governance organizations not to even consider any reduction,” Wayne Brower, Classis Holland, said. “I think it limits our leadership in doing their job. ... Shouldn’t we give them the opportunity to tighten their belts like we’re asking the other organizations?”

Shirley De Vries, chief administrative officer within the Office of General Secretary, said, “The reasoning there is that we have to have synod, and we have to have the Council of Delegates. There are some really big-ticket items that we have to have. We will be looking diligently at ways to trim those costs. ... Knowing that we have to do that, we have to get this in a leaner form.”

The Council's finance committee also shared updates from the ongoing review of the ministry share process Synod 2023 asked for after receiving an initial review requested by Synod 2022 (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 987). Finance committee chair Henry Eygenraam, a Canadian at-large delegate, said the review was a work in progress, with more findings to be shared at the May meeting of the Council.

Eygenraam presented the condensed financial report from December 2023 from CRCNA ministries, which the Council accepted and forwarded to Synod 2024. Only the Office of General Secretary showed a net deficit (\$20,000) at the six-month mark of the fiscal year.

Encouraged by a request from the trustees of the Canada and U.S. Ministers' Pension Fund, the Council agreed to form a task force to create updated compensation guidelines for CRC churches. The last denominational advice on this came from Synod 2001 for churches participating in the Fund for Small Churches.

Synod 2024

In response to correspondence voicing concerns about synodical time management and using a proposal from the director of synodical services as a guideline, the Council made some allowances to have Synod 2024 run more effectively.

This year's general assembly will have a convening session online May 29 before meeting in person June 14-20 in Grand Rapids, Mich. The May 29 session will include opening worship, roll call, introductions of advisers and guests by the general secretary, election of synodical officers, opening remarks from the newly elected president of synod, and the presentation of the program committee report for the approval of advisory committees.

Advisory committees will also be allowed to meet once via video conference on June 5 for introductions only.

The Council of Delegates also instructed the general secretary to make recommendations to the officers for Synod 2024 regarding how to manage plenary times. Among the recommendations are "Leave the speaking clock in a location visible to delegates" (the clock was at times removed from delegates' view during Synod 2023) and "Encourage the chair to exercise his/her right to set time limits on debates that are expected to go long" (*Rules for Synodical Procedure*, VIII, J, 5).

The Council approved **"God With Us" as the theme for the worship and prayer times of Synod 2024.**

The Council of Delegates also:

- » Gave provisional affirmation to recommendations from the Global Vision Team, whose revised report will come back to the Council in May and will be included in the supplemental agenda for Synod 2024. The team was charged with developing "a conceptual framework for a global Christian Reformed Church" as a response to requests from classes looking for guidance or support in integrating non-North American congregations wishing to affiliate with the CRCNA.
- » Appointed two people to fill recent vacancies on the Assisted Suicide Task Force, a team that is to report to Synod 2025.
- » Acknowledged a new form from synodical services to solicit interest from individuals in the CRC with potential expertise and experience to serve on denominational task forces or committees or in other roles.
- » Expanded the mandate of the Virtual Church Team charged with creating a "report that gives thought to and a theological framework for the possibilities and parameters of a virtual church." Besides addressing "the marks of the true church articulated

in the Belgic Confession" and exploring opportunities and pitfalls of online ministry (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 979), the report now also should "address the important theological, missiological, pastoral, and polity implications of a virtual church."

- » Made several additions to the charters of Council of Delegates committees, including that of the Governance Committee, to "appoint non-COD members to serve on committees *and ensure agreement with (the) Statement of Agreement with Beliefs of the CRCNA, the Code of Conduct, and signing the Conflict of Interest (form)*" (change italicized). This conveys that the expectations set for Council of Delegate members are also required of non-COD members who have roles on committees that report to the Council.
- » Requested the Bible Translation Committee review the Easy-to-Read Version of the Bible for use in worship.

The next meeting of the Council of Delegates is May 1-3 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

Congregation Stumbled Into Furniture Ministry

More than 20 years ago, a downsizing parishioner, a willing deacon, and a local pastor seeing a need helped to launch an ongoing furniture ministry at Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Cutlerville, Mich.

Bob Storteboom recently retired from coordinating the ministry, now led by Kari Plaisier.

The ministry began in 2002 when Storteboom, then Covenant CRC's newly appointed coordinator of diaconal ministry,



Photo by Covenant CRC

accepted an unexpected gift of bedroom furniture. He didn't know what to do with it, but just a few weeks later the pastor of a nearby church called with a request to help a mother and son who had no beds.

Storteboom shared the story at a commissioning worship service, and when four other people donated goods, the furniture ministry was born.

Volunteers regularly retrieve and deliver pieces of furniture for Covenant CRC's furniture ministry.

In the first year Covenant distributed 140 items of furniture and other household goods.

In 22 years, Covenant's furniture ministry has provided more than 53,000 items to people in need. Last year 552 people received more than 4,500 items distributed by Covenant CRC in partnership with local social service agencies.

The ministry partners with other local churches and has about 30 active volunteers. Another 30 people pray for the ministry every month.

Jeff Vanderhoof, Covenant's pastor, said some people who might not participate in church are excited to contribute to this ministry. "This is something they can do," he said. "They can lift furniture. They can organize it in our shed. They can donate."

The ministry has also helped to attract new members to Covenant. One such person had immigrated to the United States from Burundi. He saw a truck with the ministry name on it, prompting him not only to start going to church at Covenant but to launch his own ministry to serve people in his homeland.

—Greg Chandler

Better Together Launches Project to Work Across Differences

Better Together, a group formed in 2023 to promote a possible "third way" for the Christian Reformed Church between the polarities of traditional church teaching on human sexuality and affirmation of same-sex relationships, launched a new project in February.

Supported by a three-year grant of more than \$1.23 million from the Lilly Endowment's Thriving Congregations Initiative, the Better Together Project encourages congregations to work together across differences on issues such as sexuality and politics for the sake of serving others in the name of Jesus and sharing the gospel.

Calvin CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., applied for the grant, and Nate DeJong McCarron, pastor of Fuller Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, is serving as the project's interim leader.

DeJong McCarron said the conflict over sexuality is "one striking and probably pressing example" of the polarities affecting the CRC, but the conflict is not limited to that issue, and this project reaches beyond the CRC.

Rebecca Jordan Heys, minister of worship and pastoral care at Calvin CRC, said the way Christians navigate conflict is itself "a way that we bear witness to Christ's love for the world." Her hope is "that the world will see the way that we love our 'enemies' so well within the church, that people will be compelled to learn more about where this love comes from and come to know Christ."

The Better Together Project plans to create seven or more regional cohorts of churches across the United States, each led by a key partner church. About a dozen pastors across the U.S. have signed on to help launch these cohorts, DeJong McCarron said.

Churches will commit to building unity within and across congregations, leading to new or expanding missional efforts, a Better Together news release explained. Annual summits to bring leaders from all participating churches together are scheduled to begin in October.

DeJong McCarron said the project is different from simply working with other denominations. It's "an intentional three-year commitment in which congregations will be equipped not simply to partner with others, but to build unity and relationship with those they may disagree with," he explained.

After announcing the project Feb. 1, Better Together hosted an open house at the Woodlawn CRC Ministry Center in Grand Rapids and had four video conferences for congregations wanting to know more in February and March.

—Greg Chandler

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Alberta Addictions Center Supports Mothers in Recovery

Adeara Recovery Centre, a faith-based long-term addictions recovery center for women in Edmonton, Alta., allows women to have their children with them on their recovery journey.

"This is one of the key components that sets us apart from most recovery programs in our province," said Lori Patrick, Adeara's executive director. The center's website puts it clearly: "We don't want women to have to choose between getting help and taking care of their children."

The organization is supported by many churches and has a Christian Reformed congregation member as its community development lead.

"We firmly believe in the spiritual and transformative power found in the biblical Christ," Patrick said. "Every woman who enters our program is given the opportunity to hear, learn, and experience the love of Christ through the classes, church attendance, daily devotions, one-on-one conversations, personal reflection time, and daily interactions with staff."

Women commit to a one-year recovery program with opportunity to extend it if needed. They live with their children in furnished individual suites in an apartment building. Children attend daycare or school during the day while their mothers participate in various groups and classes.

Charlene Nanninga, a member of Covenant CRC in Edmonton, is Adeara's community development lead, a position she moved into after working on a key project in 2020.

That year Adeara had the opportunity to take over a thrift store from another nonprofit, and Patrick asked Nanninga to help, hoping the thrift store would generate funds for Adeara and also provide work experience for the women in recovery.



Photo courtesy of Adeara Recovery Centre

Nicole is a past resident and graduate of the Adeara program.

"I never thought I would be working for Adeara a few years later," Nanninga said. She now oversees the thrift store, called More Than a Fad, and works on Adeara's fund development team.

She's passionate about Adeara's work "because I see women's lives being restored, them becoming great moms (and) breaking the cycle," Nanninga said.

Adeara celebrated 25 years in 2023. It was founded in 1998 as the Edmonton Dream Centre but in 2017 took the name Adeara, from the Hebrew *adira*, meaning "strong."

"It is a tribute to the women in our care who show incredible strength each day as they continue towards recovery," Adeara's website says.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Allan Henry Jongsma

1933-2024

Approachable, kind, joyful, and genuinely interested in other people, Allan Jongsma was known for his passionate preaching, a pastoral heart, and skillful administration. He is also remembered for being a strict catechism teacher, a flashy dresser, and long-winded in the pulpit. Allan, 90, died Feb. 2.

He graduated from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and was ordained in 1958.

He then served Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church, McBain, Mich.; First Jenison (Mich.) CRC; Irving Park CRC, Midland Park, N.J.; Rogers Heights CRC, Wyoming, Mich.; Immanuel CRC, Wyoming, Mich.; First CRC, DeMotte, Ind.; Heritage CRC, Kalamazoo, Mich.; and Bauer CRC, Hudsonville, Mich. He served many times on the synodical interim committee and filled various roles within his classes. After retirement, he was pastor of visitation at two CRC churches in Michigan. He led Bible studies during volunteer week at the CRC Conference Grounds in Grand Haven, Mich., from 2007 to 2019.

Allan loved to laugh and tell jokes. He enjoyed card playing, camping, watching sports, traveling, and eating ice cream. He was devoted to his family and enjoyed attending events involving his grandchildren.

He will be lovingly remembered by Joyce, his wife of 67 years; four children and their spouses; 13 grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Korean Culture Shines at Orlando Church



Photo by Sunlight Grace Church

The Orlando Korea Culture Center, an outreach branch of Sunlight Grace Church, hosts an annual K-pop contest that attracts hundreds of entrants.

Less than two years after Joshua Jung launched Sunlight Grace Church in 2014, he and the first church members also launched the Orlando (Fla.) Korea Culture Center as a way to reach the community.

“We thought, what is the thing we have to offer?” Jung explained. “We said, ‘Let’s try teaching language and giving away free Korean food.’” Jung grew up in Korea and immigrated to Florida at age 29.

At first there was little interest in the cultural center, which is housed in the same building as Sunlight Grace Church. But K-pop (Korean pop music) was growing in popularity in the U.S. at the time, and as a result, Americans were becoming intrigued with Korean culture.

In 2016, the center’s volunteer leadership team started an annual cultural festival at the church, offering Korean food, games, and music. In 2017, they created a K-pop contest in which hundreds of entrants perform on stage and vie for cash prizes.

The festival now attracts about 3,000 community members each fall, Jung said. The center also hosts traditional Korean dance classes two evenings a week, which have proven popular among older couples. Every fall and spring, the center offers

beginner, intermediate, and advanced classes in the Korean language, which enroll about 75 people of various ethnicities each session.

Most of these classes and events are led by volunteers, some from the church and some from the community. The center also hires students from Korea who are studying in Orlando. Many of the students and other community volunteers are not Christians. The church considers this to be a witnessing opportunity. Several people have come to faith through working in partnership with the church.

“God is using our culture to share the gospel, and I’m so excited,” Jung said.

Sunlight Grace’s worship services are in Korean and include English translation. The church also has English-speaking and bilingual small groups. Sunday attendance was about 130 in early 2020 but declined during COVID, Jung said. Recently attendance has grown to about 75 people.

Jung was ordained as a minister in the Christian Reformed Church in 2017. As pastor of an emerging church, his credentials are held by Sunlight Ministries in Port St. Lucie, Fla.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Richard (Dick)
Duifhuis*

1937-2023

“Dick Duifhuis was not great in the eyes of the world for being ultra-successful or wealthy,” eulogized one of his sons. “Instead, he was great as a faithful, honorable, and dependable man of God who chose to live a simple life of service. He was a man of much love, compassion, and integrity.” Dick, 86, died May 22, 2023, following a stroke.

He immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands with his family in 1949. He was ordained in 1967 after graduating from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and served Emo (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church, then Alberni Valley CRC in Port Alberni, B.C.

Dick will be remembered for his love of God’s creation and being active in it. He enjoyed canoeing, walking, vegetable gardening, biking, hiking, and reading. He ground his own whole wheat flour for bread baking. His family will miss eating his signature raisin bread.

Retiring in 1988, Dick and his wife moved to Nanaimo, B.C., and became members of Christ Community CRC. He preached there occasionally and at a local seniors’ home monthly.

Predeceased by one great-grandchild, Dick is survived by Elsie, his wife of 60 years; four children and their spouses; 10 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

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**Christian
Reformed
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**Walking by Faith:
Planting Churches
with Haitians**

By Cassie Marcionetti, Resonate Global Mission

S *i Dye vle.*
In Haitian Creole, it means “if God wills.”
“I’ve learned that Haitians embody this attitude that you don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow,” explained Johnny Gryglewicz, a missionary with Resonate Global Mission. “If you’re saying goodbye to someone with plans to see them the next day, they’ll say ‘Si Dye vle.’ If you don’t say it, someone will say it for you. ... In Haiti, every day is an act of faith.”

Gryglewicz and his wife, Kim, moved to Haiti in 2018 to serve as missionaries with Resonate Global Mission. Ever since, their future has been uncertain, and so has the future for the people of Haiti.

Haiti is a country that has long suffered from economic poverty. Gryglewicz says it seems to only be getting worse. Hurricanes, tropical storms, and earthquakes have ravaged the land. Following a presidential assassination, gang violence and kidnappings have made daily life dangerous.

In 2021, it was no longer safe for Gryglewicz, his wife, and their daughters to remain in the country. Along with tens of thousands of Haitians, the family had to say goodbye to their home and flee to North America. The Gryglewicz family joined the multitude moving to Florida, where Haitian Creole is now the third most-spoken language.

“God has used it,” said Gryglewicz.

In the midst of an uncertain future, it seems God has a plan. God is weaving together the stories of the Gryglewicz family, a pastor from Haiti, and local Christian Reformed churches into a tapestry that can welcome and empower new Haitian communities in North America.

A Haitian Pastor With a Heart for the Church

Pastor Obelto Cherubin has left Haiti twice.

In 1980, he moved to the Dominican Republic, where he met Resonate (then Christian Reformed World Missions) missionaries who saw his passion for church and sharing the gospel. Cherubin fell in love with the Reformed worldview, and in 1987 he moved back to Haiti—this time with a Resonate missionary.

Cherubin felt called to plant churches. He felt that there was something special about Reformed theology, and while churches in Haiti were governed by only the pastor, Cherubin liked how Christian Reformed churches raised up leaders in the congregation.



Pastor Obelto Cherubin loves the church and has a passion for sharing the gospel with Haitian people.

“I love working together—teamwork,” Cherubin said. “I like to see people decide together.”

So Cherubin started the Christian Reformed Church in Haiti.

He worked hard to share the gospel and equip leaders. In fewer than 20 years, he helped plant 23 churches as part of the denomination. But in 2005, he realized his family needed a change. He wanted his children to have better opportunities for education and careers, so he left the denomination in the capable hands of the pastors he had trained and moved to a new home in Florida.

Meeting Needs in the Haitian Communities

For Haitians who have moved to Florida, life is hard.

People struggle to find work and transportation. This makes it hard to find adequate housing, food, clothing, medical aid, and other necessities.

Despite his calling to ministry, Cherubin took a job at Walt Disney World to make ends meet. Yet he continued to see a need for Haitian churches that he couldn’t ignore. In addition to working full time at the park, he started a church that met in his home.

“Most people coming from Haiti don’t know English,” Cherubin said. “They want someone to explain the gospel to them in Creole.”

He started the church with no formal name, resources, or plans. He knew there was an urgency to this work, and he trusted God. Would he succeed? *Si Dye vle.*

“We are walking by faith, not by sight,” he said. “When I do something, I don’t necessarily believe I can. But I believe God can send people who can help me to achieve my goal.”

And God did. Since Cherubin started the church, it has grown. He connected with Christian Reformed churches in the region and was able to secure a loan from Classis Southeast U.S. for a building that seats 150 people for worship but on special occasions welcomes more than double that. The church also owns four dormitories where Haitian immigrants can live at a subsidized cost.

But with more Haitians moving to North America every day, Resonate and Classis Southeast U.S. recognize this is just the start of God at work in the Haitian community. There is much more the denomination could do to meet this growing need.

Growing as a Denomination and Working Toward a Bright Future

“I see it as a big opportunity,” said pastor Scott Vander Ploeg, president of Classis Southeast U.S. “Knowing Pastor Obelto’s role in starting the Christian Reformed Church in Haiti and how that took off, it’s obvious to me he could do it again here in Florida.”

And when Gryglewicz and his family moved to Florida, the work became all the more possible. Gryglewicz is able to help bridge the cultures of Haiti and the United States. He has helped Resonate and Classis Southeast U.S. work more closely with Cherubin to train more pastors and plant more churches.

In January of 2023, Resonate and Classis Southeast U.S. provided funding for Cherubin to quit his theme-park job and focus full time on pastoring his church and raising up leaders to plant more churches. Gryglewicz meets with Cherubin once a week and helps communicate and meet any needs that arise, whether it’s funding for a training or a printer to provide training materials to pastors.



The building that Haitian CRC in Orlando, Fla., bought with help from Classis Southeast U.S. The church also owns four dormitories where Haitian immigrants can live at a subsidized cost.



Resonate Global Mission missionary Johnny Gryglewicz had to flee his home in Haiti in 2021, but God has used this situation to help Resonate and Classis Southeast U.S. work more closely with church planter Obelto Cherubin to train more pastors and plant more churches in Florida.

Cherubin is currently training a group of about a dozen people in Orlando in church planting, a Reformed perspective of ministry and theology, and building a network to help them plant churches. He recently started another training cohort in Miami.

Resonate and Classis Southeast U.S. have both pledged to support the leaders Cherubin is working with when they’re ready to plant their churches. Cherubin’s goal is 10 new churches in five years—si Dye vle.

“It’s good to have a community you can join—and that’s why I think church is so important,” Vander Ploeg said. “The Haitian communities here face the problems everyone faces. Life is difficult, and there might be sickness, there might be family problems, there might be economic problems. But now you can’t speak the language, and you don’t know the culture.”

“The church is very much seen as a resource,” Gryglewicz added. “A lot of the work that the church does is helping to meet physical needs: clothing, food, finding jobs, helping with documentation.”

While the future may still feel uncertain for Gryglewicz, Cherubin, and the tens of thousands of Haitians living in a new land, Gryglewicz and Cherubin have faith that God is at work.

“Working with this has really got me excited,” Gryglewicz said. “God has Obelto in Orlando. He has me here. He has Classis Southeast U.S., who is for this. Resonate is working toward planting more churches. Could it be God is behind this?” **B**

Calvin Offers Master of Science in Nursing

Over the next decade, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects there will be 193,100 openings for the registered nurse workforce each year. In Canada, a 2019 study forecast a shortage of 117,000 nurses by 2030. And a 2022 report by the International Council of Nurses estimates that 13 million more nurses will be required over the next decade.

“According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics data, this projected employment growth is very fast compared to the 5% average employment growth for all occupations and the 6% growth rate for the entire RN workforce,” said Adejoke Ayoola, Ph.D., dean of the School of Health at Calvin University.

Added to this need, a recent survey conducted by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing revealed that 62% of educational institutions reported they had vacant full-time positions in nursing departments for the 2022-2023 academic year.

“There’s a need for qualified individuals who can take on the role of nurse educators, researchers, leaders, and other nursing-related administrative positions to better nursing education and the field of nursing in general,” said Ayoola.

To address these gaps, Calvin University is introducing the Master of Science in Nursing program, which consists of two tracks: certified nurse educator and certified nurse leader. The program, which is created with

working nurses in mind, is flexible and online, with a one-week on-campus health assessment immersive experience in the first year of the program. It is designed to be part time and finished within two years.

“Bettering patient outcomes is the goal,” said Carol Rossman, graduate nursing director at Calvin University. “If you are someone who wants to make changes, views yourself as a leader, sees things on the floors or systems you are working in that could be changed to improve patient outcomes, then this is the program for you.”

“We are equipping people to be an agent of renewal and to think deeply,” said Ayoola. “When preparing nurses, it’s important to think about that preparation from a holistic perspective. How am I delivering care, how am I thinking about the whole person, where they are coming from, where they are going back to. It’s not simply thinking of just the acute setting alone.”

Ayoola says bettering patient outcomes is important, but so too is helping the nurses themselves think about their role in the nursing profession as more than just a job.

“We are preparing nurses at the next level to see what they are doing as part of their vocation,” said Ayoola. “From the Christian perspective, we are helping students understand that if this is what God has called them to do, they’ll want to do it with all their heart. Satisfaction and fulfillment helps build resilience, and so when you are approaching this work with the mindset that this is what God’s called you to do, it’s life-giving.”

*A version of this article first appeared at calvin.edu and was reprinted with permission.

—Matt Kucinski,
Calvin University

The View From Here

Foreigners and Strangers

THE ONLY THING I could think was, “Dear Lord, what have we done?” Beside me was my visibly stressed wife holding a newborn baby in each arm. In my arms was a tired, crying toddler exhausted by a long day of travel. In front of me were several customs agents inquisitively rifling through all 15 pieces of our checked luggage. To my right were overly zealous airport valets wheeling our precious carry-on luggage out into the parking lot without permission. And to my left was a customs supervisor holding all our passports and barking unintelligible questions about our customs declaration form. It was about 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and my bewildered family of American immigrants and I were arriving as missionaries in Haiti, where we knew we did not belong.

Our experiences living abroad have made Hebrews 11:8-10 resonate with me: “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country. ... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” The author of Hebrews goes on to remind readers that the people of God have always been “foreigners and strangers on earth” (v. 13).

Our spiritual parents were nomads (Deut. 26:5), and so are we. Yet we often think, speak, and act like we own the place. Whether we are living among downtown skyscrapers or at



Eight months after they arrived as missionaries in Haiti, Zachary King and Sharon Seegar-King stood with their children on top of La Citadelle Laferrière, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

intersections of gravel country roads, it is human nature to become comfortable, get into ruts, and stop being curious about the diverse people who cross our paths.

In today’s world, immigrants and people of diverse ethnic backgrounds live in almost every community in North America. By getting to know them, we have an opportunity to reconnect with our core Christian identity as spiritual immigrants. Through the eyes of immigrants and people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, God gives us a mirror and a lens to see ourselves as we truly are.

I am so thankful for the Haitian believers who helped me experience my faith and the biblical text from the standpoint of a culture that is much

closer to that of Jesus than my own. In the same way, immigrants and believers of diverse backgrounds in our churches can strengthen our faith, hold us accountable, and keep us more connected to God through prayer and worship.

As Christians, our primary identity is not Canadian, American, Latino, Caucasian, Korean, or some other ethnicity or nationality. Our primary identity is Christian. In Christ we are wanderers and aliens on this earth until he returns with our heavenly city to make all things new (Rev. 21:9-14). Though God places us in this world, we are not of this world (John 17:14-16). God’s new creation is yet to come.

One of the best ways to see God’s world-to-come is by building relationships with immigrants and believers of diverse ethnic backgrounds. As we learn to see things through each

Canadian Churches Embark on Multicultural Learning Journey

Through the eyes
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truly are.

other's eyes, the gospel is revealed to us in new ways. In this month's Our Shared Ministry articles, we will hear stories of diverse believers who challenge us and lead us in faithful mission and ministry. These stories illustrate how God is leading us through the Our Journey 2025 ministry plan to "grow in diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome, sharing our faith as we build relationships with and honor the cultures of our neighbors and newcomers." I am particularly pleased that the story of the Haitian Christian Reformed Church will be highlighted in the following pages. 



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

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

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

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

"I LOVED the Christian Reformed church we were attending," said Peter Carrión, "but I missed worshiping in Spanish."

This simple story is how La Roca Spanish ministry was started. Carrión started gathering with his family in his home and leading a service. Word started to spread, and more families arrived. Finally, there was no more space in Carrión's home, so La Roca partnered with Immanuel CRC in Brampton, Ont.

Carrión, originally from Ecuador, noted that the Spanish-speaking communities in Canada are a rich tapestry of people from many different countries. This multiculturalism inspired La Roca to think about creating spaces where diverse communities can come together under the umbrella of one church.

Carrión is participating in a 10-month collaborative exploration of what it truly means to be a healthy multicultural church. This learning cohort, supported by the CRCNA and a Thriving Practices grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc., brings together leaders from churches across Canada whose congregations increasingly include multiple ethnicities and cultures to deepen their understanding of multicultural wisdom, exchange insights from diverse experiments, and cultivate innovative practices that foster multicultural hospitality and community.

Sid Hielema, one of the project's leaders, expressed his passion for seeing churches as dynamic learning communities. He said that CRC congregations are becoming "increasingly multicultural" and "welcoming diversity in both origins and languages spoken."

Pablo Kim Sun, the CRCNA's senior leader for anti-racism and intercultural conciliation, noted an ongoing



At a recent retreat, members of a cohort exploring congregational multiculturalism discuss ideas shared by presenters.

demographic shift in Canada that means that "by 2044, one out of two Canadians will be either Indigenous, Black, or a person of color." This reality has prompted many churches to ask how they can faithfully follow Christ and love their neighbors in a culturally diverse community.

The 13 congregations participating in this learning cohort have different backgrounds and origins but face common challenges in adapting to changing neighborhoods. By sharing experiences and learning from one another, they hope to navigate the complexities of multiculturalism and develop best practices for all multicultural congregations even while recognizing that each congregation's journey is unique.

—Victoria Veenstra,
CRC Communications

Miracles of Purpose and Community in Zambia

TADALA'S SMILE LIGHTS UP a room. She is funny, opinionated, and curious. She walks slowly and confidently. She makes friends easily. "Tadala's story is a miracle," said Mable Sichali, a deacon in the United Church of Zambia, one of World Renew's global partners.

Tadala has a cognitive disability and needs assistance with daily tasks like eating and bathing. While her parents desperately wanted to care for her, they also needed to work to support their family, and finding a way to do both seemed impossible. Leaving Tadala in the care of neighbors or bringing her along to work were imperfect solutions, and Tadala became vulnerable to abuse.

The United Nations estimates that children with disabilities are 24 percent more likely to experience physical abuse and neglect than those without. According to *Disabled World*, 83 percent of women with disabilities are sexually assaulted at some point in their lives. That number increases for Tadala and others who don't have access to the resources available in the Global North.

Tadala's parents heard about Ben Therapy, a physical therapy group for people with disabilities. They began bringing her each week. The program is offered at a local church called Bethlehem Congregation and supported by World Renew.

Tadala is now 13, but when she joined Ben Therapy, she was just 4 years old and unable to walk or talk. "At 13," Sichali said, "most young ladies in Tadala's situation would find themselves pregnant. Because she has joined this community, everyone knows her and makes sure she stays safe."

Urthuan is a young adult in Zambia who has an intellectual disability. He was raised by his grandparents and



Grace (left) and Elder have been participating in Ben Therapy as a couple for years. After experiencing positive effects from physiotherapy, Elder is now one of the lead volunteers.

achieved a grade five education by the time he was 18 years old. As he aged out of formal education, his teachers recommended Ben Therapy.

As Urthuan worked with program therapists, he not only built self-confidence, but grew in coordination and his ability to communicate. His behavior improved dramatically, and soon his grandfather began to trust him with tasks in his carpentry workshop.

After two years with Ben Therapy, Urthuan was selected by church leaders to attend the Chipembi College of Agriculture through a scholarship provided by World Renew. As he gained new skills, Urthuan began to teach his grandfather how to grow crops on his land.

"We need to be a voice for the voiceless, to fight for their rights," said Chief Chamuka Morgan Kumwenda VI, Ph.D., whose chiefdom encompasses the agricultural college. An advocate for accessibility, Kumwenda is

passionate about the school's program for students with mental disabilities because he sees God's gifts in every person.

"We should not make decisions for people with disabilities," Kumwenda said. "People with disabilities should be involved in decision-making in civic life. They have to decide what they want rather than others deciding for them. We should have representation there."

When communities support every child, whatever their abilities, young people grow in confidence, safety, and purpose. Girls like Tadala are protected from abuse, and men like Urthuan gain marketable skills.

Urthuan is proud of the contribution he is making to his family. "I am happy," he said, "because I know a lot and I am able to assist my grandfather."

—Lesley Wakelin,
World Renew

Students Reflect on *Today* Through Photography

FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, high school students in Susan Van Geest’s art class have found a way to share what they’ve learned in the *Today* devotional by using photography.

Every week, you’ll find Van Geest’s students at Avail Academy in Edina, Minn., outside taking pictures.

“Using photography,” Van Geest said, “students seek and capture the beauty around them as a way to open their eyes to the abundance of God’s beauty.”

For a special assignment, Van Geest’s class partnered with *Today*, the daily devotional produced by ReFrame Ministries (the media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church) and read by almost half a million people every day.

At the end of 2023, Van Geest challenged her students to read the December devotional series “God With Us,” written by Joe Huizenga, pastor and executive director of Roseland Christian Ministries in Chicago. In the introduction to the series, Huizenga invited readers to “slow down and reflect on how the love of God in Christ Jesus being lived out in the neighborhoods and communities that you are a part of.”

With this challenge in mind, students photographed what they saw and then wrote reflections about how their everyday lives intersected with the devotions.

“I learned how to connect and be covered in God’s beauty,” said student Sophia Kruger. “I’m surrounded, I’m drowning in the glory of God at all times. I just have to open my eyes.”

You can find several of the reflections and a video about the project at TodayDevotional.com/Avail.

“As you look at the photographs and read the reflections,” said *Today*



‘Still’ reflection and photo by Ainsley Mick from the Dec 16, 2023, *Today* devotional

“Just as the noise and busyness with which we fill our lives disrupts our peace and stillness, so the ripples of the water disrupt the perfect reflection of the trees. Animals, boats, and people will come and interrupt the stillness. But even when the water is not perfectly calm, eventually it always settles and becomes still again.”

In response to this photo, an online *Today* reader named Angelica shared, “So much is going on in my life I just have to know to be still and hear God’s voice and know he is in control. I enjoy wonderful pictures like this—it gives me peace.”

managing editor Jeff Bulthuis, “I hope you are encouraged by how young people in our *Today* community are engaging with God’s Word. I hope their reflections and faith inspire you as you interact with God’s Word this year.”

—Brian Clark,
ReFrame Ministries

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Joy

SOME OF MY FAVORITE moments enjoying God's creation happen in moments of joy, such as gulls seem to experience on really windy days. They fight to fly into the wind, wait a moment, then ride the winds at high speed back over the water. The gulls do this over and over again. While there might be a different explanation, I like to think of this behavior as them simply having fun. Once I witnessed four warhog piglets, under the watchful eye of their mother, burst out of the grass, look at each other, and gleefully run back and forth together with what seemed to be little smiles on their faces. To me these are more than just moments of play. They are moments of joy. If you watch closely, you can see many moments of joy in creation. Sometimes creation can bring us joy, and sometimes you can see joy happening for other parts of creation.

But what does "joy" mean? Is it being happy? Is it having fun? Is it laughing together? It's more than just happiness or fun or laughing. It happens in moments of happiness, when you feel safe. It's often unplanned. It frequently happens with others around; it's something that is shared. Joy combines a feeling of happiness with a sense of contentment, that everything is all right.


The Bible mentions joy a lot—more than 200 times! Why does the Bible talk about joy? Trusting in God and knowing God is with us give a sense of peace or safety, just like the young warhogs who felt safe to be silly and enjoy each other's company knowing they were under the watchful eyes of their mother, or like the gulls spending time enjoying each other's company and playing with the wind.

In Galatians 5, Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit, or ways of acting that come from a relationship with God. One of them is joy. Knowing that God is there and cares for us gives us the freedom to truly enjoy moments, whether those moments are with creation, with others, or with God.

Dig Deeper

Read Psalm 126:2-3, Romans 15:13, and Galatians 5:22-23. What do these verses say about joy? What do they have in common?

Try This!

Think about things that make you happy. Then try to think of times you felt joy. What makes them different? 



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



Reimagining Church: Embrace Small

By Moses Chung and Chris Meehan

*Editor's note: This article is the first in a three-part series on the missional church based on the authors' book *Joining Jesus: Ordinary People at the Edges of the Church*, by Moses Chung and Chris Meehan.*

At a conference several months ago, I (Moses) met pastor Andrew Yi and Sunna, his wife. They invited me to preach at an anniversary celebration for their church in Seattle. While riding with them to a restaurant, I mentioned the book *Joining Jesus: Ordinary People at the Edges of the Church*, which Chris and I wrote. I described our book as the story of people in the Christian Reformed Church who are flying under the radar but faithfully following the Spirit for the long haul. I told them about the three takeaway words that stand out for me in how I see the Holy Spirit working: small, slow, and patient. Sunna immediately replied, "That's my husband!"

She explained that's how she sees Andrew and their church: nothing flashy, just steady and calm. Their ministry is small, and they have sought to embrace that. They have

labored for many years in the shadow of larger and seemingly more successful ministries, and sometimes they have felt as if they were doing something wrong. But hearing those three words from me seemed to affirm who they are and what they have done. Although their church remains fairly small, they work humbly to open their hearts and those of their congregation to the ongoing grace, goodness, and stability that comes from following the Spirit.

In the past year I have often been surprised by people's strong responses to "small, slow, and patient." They have shared how those words helped them feel seen, acknowledged, and supported. They feel a sense of relief and perhaps hear the Holy Spirit whisper, "Don't worry about the smallness of numbers in your church. You have been faithful with little."

To be honest, there was a time when I believed the size of my church, the reach of my preaching, and the growth of my ministry were what defined my success. But I now know God doesn't judge us by the number of people we have in the pews on Sunday or the size of the crowd that might hear me speak somewhere.

About 20 years ago, when I was working on my doctorate at Fuller Seminary, I had what I see today as a turnaround, a conversion in my thinking. In my studies there and through my professors and the people I met, as well as through my own introspection and reflection, I began to see how what I thought and believed about what it meant to succeed in church life was a lie. Wanting to be big without the leading and loving presence of the Holy Spirit is a kind of sickness, an addiction that can lead to ruin. Not that big is bad; rather, only by God's gracious guidance can I be the leader—the Christian—that I am meant to be. Like Sunna Yi, I fully realize today the value of appreciating and going deep in what I have. Embracing "small" is key.

What does embracing "small" mean when it comes to church? I think of Matthew 17:20, where Jesus says:

"Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Inspired by Jesus, I'm speaking about a mustard-seed type of faith.

We need to recognize and resist believing in and idolizing a culture

that glorifies and defines success with big numbers. That means, as church leaders and members, we must shift our mindset about the definition of success. It is not about having big numbers, but being faithful with whatever we have been given by our Lord. As we renounce the lies of our culture, which worships bigger and faster results, we embrace one person, one neighbor, one family—whatever “small” ministry God has placed in front of us—with gratitude and joy. Especially in a time of doctrinal and cultural clashes, we must tell each other that we are OK as a small church—or any size church—as long as we can say we are doing what we can with what God gave us. No matter how big or small we are, God’s Spirit is working through us.

The truth is, we are simply ordinary humans who spend most of our time just making it from day to day. We forget that doing anything worthwhile in our everyday life often requires patience and involves taking small steps. This is also how the kingdom of Jesus comes near. This is how a ministry in God’s kingdom, even one facing decline or stagnation, can grow like a mustard seed. We plant; God grows. We water; God warms the land with the sun. The seed sprouts. We have a new life!

A Small and Sacred Saga in North Philadelphia

In our book, we tell the story of Manny Ortiz and Sue Baker. They never dreamed of building a megachurch in Philadelphia. They had a completely different imagination. They knew the secret of God’s kingdom was found in a different journey far from the North American build-it-faster, make-it-bigger mindset. It was the mustard-seed secret of God’s kingdom that Jesus spoke about.

Baker and Ortiz embraced one person at a time on the streets of North Philly, starting with youth in the neighborhood who had nothing to do after school but watch TV or learn the gang

Wanting to be big
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culture of the barrios. They began spending time with these young people, which led to starting a youth group with friends of their own children. These youth brought their younger siblings, so Baker and Ortiz started after-school programs for young children. Then parents began showing up, and those new friendships led them to start a church.

Over the past 27 years, their church, Spirit and Truth Fellowship (a Christian Reformed congregation), has partnered with so many ordinary people of faith, all from this one small neighborhood. Baker and Ortiz planted several new congregations in nearby neighborhoods and established a Christian school with neighborhood children that now has a long waiting list, a legal clinic for lower-income neighbors, and the Esperanza Health Clinic, which treats hundreds of patients every day. They’ve also started a bike shop, an art school, a music studio, and a vocational high school—all for the residents of North Philly, one of the economically poorest neighborhoods in America. This is how the seeds of God’s kingdom grow and birth new life! Baker and Ortiz did not start their church with a vision of

building something big; rather, one thing led to another, and it all became something beautiful beyond their dreams. They embraced small; God took their humble, faithful offering and brought God’s kingdom right onto their doorstep (Luke 10:9, *The Message*).

Thinking Small in British Columbia

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, members at The Well Church in Kelowna, B.C., wondered if they could keep going. Numbers of those attending the CRC congregation had dwindled, and they had lost the space where they met for worship.

When The Well began as a church plant before the pandemic, they had high hopes of becoming a congregation that offered attractive programs and ministries. Their goal was to become a beacon of grace for people living in their community. But, like many churches, they were battered by the headwinds of a swiftly changing culture. They were depleted and confused. Without the bells and whistles people have come to expect from a church, they wondered, would church matter?

But a light went on after participating in the Innovation Experiment Grant Program facilitated by Resonate Global Mission in 2023. Jenn Burnett, The Well’s pastor, and John Gerrits, a church leader, came to the program fearing for the future of their church. However, in designing and experimenting, their project opened their eyes to the opportunities they already had. They began to believe they could take a few small steps forward in saving and stabilizing their church by starting where they were instead of where they wanted to be.

As 2023 came to a close, leaders at The Well were putting the final touches on an action plan. They were reformulating themselves and their approach to church. They thought hard about the connections they had already made through offering an English as a Second Language program to a group of Syrian refugee neighbors. Setting

aside tried and traditional ways of doing church, they decided to move toward developing a “dinner church” that will gather folks for a weekly meal. It will be a time of feasting, of course, but more than that too. Folks from the church and Syrian families from the neighborhood will break into small groups to talk and pray about many matters, especially how they think about and relate to God. They will build friendships. “Each week, church members will gather over a meal and delve into a menu of theological topics,” Gerrits said. “But once a month, this meal will be deliberately crafted as a bridge for building community and friendship with the unchurched and people of other faith backgrounds.”

It will cost money to buy food and rent a space. The small steps the congregation will take will be uncertain. And there will be questions: Is this new land into which they are moving worth the effort? What will happen? Can The Well become a place for everyone without the trappings of what so many have traditionally seen and believed to be church? Will worship reform itself over dinner tables? Will the meals be the communion they all need? Can The Well, in fact, become the beacon it has always sought to become—but in a way different from what they expected?

Inspired by the Mustard Seed

Until earlier this year, I (Chris) worked as an associate pastor under Rev. Jerome Burton, a Black leader who grew up during the Civil Rights era in Selma, Ala., and served for more than 30 years as the pastor of Coit Community Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. I respected him, learned a great deal from him, and came to care deeply for him. Tragically, he died of lung disease in July 2023 after spending more than 40 days in the intensive care unit at a local hospital.

One of the last things Burton did before he went into the hospital was to fulfill a long-held desire to find another Black man to succeed him in

the pulpit. In the weeks following his death, many of us in the church were gripped by grief. Our new pastor did his best, working diligently and with great energy to lead us forward.


A couple of months into our new journey, the pastor asked me to preach. It didn’t take long for me to realize that my sermon should be on what Jesus had to say about mustard seeds in Matthew 17. After all, I thought, churches grow and die, they change and transform, and they can reach a crossroads. Small as we were, we were at a crossroads. We were at a time of new planting.

I believe the sermon summarizes what Moses and I are trying to express—a new way forward for the church. From the pulpit in our tiny church, this is essentially what I said to the 20 or so people spread out in chairs in our sanctuary:

Despite our grief and our sense that things aren’t working out as we might want, Jesus reminds us that having faith is essential. Even faith as small as a mustard seed can move formidable obstacles. Like so many churches these days, we are unsure if we can go on. Even though we have a new leader, a powerful preacher, we might still wonder what’s the use when we look around and see empty seats. With Jerome gone, what do we do? The days ahead might seem cloudy and gray. But Christ told us that if we have faith, we must put it to use and hug tightly to hope in the face of sorrow and uncertainty.

Like so many churches, we might feel stuck and wonder if maybe we need to undertake some large, all-encompassing program to survive. Maybe we need to shake things up in a major way. Maybe we should do something big! But instead, we need to remind ourselves that Christ tells us to stay humble, to stay who we are. The key for us is to let the Spirit lead us through troubled times. Take small steps. Plant new seeds.

We can embrace this truth: Living deeply into who we already are is how God’s kingdom comes near. This is when we can hear the Spirit whisper words of encouragement, telling us that what we want is already here; it has already come. Living deeply into who we are helps us realize that Jesus brought God’s kingdom, a new world of justice and joy, to us all. He gave us the good news. He brought us all together. This is the ineffable reality: Christ ushered in a new history. He brought the kingdom close. And knowing this as the truth gives us the solid ground on which to stand to spread a few small seeds that, through the sunshine of God’s radical grace, can sprout into plants of many colors and more opportunities that we can yet imagine.

And we will know in our souls—deep down in our souls—that embracing small is what God wants us to do. 



Moses Chung is the program and strategy director for Resonate Global Mission and lives in Anaheim, Calif.



Chris Meehan is a commissioned pastor and lives in Grand Rapids, Mich. They co-authored *Joining Jesus: Ordinary People at the Edges of the Church* (joiningjesusbook.com).

1. When you think of a “successful” church, what image first comes to your mind? Describe it.
2. What might be some of the advantages or benefits of a small church?

READ MORE ONLINE

Monologue vs. Dialogue

The beauty of this approach to preaching is that the people learn from each other.



Dale Melenberg is a second-career pastor serving The River Community Church in Edmonton, Alta. He is a husband, father, grandfather, and friend. He is author of *The Inside Out Church: Moving Towards a Disciple-Missional Model* (2016).

IT WAS DARREL JOHNSON, preaching professor at the seminary of Regent College, who modeled it. He would preach a sermon in class, then ask us students what we thought about it. At the beginning of the semester, we were all hesitant to speak up. After all, Johnson was quite well known for his preaching, in and out of the seminary. Who were we to critique his messages? But by the end of the semester everyone was chiming in about what they liked or did not like, what comment had the biggest impact, or how they thought he should have ended the sermon. It was invigorating! I looked forward to his class each week.

Have you ever experienced a lively discussion among students and teacher?

Early in my pastorate, I decided to incorporate this kind of dialogue into our worship services. So one Sunday, after the message, I invited questions and comments. Crickets. I waited, then waited some more. Still crickets! Dismayed, I wrote Johnson an email outlining my failure. His response: “Did you prime the pump? You should ask one or two parishioners before the service to think about the question you want to ask. Then they will be ready.” His suggestion worked! I primed the pump a couple of times, especially after a sermon series, and the conversation got rolling. After five years this dialogue became an expected part of our services. I recall many visitors telling me how remarkable it was that so many people would speak up and share. I would smile and tell them how proud I was of the congregation.

What do you think about offering this time for questions and answers after a message is preached?

I am now at my third post as a pastor. After the cloud of COVID lifted, we started gathering around tables. I invite people to have “table talks”

during the message. I pose a question about the text and ask them what they think: “Why was this story included in the gospel of John?” “If this happened to you, how would you respond?” People share their ideas at their tables, and often I ask them to share with the larger group. We would pause to discuss the message up to three times within the sermon. It’s dialogical!

Who do you think would benefit most from this style of interaction?

The beauty of this approach to preaching is that the people learn from each other. They glean insights into texts they never thought of before—all because someone shared it at their table. They are learning about the Bible, but also about their fellow parishioners. Fellowship is growing, and so is spontaneous discipleship.

A couple of Sundays ago, I shared with the congregation how I read my Bible. Using the lectio divina method of reading a passage three times, I invited the people to enter the text the same way that they would enter a friend’s living room. Pay attention to the details, I said. What is on the walls? What kind of furniture is there? What is the main feature of the space? Who is in the room, and where are they seated? Take note of the text’s details, I told them, and we would talk about what they noticed a bit later. The amount of detail and insights gleaned from the text amazed me. The number and variety of people who shared insights or asked questions, from the teenager in the back corner to the septuagenarian at the front table, demonstrated a high level of engagement.

Dialogical preaching, I have discovered, not only invites people into the text, but makes room for each of us to wrestle openly about what God is saying to us as a community. **B**

GROUP QUESTIONS ONLINE

Sin Therapy

Is sin really like
a crouching lion
hiding in the
bushes, ready to
pounce on us?



Ken Nydam is a retired Christian Reformed minister of the Word now working as a licensed mental health counselor in his agency Hope Way Counseling Services (hopewaycounselingservices.com) in Byron Center and Allegan, Mich.

WHY DO PEOPLE SEEK medical care or counseling? Because something inside them or in their lives is “not the way it’s supposed to be,” as theologian Neal Plantinga says in his book of the same name. People come to church for the same reason. Something in their life is not the way it’s supposed to be. As Christians, we believe there is a sinful nature inside us that, just as disobedience did for Adam and Eve, breaks or disrupts our relationship with God and other people—and that’s not the way it’s supposed to be.

As a pastor, I preached and taught the Christian gospel to sinful people so they would be “saved.” I hoped people would embrace the good news that Jesus died the death they deserve and lived the life they should have lived and that they would accept this gift of God’s grace by believing it. Those who did believe would receive new joy in living a guilt-free, grace-filled life of thankfulness to God. But often it was obvious from observing their behavior that the roots of sin seemed untouched. Relapse was common. I was one of God’s tools to help them be free from judgment of their sin, but freedom from the consequences of their sin was not always a straight path. So when the circumstances of my personal life made it necessary for me to shift my work out of parish ministry, it was a natural choice to become a mental health clinician to fulfill my desire to know better and more deeply the hurts of broken souls struggling with what was not the way it was supposed to be.

Over the past 15 years, I have treated with some satisfying success more than 600 people with emotional, mental, or relational problems. About half of those people were not Christians. But often I would meet an invisible wall during therapy when, no matter what psychological modality of treatment I attempted, it felt more like

a bandage than a cure. I intuited that something, some power deeper than thoughts and feelings, refused to let go of the client and remained hidden in a dark corner of their soul. When that happened, I found myself praying for the Holy Spirit to help us conquer what felt like a formidable force. Was it the force of sin?

In Genesis 4:1-7, God has a conversation with Cain, Adam and Eve’s first-born son. Cain is angry and depressed. His offering to God, the fruits of his crops, was not as acceptable to God as was his brother Abel’s offering of fat portions from the firstborn of his flocks. Cain is terribly upset, and his emotional pain has made him vulnerable to sin. God warns him that unless he chooses to do right, the sin that is “crouching at his door and desires to have him” will pounce. God encourages Cain to take charge of his feelings and “rule over them” to be saved.

Wow! Is sin really like a crouching lion hiding in the bushes, ready to pounce on us? Sin does try to stay unseen and unrecognized, like the lion hiding in the tall grass, watching its prey. Sin is also patient, waiting for the right moment to pounce. Sin watches for our vulnerabilities and uses them as opportunities for temptation. Sin is vicious. It has sharp claws and teeth to ravage its victim. Sin uses surprise as a weapon. It pounces when we least expect it. And sin has a clear, strategic motivation: “It desires to have you” (Gen. 4:7).

Is sin an entity outside us that pounces upon us and poisons our soul like COVID-19 germs poisoned our lungs? Plantinga describes sin as “the power in human beings that has the effect ... of corrupting human thought, word, and deed so that they displease God and make their authors guilty before God. ... This power lies ... behind our neglects and inattentions as well as



behind our assaults and trespasses” (*Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*, p. 13). In Romans 7, the apostle Paul agonizes that the things that he does not want to do, he keeps doing, and the things he wants to do, he can’t do. So, he concludes, “It is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me” (Rom. 7:20).

The original root of sin is not trusting God to be God. God set the stage for sin to appear, so to speak, in humankind by giving Adam and Eve a single command. It was a risk God took to receive unconditional love from his creation. But Satan pounced, attaching concerns about God’s command and suspicions that God couldn’t be trusted, and Adam and Eve fell for it.


This demonstrates that, as Reinhold Niebuhr says, the base problem of sin is unbelief. “Failing to trust in the infinite God,” Plantinga explains, “we live anxiously, restlessly, always trying to secure and extend ourselves with finite goods [or forbidden fruit] that can’t take the weight we put on them” (p. 61).

The essential dynamic of sin, Martin Luther says, is human nature being “curved in on itself”—wanting to be like God, to be in the place of God, to be one’s own savior. This self-centeredness cancels out a relationship with God, in whom we are created to “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). It also cancels out our ability to love people sacrificially.

As a mental health clinician, I ask, “What good is psychotherapy without this biblical interpretation of what is wrong with people at their spiritual core?” The answer is that it is still very good. Secular psychology explains many things about the human brain and soul (will, thoughts, and feelings). Addressing those truths scientifically leads us to significant improvements in behavior, clearer thinking, and more positive feelings. Even faith, hope, and love increase with medication, empathy, wisdom, kindness, truth, and reconciled relationships. That is because all truth—social science and theology alike—is still God’s truth, which sets us free. But it

is not enough. The healing of a broken person cannot stop with social science because still hiding in the bushes is this power called sin crouching at our door, desiring to have us.

Jesus died, so our sin can’t condemn us. He rose from the grave, so our sin can’t defeat us. But whatever is left of sin in our hearts, even after we accept these gifts, still attacks our fellowship with God. So, to be a full-service therapist, I must do not only psychotherapy, but also “sin therapy,” which is simply an intense examination of a client’s relationship with God. Through our therapeutic relationship we can cultivate the Holy Spirit’s work of restoring unconditional trust in and love for God.

I might have left church ministry, but I’m still in the business of helping people examine and address sin. But I am not often invited by my Christian clients to guide them through sin therapy. Many come to church or to a Christian therapist because they want God’s help, but they reject God’s hold on their life. And there lies the crouching lion, ready to pounce. God, have mercy! 

The Luminous Life of Lucy Landry Lights Up the Page

ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD Lucy Landry, a French-Ojibwe girl, can't understand why everyone she loves has to go away. Her mother died when Lucy was very young, and her father died two years ago in a shipwreck. Now it's 1912, and Lucy's loving guardian has just died. Her will stipulates that Lucy must live with Mr. and Mrs. Martin and their six children at Harmony Lighthouse off Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula in Lake Superior.

Ever since her father drowned, Lucy is terrified of water and refuses to get into a boat. But now she has no choice.

The only way to get to the lighthouse where Mr. Martin is the lighthouse keeper is by boat. Lucy is distraught because "she had never been in charge of her own fate. Grown-ups always decided everything, never considering the feelings of a lonesome little girl who had a great many needs."

Though Lucy fears living on a tiny patch of land in the middle of a treacherous lake, its location stirs hope in her heart. Its proximity to Mermaid's Corner means that, if she can come up with a plan, perhaps she can go there and look for the priceless ruby necklace lost in a shipwreck decades before that her father had often searched for. She's convinced that if she discovers it, "that would ensure that she was not being disloyal to his memory."

When Lucy meets the Martin family, she's thrilled to learn that they share her Ojibwe heritage, and she tries her best to win their love by being helpful. However, her spirited imagination and pompous proclamations—she

imagines herself, among other things, as a princess of Acadia, an actress, an heiress, or a waif—and the myriad mishaps that accompany her acts of service cause the Martin children to see her as more of a hindrance than

a help. Lucy is caught between her need to live in her imaginary world, which helps her deal with her sadness and loneliness, and the need to concentrate on the duties and rigors of living in a lighthouse.

When Lucy encounters a life-threatening situation, she responds with bravery she had never demonstrated before or even imagined possible. In the

midst of the crisis, she knows she is receiving strength from God to do the impossible.

In this delightfully funny and heart-warming novel for children ages 8-12, author Anna Rose Johnson, a member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians (Ojibwe-Anishinaabe), masterfully melds adventure, the human need for love and a home, her First Nations heritage, and her Christian faith. (Holiday House) **B**



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



King of Collectibles: The Goldin Touch

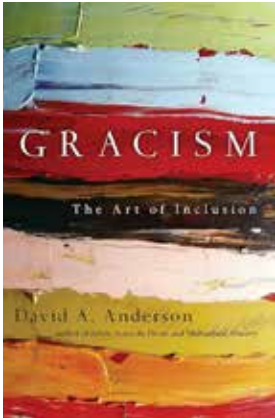
Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

If you find yourself at a social gathering, try asking, "Did you collect anything as a kid?"

Folks tend to leave behind their childhood collecting habits as they age, but some start up again as they reach midlife, looking back with nostalgia, ready to recapture some childhood magic.

This is where Ken Goldin and his company Goldin Auctions comes into play.

This TV series is a behind-the-scenes look at Goldin, his team, and a curious group of collectors around the world who have the most fantastic collections hidden away in basements, attics, living rooms, and garages. Over six quick episodes, we see prized collections including a Jackie Robinson Dodgers jersey, an Apple-1 computer from 1976, and a 2017 Lionel Messi soccer jersey, among other things. (Rated TV-14, Netflix)



Gracism: The Art of Inclusion

By David Anderson

Reviewed by Mary Li Ma

This newly revised and expanded version of David Anderson's 2010 book *Gracism: The Art of Inclusion* builds on Anderson's Scripture-informed model for anti-racism and continues the conversation about "gracism," which still sounds prophetic to churches today. The author defines "gracism" as "the positive extension of favor to others regardless of and sometimes because of their color, class, or culture." As a Black Christian, he has experienced and witnessed the trauma of systemic racism in the broader society and in the church.

Gracism is an appropriate response to a God of grace. Anderson uses eight phrases from 1 Corinthians 12 to form his themes of honoring, covering, sharing, dignifying, standing with, considering, celebrating, and healing marginalized members of Christ's body. The book includes questions for guided discussion. (IVP)



Parent Talks

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

Parent Talks is a podcast produced by Gateway Community Christian Reformed Church in Abbotsford, B.C., in which pastor Marcel DeRegt and three parents from the church discuss the book *Habits of the Household*, by Justin Whitmel Earley.

In their chapter-by-chapter discussions, the group considers the author's points and gives honest responses. Participants admit their own parenting flaws, joys, and sorrows, talk about what in the reading had the most impact, and name the practices they will try to incorporate into their parenting. All 10 episodes are available to listen to anywhere you find podcasts as well as on the YouTube channel of 412 Ministries, Gateway's youth and young adult ministry.

The Lowdown

The Surface of Water: Written by *Banner* reviewer Cynthia Beach, this novel in IVP's fiction line is about a megachurch pastor living in a world beyond his control. In the #ChurchToo era, it invites readers to see life's shadowed edges illuminated by the light of truth. (IVP, April 9)

Cabrini: This powerful biopic from Alejandro Monteverde, director of *Sound of Freedom*, portrays the life of Francesca Cabrini, an Italian immigrant who arrives in New York City in 1889 and sets off on a daring mission to convince the hostile mayor to secure housing and health care for society's most vulnerable. (PG-13, Angel Studios. In theaters March 8.)

Based on the Book: We Were the Lucky Ones is a limited series based on a *New York Times* best-selling novel about a Jewish family enduring and surviving the Holocaust. Author Georgia Hunter drew inspiration from her own family history to write the book, uncovering her grandfather's experience as a Holocaust survivor. (Hulu, March 28)

Miss Morgan's Book Brigade: In 1987, librarian Wendy Peterson stumbles across a reference to Jessie Carson in the New York Public Library's archives. During World War I, Jessie turned ambulances into bookmobiles and trained the first female French librarians. Wendy discovers her story converges with Jessie's in surprising ways. (Atria Books, April 30)

Must I Reject My Non-Western Culture When Becoming a Christian?

Transmitting the gospel—the work of Christian mission—always entails translation, and at its best, this enables mutual submission and cultural edification.



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.

ALTHOUGH IT HAS BEEN so influential in the West, Christianity is not a Western religion. The gospel of Jesus was preached in Africa and Asia before Europe and North America. Nevertheless, non-Westerners are often asked to leave their cultures behind when they become Christians.

What does Scripture tell us about Christianity and culture? Let's look at two passages from Acts.

The first passage is the account of the day of Pentecost. Luke goes to great lengths to list all of the diverse people groups represented. "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs"—all marvel that they are hearing about the mighty works of God in their native tongues and wonder aloud, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:9-12). What it means, Peter responds, is that Christ has been enthroned as Lord, and his Spirit has been poured out on all who believe.

Notice that the Spirit does not homogenize all languages into one. Each pilgrim hears about the mighty works of God in their own language. The Spirit affirms the dignity of human language and culture by translating the message into new tongues rather than insisting that minority groups submit to the majority culture's language and logic. The day of Pentecost declares that the Spirit has something to say to and through these people too in the languages their hearts can hear.

Tragically, Christians have not always followed the Spirit on this. But transmitting the gospel—the work of Christian mission—always entails translation, and at its best,

this enables mutual submission and cultural edification. Translation is not domination but a sharing of life in common surrender to Christ.

We can see this in the second passage, the Acts 15 account of the Council of Jerusalem. After the Holy Spirit has been poured out on Gentile believers, the leaders of the church meet to consider whether the Gentiles should be required to become culturally Jewish to be counted as Christians. The church speaks with one voice, concluding that "we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God" (15:19). Yet the council does give some instructions to the Gentiles: "Abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality" (15:29). Christian faith can be translated and adapted to every culture, but every culture will have aspects that are at odds with the gospel.

So the answer to whether new Christians must forsake their culture is a qualified no. Every culture can host the gospel, and we do not leave our cultural stories behind when we become Christian. At the same time, the gospel calls every culture to reformation, to repentance, and to "the obedience that comes from faith" (Rom. 1:5). But note this is a call to obey Christ, not to conform to Western culture, which the gospel also calls to repentance!

The idols of every culture and the injustices that inevitably come with them must be challenged, resisted, and rejected. But no culture needs to be replaced without remainder. Christ comes not to replace our cultural stories, but to fulfill them. Our cultures will not be left behind, but will be taken up and transfigured so that they can be carried, along with the "glory and honor of the nations," into that city whose gates will never be shut (Rev. 21:24-26). **B**

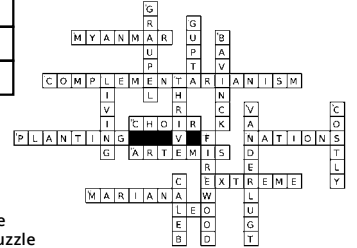
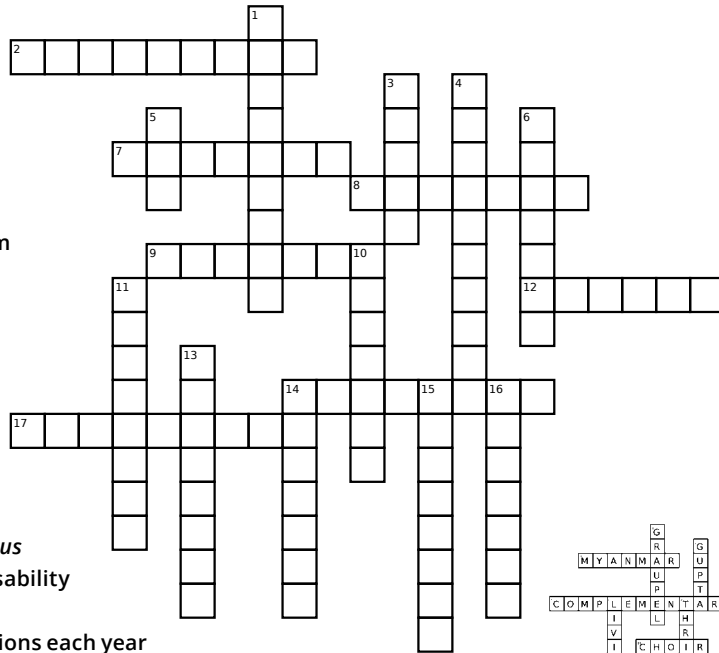
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions next month.
 (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

Down

1. What Covenant CRC in Cutlerville, Mich., collects and shares
3. Hebrew word meaning "strong"
4. An ice sculpture on display in Waupun, Wis.
5. A feeling of happiness mixed with contentment
6. Title of a new book by David Anderson
10. A new Calvin University Master of Science program
11. The base problem of sin
13. _____ Grace Church is in Orlando, Fla.
14. This powerful biopic movie portrays the life of Francesca _____.
15. A tool for dealing with people's spiritual doubts
16. "God With Us" is Synod 2024's _____ theme

Across

2. As opposed to dialogue
7. Book by Moses Chung and Chris Meehan _____ *Jesus*
8. A young adult in Zambia who has an intellectual disability
9. Founder of La Roca Spanish ministry
12. The denomination sends this to CRCNA congregations each year
14. Author Anna Rose Johnson is a member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of _____ Indians
17. Sibelius' _____ has been used with more than one hymn



Solution to the March 2024 puzzle

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Church Positions Available

BARRHAVEN FELLOWSHIP CRC is prayerfully seeking a new Pastor. Our diverse and growing congregation eagerly anticipates a new pastor to work alongside us to help us make a lasting impact in our city, and lifelong connections with our local community. If you feel called to this opportunity, contact the chair of the search team, Charley DeSchiffart @ c.deschif@gmail.com for more information.

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

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

FULL TIME CO-PASTOR Crosspoint Community Church in Tillsonburg, ON is seeking a co-pastor to join our ministry team. This individual will serve alongside our current pastor, focusing on making more and better disciples of Jesus Christ. We are looking for a person of prayer, who will help lead the ministries of our church and develop personal relationships within our church family and community with the intent of helping all grow in or come to faith. For more information, please see our website at crosspointtillsonburg.com or email us at search@crosspointtillsonburg.com

SENIOR PASTOR REQUIRED Hebron CRC, located in the fast-growing multi-ethnic community of Whitby, ON Canada, requires an experienced ordained pastor to lead, teach and encourage our members in fulfilling the great commission in our community. If you feel called to serve in this capacity, please contact Fred Engelage at fredengelage@gmail.com for more information.

FULL-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR: Bethel CRC, a thriving, multi-generational congregation, committed to our Reformed roots and located in the growing, dynamic, scenic Gallatin Valley of SW MT seeks a full-time, ordained

Associate Pastor to work in tandem with our Lead Pastor, shepherding God's flock with preaching, pastoral care, youth/education ministries and outreach. Please contact Jack Huttinga at prjackhu@gmail.com

WASHINGTON, DC CRC: We are a small but mighty, multigenerational, multiethnic urban congregation looking for a pastor with a spiritual and emotional growth mindset, sense of humor, forthright communication, careful listening, and humble service who can lead us to grow spiritually and serve our communities. To request a church profile and submit your resume/CV, please contact search@dccrc.org.

FULL TIME PASTOR Enjoy beautiful sunsets followed by the glow of a bonfire in west central Minnesota. Raymond CRC is searching for a full time pastor to preach the Bible and lead our congregation as we together seek to glorify God in all we do and to joyfully acknowledge His sovereignty over all things. Our prayer is that our next pastor will lead us as we continue to grow our faith in God and stir in us a passion for reaching the lost in our community, so they know Jesus Christ. If you feel the Holy Spirit nudging, you to consider being our next pastor contact secretary@raymondcrc.org for more information.

CO-PASTOR SEARCH Drayton Reformed Church, in Drayton ON, Co-Pastor search, to assist with preaching, teaching, youth leadership & other ministries. Please check our Pastoral Search tab on website: www.draytonreformed.org, or contact dkabbes75@gmail.com

Church Announcement

URGENT NEED FOR ENGLISH BIBLES! In communities around the world, believers outnumber Bibles 300 to 1! You could be an answer to their prayer by donating Bibles today. We accept any translation in any condition. English Bibles needed for English speaking believers. Please call/text/email Jess at Project Bible Runners: 217-273-9497 or projectbible.runners@gmail.com for more information.

Church Anniversary

CHURCH ANNIVERSARY 75 YEARS

CHURCH ANNIVERSARY 75 Years. The Christian Reformed Churches of Woodstock, Ontario Canada will celebrate 75 years of grace and faithfulness. Join our Celebration Service on Sunday, June 2, 2024 @ 10am Maranatha CRC, Woodstock Ontario. For more information, contact via email: office@maranathacrc-woodstock.com

Obituaries



CAMPING, LOIS GERTRUDE nee Blom, from Riverside, CA, went to her heavenly home on December 17, 2023, at the age of 97. She is preceded in death by her parents John and Jeanette Blom, her husband William Camping,

her brothers Wesley Blom and Bruce Blom, her children Donald Camping and Melinda Camping, and her granddaughters Aymee Maier and Luanna Camping. She is survived by her children Terry Camping (Ginny), Tom Camping (Linda), Nancy Holderman (Bill) and Sandra Camping. She is also survived by ten grandchildren, twenty-eight great grandchildren and four great-great grandchildren. Lois was born in Highland, IN on October 4, 1926. She attended Highland Christian School, Chicago Christian High and Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI where she earned her teaching degree. She also met her husband, William Camping, there. They were married on June 10, 1949. In 1950, they moved to Southern CA. In 1966, they settled in Norco, CA where they attended Church on the Hill and raised their family of six children. They were married sixty-six years before his death in 2016. Lois was involved in the Special Olympics for nearly four decades after their sixth child, Melinda, was born with Down Syndrome. She took up bowling which became her lifelong hobby. She was a big Angels baseball fan and enjoyed reading, camping, ballroom dancing, swimming, travelling and especially spending time with her many grandchildren and extended family.

KRYGSHELD, KAREN (BANDSTRA) age 82, passed away peacefully on March 2, 2024, with her sons at her side. She was preceded in death by her husband John, son Tom, and daughter-in-law Darcy. She is survived by her sister Chris and brother Ken and four sons: Jack (Valerie), Jeff, Tim (Sheila), and Dan (Beulah). She had 8 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren. "It is well with my soul."

LABRENZ, GRACE (GROVE) age 99 passed away on February 14, 2024 at Larchwood Inns in Grand Junction, CO after a short illness. She was preceded in death in 2018 by her husband Jim, her husband of 69 years and an infant son. She is survived by her children Mike (Carol) LaBrenz, Tina (Carl) Chan, and Jana (Tim) VanDam; along with 9 grandchildren and 8, soon to be 9 great-grandchildren.



MILDRED "MILLIE" VOS, NEE VAN HOWE, age 86 went to be with her Lord on Feb. 5, 2024. 1131 S. Prospect Ave, Elmhurst, IL 60126. Millie is lovingly remembered by her husband of 66 years, Donald Vos; children, Ken

(Cindy), Karl (Maria), Deanna (Ed) Wondergem; grandchildren, Ashley (Joel) Zandstra, Brittany (Ben) Briddell, Chad (Celeste) Vos, Leia (Steve) DeMaagd, Emily (Ryan) Evenhouse, Aimee Vos, Anna (Josh) Wyman, Marcus (Rachel) Wondergem, Kaila Wondergem, Janaé (Tim) Urmanczy; sister-in-law Clara Van Howe; brother Bill (Marilyn) Van Howe; nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, William and Tena Van Howe; her brothers Bernie and Ron Van Howe; her sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law Shirley (Rev. Harry) Buis, Arthur Jr. (Joanne) Vos. Memorials to Elim Christian Schools, 13020 Central Ave, Crestwood, IL 60418 are appreciated. Great is Thy Faithfulness!



SCHURINGA, ALBERDINE A, nee Van Bruggen, 100 years old, passed away on February 26, 2024. Beloved wife for 71 years to Jacob "Jake" Schuringa (2014). Loving mother of Nancy (Daniel)

Switalski and Arlene (Kenneth) Werner. Cherished grandmother of Tina Hill, Steven (Rosy) Switalski, Paul (Sarah) Switalski; David (Julia) Werner and Andrew Werner. Dearest great-grandmother of Brandon, Shannon, Connor, Allison and Zachary Switalski; and Samantha Werner. Devoted daughter of the late Samuel and Abbie (nee Naber) Van Bruggen. Dear sister of the late Annette (late Preston) Harris, the late Adele (late Martin) Mulder, the late Jack (Betty) Van Bruggen and the late Charlotte (late Henry) Ipema. Dearest aunt of many nieces and nephews. Alberdine was a charter member of Palos Heights Christian Reformed Church.

TILMA TILMA, June (Gabrielse) Tilma, age 90, passed away on Tuesday, January 2, 2024. She was preceded in death by her husband of 36 years, Jack Tilma; brothers Theodore and Dennis Gabrielse; and by brother-in-law and sister-in-law Stuart and Jean De Jong. She is survived by her children Barbara (David) DeKorne, Marijo (Mark) Vaughan, Thomas (Amy Poplaski) Tilma, Larry (Lori) Tilma; 10 grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren; sister Eunice (John) Stegink; sisters-in-law Shirley Gabrielse and Jan (Vic) Scheffler; and numerous nieces and nephews. June was a long-time member of Plymouth Heights Christian Reformed Church.

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VAN ZYTVELD, EDITH JANE On February 6, 2024, Edith Jane Van Zytveld passed away surrounded by her family who loved her dearly. Born in 1936 in Denver, CO to Henry and Gretta (Veenema) Volkema, Jane graduated from Calvin College before marrying the love of her life, Jack Van Zytveld. She was a gifted pianist and organist and contributed to the worship life of several congregations for nearly 70 years. Preceded in death by her parents as well as her beloved older brothers Fred and Art Volkema and her sister-in-law, Harriet (Keith) Barry. Survived by her husband, Jack Van Zytveld; her sons, James (Marlise), Donald, and David (Karen); 6 grandchildren, 3 great grandchildren; her sisters-in-law, Martha and Annabelle Volkema, and Janice Van Zytveld (Nelson) Zwaanstra; and brother-in-law, John (Jan) Van Zytveld; and numerous nieces and nephews. Services will be held on April 19th at Calvin CRC in Grand Rapids. More details found online.

Birthday

100 YEARS

AUKEMAN, MARK of Hudsonville, MI celebrates his 100th Birthday on April 4, 2024. His beloved wife Elizabeth passed in 2017 just prior to their 70th Wedding Anniversary. His children are Carol (Rev. Rich) Rienstra, Shirley (Rick dec.) Bultema, Gloria, Nancy and Mark (dec). He has 8 grandsons and 12 great grandchildren. We praise God for His faithfulness.

97 YEARS

BUSSCHER, WILMA (WALTERS) of Zeeland, MI will celebrate her 97th birthday on April 20. With her husband, Ken, who passed away in 2015, she has 7 children, 22 grandchildren and 45 great-grandchildren who all give thanks to God for his faithfulness.

90 YEARS

ROELS, BERTIE (KLAMER) will be celebrating her 90th birthday on April 26. We thank God

for what a loving wife, mother, grandmother and great grandmother she has been through the many years God has given her. She has blessed so many through her gracious, giving spirit. Your family loves you so much! Birthday greetings can be sent to 2805 E Fulton, Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

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Shedding Light

Mental health issues are not wrong or shameful, yet the world has stigmatized them.



CRC Regional Disability Advocate Elizabeth Schultz belongs to the Church of Benjamin's Hope in Holland, Mich. She is a Distinguished Toastmaster and teaches group home aides how to treat people with disabilities. Find her online at tinyurl.com/Sf65web6.

I'M A PERSON who uses a power chair. Some people think I have an intellectual disability. I don't, and I have never understood why people think that. What very few people recognize is that I do have depression as a secondary condition. Mental illness is so quiet.

This summer I experienced a mental health crisis. I take medication to keep my depression at bay, and I had realized months earlier that the meds I was on were no longer controlling it. If someone would have listened sooner, I never would have gone through what I did.

Even though I was "in the system," (in the U.S.) I encountered three roadblocks to getting my depression under control. First, the state's community mental health agency in my county would not change my medicine without a sleep study even though I had been telling them for months that I needed a medication change. I followed through, but the clinic canceled my first two appointments and ultimately scheduled a study for months later. When I became desperate for a new prescription, I went to a walk-in mental health clinic, where I filled out paperwork and waited for two hours only for them to tell me they didn't take my insurance. My insurance card had been the first thing they'd seen. The next night I went to a hospital emergency room, where I talked to a psych nurse who agreed I needed help. But the doctors there won't change prescriptions because they can't follow up. What ultimately happened was my general practitioner reading the ER doctor's notes. My doctor knew it wasn't like me to be so desperate, so she finally started me on a new medication. It has helped significantly.


All this happened even though I was already "in the system." Imagine somebody not in the system not only trying

to admit they need help but then having that much trouble finding it.

Diagnoses of mental illnesses are on the rise. According to Mental Health America, here in Michigan alone about 1.7 million adults live with a mental illness, but 26.6 percent of those individuals are not getting the care they need.

Mental health issues are not wrong or shameful, yet the world has stigmatized them. About all we can do is more advocacy to get the word out that they are just like any other health crisis. This May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Let's take this opportunity to educate people about the signs and symptoms and about the barriers to care.

People shouldn't have to wait for two hours in a clinic only to be turned away because the clinic doesn't accept their insurance. People facing mental health crises should be able to find immediate help. Too many doors were slammed in my face. How many people with depression or other mental illnesses will keep fighting for help?

As I left the mental health clinic, I read its sign: "Christian Hospital." I chuckled to myself. I wondered if they'd treat Jesus the same way. 

Glory Days

In my own experience, there are waves of good times throughout life.



Ben Gresik serves as the pastor of Holland Marsh Christian Reformed Church near Newmarket, Ont. He lives next door to the church with his wife, Amanda, and their two dogs.

THEY DEMOLISHED the Christian school building next door to our church. The school is now in a new building on the next road over. As the old building was demolished, I documented the process on Instagram, and as I've been sharing pictures, people from our community have had something to say about it.

Most people are sad about it. People have strong memories of that place and the era it represents. The days when the school was first built were the "glory days" for many in our community. There was enough money for a school, a full sanctuary for worship, and a strong sense of community in our area. That old building represented some of the best times people can remember, and the demolition makes it feel like those times are over.

I'm a newcomer to this place, but I understand the feeling of "glory days." There are seasons in life we can point to as "the best." There's a picture I keep of the staff dorm at a camp in eastern Ontario. I spent a spring working there, and it was one of the best times of my life. I have often wished to recover that feeling—the sense of community among my coworkers over those two months. I think most people have their own version of this. Something about the mix of people and events God brings into our lives brings us a season of joy. Then it ends. In our minds it becomes the "glory days" and occupies an outsized place in our memories. We can sometimes forget the truth of what it was like or how short a time it was.

There's an interesting exchange at the end of the gospel of John. Mary Magdalene is speaking to a man she does not at first recognize, but when she realizes the man is Jesus, raised from the dead, she cries out in excitement and joy. Jesus responds by saying, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet



Demolition equipment and fencing remained around the former site of the Holland Marsh District Christian School after the building's demolition in November 2023. Holland Marsh CRC rises in the background.

ascended to the Father" (John 20:17). In Mary's joy, there must have been memories of her glory days. She and all the disciples must have remembered Jesus' earthly ministry fondly. Jesus' response urges Mary to keep moving, though. Mary and the disciples were about to experience something new: days filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and new brothers and sisters in Christ added to the fold. It was different from before, but also filled with glory.

The hopeful thing I take from Jesus' words to Mary is a reminder to look forward, to receive with gratitude the seasons of blessing and glory as they come, and then to keep moving when it comes to an end. In my own experience, there are waves of good times throughout life. No period of glory days lasts forever—they knock down the school, or a season of close friendships ends. But God seems to move us into new kinds of glory days. Each one is different, none lasts forever, and none is the last.

When they knock down the symbol of one of these times from the past, it doesn't knock down joy forever. It just reminds me to look ahead to the next thing—a new glory day for the future, coming to climax in Jesus' return. **B**

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