

BANNER

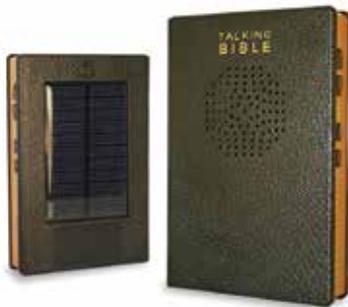
MAY 2024

THE BANNER.ORG



Slow Church

A Bible for Those Who Can't Read



The Solar Talking Bible

- Easy to use
- Powerful speaker
- Solar powered

Amos is asking for more Talking Bibles so more lives can be changed!

As a young child, Amos' life was changed by the Word of God. An evangelist named Enoch set his fears of death at ease when he taught Amos about the eternal life offered by Jesus. To this day, Amos has followed Jesus and says, "Now, I do not fear death because I realized that when I die, I'll have a new life."

Now, with a wife and children, Amos provides every opportunity he can to expose them to God's Word. Meeting three times a week for Bible study, there were still challenges as their Bibles were in Kiswahili, and everyone spoke Kiiraqw, causing many Biblical truths to be lost in translation.

Then God's Word once again changed everything; Amos' Bible study received a Talking Bible with the New Testament in Kiiraqw. Now Amos, his children, and his Bible study can be fully reached with the Gospel and grow in their knowledge. Donate now and give the life-changing Word of God to people like Amos!



Enhancing Trust



Christian Reformed Church
"Accredited for special offerings"

Talking Bibles International • www.talkingbibles.org



419 East Grand Avenue, Escondido, CA 92025 • Telephone: 855-55-BIBLE (855-552-4253) or 760-745-8105 • Mark S Hoekstra, President

BANNER

SPECIAL ISSUE THE BANNER.ORG



Engaging Scripture

For a limited time only, get this free PDF book, Engaging Scripture! In a collection of carefully curated Banner articles, this PDF book explores questions of how we can trust, interpret, and apply Scripture to our lives.

Go to thebanner.org/book/engaging-scripture



BANNER

BY THE NUMBERS

“Many have inquired about the current ratio of vacant churches to ministers eligible for call, and there is a growing sense that the CRCNA has a ‘pastor shortage,’” writes the Christian Reformed Church’s Candidacy Committee in a 2024 report on the denomination’s leadership landscape. Survey data from the regional groups of churches support that observation.

Pastor Shortage?

At the time of the Candidacy Committee report:

About 128-154 CRC churches were vacant. (The survey asked respondents to report how many vacancies they were aware of in their classis. The variance is due to differing responses.)

86 ministers were available for call. (These include 10 new candidates, 12 candidates who graduated two or more years ago, and 64 ministers between calls.)

40% of ongoing pastor searches had lasted more than 2 years.

Survey responses were received from 82 classis leaders representing 39 of 49 classes. The approximated numbers include 34 vacancies for the classes who didn’t respond to the survey, as recorded in a database from classis minute reporting. The full Candidacy Committee report will be in the *Agenda for Synod 2024*.

WHAT’S ONLINE

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

- » News: *Chimes Reports Due Process Concerns Around Boer Resignation, Board’s Response*
- » Book review: *Cobalt Red: How the Blood of the Congo Powers Our Lives*, by Siddharth Kara
- » Podcast: *Music and Meaning* with Charlie Peacock
- » Movie: *Mission Impossible: Dead Reckoning Part One*



FEATURES



10

Reimagining Church: Going Slowly

Moses Chung and Chris Meehan // To go slowly is a countercultural act.



32

Make Every Day Ascension Day

Bob DeMoor // We let Ascension Day pass with a yawn. Go figure.



36

Faith Matters: 4 Ways to Avoid Clobbering Others With Our Prayers

Jon Hoekema // These might look familiar.



Cover: Growing a plant takes time—and so does growing a healthy church.

NEWS

- 14 Cambodian Fellowship:
Recognizing a Second Generation's Call**
- 16 Classis Watch: Spring 2024**
- 18 Colorado Church Hosts
Code-a-thon for Missions**

COLUMNS

- 7 Editorial: Jesus' Selective Reading**
Shiao Chong // Unpacking Luke 4:16-30.
- 8 Reply All**
- 9 Vantage Point: Flippant Greeting Disorder**
Ken Nydam // Don't ask how I am if you don't want the answer.
- 12 Big Questions**
When someone needs help, is praying for them enough?
- 31 Discover: The Rock Cycle**
Albert Kok // God is a great recycler.
- 35 The Other Six: 3 Strategies to Know When
Seeking a New Pastor**
Carolyn Wadsworth // How to create selection criteria.
- 38 Mixed Media: 5 AAPI Children's Books
My Kids Love**
Sara Kyoungah White // These books celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander stories and cultures.
- 40 Cross Examination: Does God Always Accept
Deathbed Conversions?**
Michael Wagenman // The question is unsettling.
- 41 Word Play**
- 45 In My Shoes: Would You Share Your Story?**
Michelle VanderMeer // Stories are my favorite.
- 46 Still: Depression Screening**
Rod Hugen // The doctor looked deeply concerned.

Correction

- » The photo caption in Our Shared Ministry's article "Rethinking Ministry" in the March 2024 issue should have said Noemi was third from the left.
- » The April 2024 article "Does the Christian Reformed Church Have a Position on Vaccines?" should have referred to the Church of Christ, Scientist instead of Scientology.

OUR SHARED MINISTRY

Editor Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



**The Biggest Fears About Evangelism—
and How to Overcome Them**

Cassie Marcionetti // The idea of proclaiming our faith can be scary.

**26 The View From Here: Love and Practice:
Becoming Comfortable Sharing Our Faith**

Zachary King // We can find it difficult to share our hope in Jesus.

BANNER

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

- 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. 5, 2024.

Member of the Associated Church Press and Evangelical Press Association.



Young Adults Writing Contest

Topic: Peacemaking

The Banner and Talking Bibles International is pleased to present a writing contest on the topic of peacemaking. What does it mean to be Christ's peacemaker in today's world? Please use a personal story to illustrate the theme of your article.

We'll publish the top two winning articles in print and the top three online, plus award cash prizes of \$1,000 USD (first prize), \$500 USD (second prize), and \$250 USD (third prize).



This year's writing contest is sponsored by a generous gift from Talking Bibles International.

- » Deadline for submissions is 11:59 p.m. June 23.
- » Contest open to anyone ages 16-23 who has not been previously published by *The Banner* and who is a member of or regularly attends a Christian Reformed church.
- » Articles should be no more than 1,000 words in length, submitted as a Word file or Google doc and accompanied by a separate cover letter that includes your name, address, phone number, where you worship, and brief biographical note. Do not include this information on the essay itself. Email to info@thebanner.org with the subject heading "Writing Contest."
- » Decisions of judges are final. We reserve the right to withhold one or more prizes if none are deemed worthy. Winners will be notified by July 8.

BANNER

TheBanner.org

Jesus' Selective Reading

Jesus casts a more inclusive vision of God's kingdom.



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.

I WAS OFTEN PUZZLED by the sudden turn in the crowd's mood in Luke 4:16-30. Jesus was in his hometown, Nazareth, and read the scroll of Isaiah 61 in the synagogue. Verse 22 says, "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips." But within a few minutes, the mood suddenly turned from praise to rage and an attempt to kill Jesus! What did Jesus say that incited them so?

Kenneth Bailey, a Bible scholar who spent 40 years steeped in Middle Eastern cultures much like Jesus' ancient Jewish culture, helped me understand (*Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*). The Greek translated as "spoke well of him" literally means "bore witness of him" and needs context to determine if the witness is positive or negative. Our English Bibles have mostly opted for "spoke well," but Bailey argues it should be "spoke against."

In other words, after Jesus read from the Isaiah 61 passage, they likely were already mad at him. Why? Because Jesus gave an edited and selective reading of Isaiah 61, sending a message they did not like. I'll focus here on verse 19, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." If we look at Isaiah 61:2, we notice that Jesus left out the rest of the sentence: "and the day of vengeance of our God." By stopping mid-sentence, Jesus implied that his Messiahship was about grace and liberation, not vengeance.

Nazareth was in the province of Galilee and surrounded by Gentile territories, including Samaria, Syria, and Sidon. There was a strong "us (Jews) vs. them (Gentiles)" mentality among Galilean Jews. Jesus' hometown likely interpreted Isaiah 61's promises as "God will bless us Jews, free us from our Gentile oppressors, and bring judgment on our Gentile enemies, who

will then serve us as we feed on their wealth" (see Isa. 61:5-6). The anticipated Messiah was supposed to bring this hope to fruition. That's why the people of Nazareth were shocked by Jesus' words of grace minus the judgment. They knew he was one of them, the same son of Joseph who grew up with them and was taught by their rabbis. I can imagine them grumbling, "Isn't he one of us? Doesn't he know our theology?"

Jesus knew they would want him to prove himself and his audacious message with miraculous works (v. 23). Jesus doubled down on his unpopular message by telling the stories of Elijah and the widow of Sidon and of Elisha and Naaman, the Syrian leper. The widow and Naaman were Gentiles, outsiders who, in the traditional reading of Isaiah 61, should have been among the "strangers" and "foreigners" who would serve them. Instead, Jesus implied that such outsiders and enemies might be beneficiaries of the Lord's favor if they responded in obedient faith as the widow and Naaman did.

This is what drove the angry crowd over the edge into a murderous rage. How dare Jesus say that there might not be a day of vengeance on the Jews' sinful enemies? And to say that God might actually bless those enemies instead of the Jews? That's blasphemy!

Jesus cast a more inclusive vision of God's kingdom, challenging his hometown's cherished "us vs. them" beliefs. In response, they tried to "cancel" him. "No prophet is accepted in his hometown" (v. 24) because the people see any criticism from one of their own as betrayal. **B**



REPLY ALL

Disagreeing Well

The *Banner* article “They Disagreed Well” (Jan. 2024) on the deliberations of a 2022 synodical committee puzzled me. The executive summary of the related report states, “All Jewish writings from the ancient world uniformly rejected gay and lesbian behavior. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that Jesus as a Jew differed from that view.” This remarkable assertion ignores the fundamental changes that Jesus introduced in Israel’s culture and religion. He replaced the temple as a center of atonement and mediation between God and humans. Well known are the gospel passages quoting Jesus: “You have heard it said ... but I say to you ...”. Jesus also asserted that new wine should go in new wineskins. True, there are continuities between the Old Testament and the gospels, but also substantial discontinuities. This issue is vital to the present topic.

» John G. Cook // Russell, Ont.

Creation Care

Thank you for publishing Rev. Kyle Meyard-Schaap’s excellent article “Dust and the Divine” (Feb. 2024). As Christians, we have a holy calling to serve and care for the natural world, yet too much of the church in the West has vilified creation care, seemingly ignorant of the dire climate emergency rolling out. This is the crucial decade when a massive reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is imperative. Every action in that direction is important if our children are to inherit anything like a livable home on God’s good earth. Although the situation sometimes feels hopeless, I have come to understand that my own responses to climate breakdown (eating a mostly

plant-based diet, switching to a climate-friendly bank account, reducing plastic use, planting native flowers, getting an electric heat pump and solar panels, and talking with friends about climate issues) are significant—both in God’s eyes and as part of the growing, needed social shift toward sustainability.

» Julia Smith // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Editorials

Thanks for your past two excellent editorials, “Peace” in December and “Unarmed Truth” in January. Thanks also for printing Paul Kortenhoven’s excellent “Reply All” letter about peacemaking. We need to get more serious about nonviolence in both actions and words, and you are helping us to do that. You quoted Martin Luther King Jr.’s Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. You could also add his oft-quoted remark that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” It’s easy to point to violence and injustice, but despite what so many Christians believe, and despite what the media bombard us with, our world can become less violent and more just. We have the kingdom of God to thank for that.

» David Stravers // Fountain Hills, Ariz.

In my reading of *The Banner* I always turn to the editorial first, not because it comes first but for its content, which is usually thoughtful and always thought provoking. The editorials do not avoid dealing with the challenges that face the denomination. This month’s editorial (Feb. 2024) urges us to use a kinder and gentler approach “if possible.” From there it steers us to speak with each other with the “unarmed truth” and in love. Fair enough; I too need to hear and heed that. But the Old Testament is

not just a history of a loving God. There is always the warning of “If you do not listen ...”. We hear and read the same in Jesus’ earthly ministry. In the end of (not up front in!) our discourse over the differences among us today, there must be a place for strong words and actions.

» Ed Grootenboer // Kitchener, Ont.

Thank you for your leadership as editor of *The Banner*. Your editorials have encouraged me to ponder and reflect on how I approach my fellow Christians and how I believe. I find your editorials to be filled with love, compassion, and wisdom for us in the Christian Reformed Church. I appreciate you and your staff and love to read *The Banner*, both online and in print.

» Janet deWinter // Barrie, Ont.

We are writing to express our appreciation to you for sharing your insight and encouragement as editor-in-chief of *The Banner*. These are challenging times for the CRC. We live in a society which changes rapidly, and the CRC faces both concerns with its governance and addressing different views on theological issues. For many of us, our trust in the leadership of the CRC and decisions by synod has been significantly reduced. In spite of this, we have been encouraged by your editorials. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to bless you in this work.

» Wilma & Martin Mudde // Ottawa, Ont.

Psalm 91

In regard to the “Cross-shaped Protection” article by Sam Gutierrez in the February issue of *The Banner*: I am a retired Bible teacher and biblical archaeologist. Having spent more than 40 years following God’s footsteps in the Middle East and working in 12 countries, I’ve had my share of bad encounters. After a particularly

Flippant Greeting Disorder

serious incident, people asked me, “How did you survive?” My response was, “Read Psalm 91.” My faith rests in the shadow of el Shaddai. Also, in my personal Bible, beginning with the psalm’s second verse, I have changed every reference to “I” or “you” to my personal name.

» Neal Bierling // Ada, Mich.

Descended Into Hell

One of the discussion questions for Sam Gutierrez’ February article “Seven Miles Into Hell” is “How have you understood the phrase ... ‘Jesus descended into hell?’” I believe it was on the cross, when God forsook him and Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). Gutierrez says the catechism implies that, sometime between Friday and Sunday, Christ sank through the stone floor of that sealed tomb. The Bible says that while on the cross Jesus told the criminal, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

» Grace Kamp // Tinley Park, Ill.

As I Was Saying

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

- » Called to Be a Friend
- » The Untold History of the CRC Day of Prayer
- » God Values the Ordinary

WALKING DOWN A HALLWAY I met an acquaintance and said, “Hi!” She smiled and said, “Fine, thank you.” I hadn’t asked how she was, and after a millisecond I realized that I had once more encountered “flippant greeting disorder.” It’s not a clinical disorder, but I believe our society needs to be “healed” of it.

When people greet each other by saying “Hello,” many also add the question “How are you?” Why? Most of the time they have no serious desire to know how you are doing. It’s just their way of greeting people. If the greeted person were actually to give an honest response with a tale of woe, the greeter would soon regret they’d asked and seek the quickest escape.

As a pastor and a therapist, I know people often really do want someone to sincerely ask, “How are you?” And they hope the person asking plans to take the time to listen to the answer. Everyone is hurting. The double whammy of “flippant greeting disorder” for the hurting person is that not only are they not receiving a needed inquiry about their life, but, to be polite, they feel compelled to misrepresent themselves by glibly saying “Oh, fine” when in fact they might not really be fine. A flippant question brings a flippant response.

Flippant greeting disorder is not only a people-care mistake unthinkingly practiced in our culture. It also makes no sense. “How are you?” does not by any stretch of the imagination mean the same as “Hello.” When I challenge people to refrain from using this question when greeting people, they usually are surprised at how automatic it has become. Flippant greeting disorder desensitizes us to the value of this tool for connecting to hurting people. Saying “How are you?” has become a meaningless gesture.

So what can we do about it? I recommend four simple actions:

When people greet each other by saying “Hello,” many also add the question “How are you?” Why?

1. Don’t ask the question. Commit to never greeting anyone with “How are you?” unless you really want to know and have the time to listen.
2. Don’t answer the question. When you are greeted with a flippant “How are you?”, offer the greeter an awkward moment of silence, then say just “Hello” in return.
3. Answer the question truthfully. If greeted with the question, tell the greeter exactly how you really are, expecting them to listen and take the time to respond. Don’t let them off the hook.
4. Model more appropriate greetings. Greet people by saying simply “Hello,” “Good morning,” “Nice to see you,” or just “Hi!” Use real greetings for greeting.

We need to restore the question “How are you?” to its rightful use. I can’t imagine Jesus asking “How are you?” without a sincere desire to hear a heartfelt response. 



Ken Nydam is a retired CRC minister now working as a licensed mental health/marriage counselor at Hope Way Counseling Services. (hopewaycounselingservices.com) in Byron Center and Allegan, Mich. He attends The River CRC in Allegan.



Reimagining Church: Going Slowly

By Chris Meehan and Moses Chung

*Editor's note: This article is the second in a three-part series on the missional church based on the authors' book *Joining Jesus: Ordinary People on the Edges of the Church*.*

I (Chris) needed to have abdominal hernia surgery right after the first of the year. Recovering painfully at home, I had lots of time on my hands. Since my belly hurt every time I moved, I needed to go slowly. Meanwhile, I knew that going slowly would be the topic for this article, the second of three I'm writing with my friend, Moses Chung, with whom I co-authored the book *Joining Jesus: Ordinary People on the Edges of the Church*. At the end of our book, Moses added three words he believes describe vibrant congregations today. Those words are "small," which we wrote about last month; "slow," the theme for this month; and "patient," which we'll address next month.

So back to going slowly. Nursing my aching stomach, I felt trapped and thought of how poorly I'm able to practice going slowly in my everyday life. My tendency is to barrel ahead, a

bull in a china shop. That being true, I wondered: Could I honestly write this article? Should I be the one to promote something I'm so terrible at doing?

I realized I needed help, so I decided to turn to others with more wisdom on the subject. Hobbling my way into my basement library, I found a bunch of books touching on going slowly.

One of the first I read was *Seeing Jesus: Visionary Encounters from the First Century to the Present*, by Robert Hudson. In the third chapter, Hudson recounts the story in Luke of the first Easter, when two of Christ's followers were walking the Emmaus road on their way home and encountered a stranger. As many of us know, the pair spoke at length to this stranger, having no idea who he was until they reached home and invited him in. Around the dinner table, as the travelers started to settle down from an eventful day, the stranger picked up a loaf of bread and broke it, and suddenly they knew this person was the risen Christ!

What happened? Why did they see it was Jesus? Hudson explains that "the Scriptures, from Moses to the prophets,

were a slow-motion revelation about the inevitable advent of the Messiah." Slow-motion, he writes. It takes time. It takes us settling in and going slowly to have that wondrous and healing encounter.

Yet another gem of a book is *Stability: How an Ancient Monastic Practice Can Restore Our Relationships, Churches, and Communities*, by Nathan Oates. As the title indicates, the book is about remaining rooted—not necessarily going slowly, but about paying attention and staying put. Only by going slowly, though, can we truly and clearly see where we are, what is going on, and what needs to happen. And in this are lessons for the church. Oates writes: "Maybe the answer is for us to restore the church—to choose to be a stabilizing presence in the midst of a very unstable and individualistic culture. Maybe the answer for us is to value staying in this moment, in this place, in this relationship, in this community, instead of getting caught up in the bigger cultural current of constant change." Like monks in a monastery, Oates says, we need to develop slow, daily rhythms of prayer

and activity, and we don't need to be constantly on the move.

Directly about our topic is the book *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus*, by C. Christopher Smith and John Pattison. Here is an excerpt describing what "slow church" entails, particularly from the start: "As in any relationship, trust and openness take time. We start as strangers, become acquaintances, but going from acquaintance to relationship/friendship is a slow, mutual journey of getting to know and accept one another—it requires time, intentionality, authenticity and love!"

And here are some comments from Rod Hugen, a retired pastor of the Village Church, a congregation we featured in our book that is located in a former Tucson, Ariz., elementary school. We went there because we had sensed it embodied characteristics we wanted to write about, such as going slowly.

"The world around us is always making harsh demands of us," Hugen said. "Success is written into everything we do. ... It's wearying. A slowing down becomes a salve to the soul in a weary world. Our calling is to invite the frazzled folks around us to lay down their burdens at Jesus' feet—and to not pick them up again."

Seek the Risen Christ

Like Chris, I (Moses) struggle with going slowly in my life and ministry. My calendar is filled with too many to-do lists and appointments, day to day, week to week, and month to month. That's the reality for many of us living in North America's frenzied culture, including those in church ministry. To go slowly is a countercultural act.

In many of the stories we wrote in *Joining Jesus*, I discovered that one common characteristic of those who

One common characteristic of those who seemed to exemplify Spirit-led ministry was what I call a "ministry of presence."

seemed to exemplify Spirit-led ministry was what I call a "ministry of presence." They are committed to a specific local place and the people who inhabit that space, and they treat them as if they are their whole world. They were there simply because they felt a call to be there, started to meet people one by one, paid attention to their neighborhoods and the ordinary activities happening around them, and devoted their time and energy to loving their neighbors. In short, they were simply available and present to their place and the people there. As they followed one thing to another, without a big agenda, the Holy Spirit wove their lives together with their neighbors' and eventually birthed vibrant communities of peacemaking, hospitality, and compassion.

Where do we begin to become a countercultural force in this slow, missional movement and join in what God is doing today? What can we try in the places we live our ordinary, everyday lives? We suggest three simple

practices of going slowly in our lives and church ministry.

First, start by asking a different question that helps you to value, as Oates suggests, "staying in this moment, in this place, in this relationship, in this community, instead of getting caught up in the bigger cultural current of constant change."

Second, invite others—a friend or stranger from your congregation or neighborhood—to your home for a slow dinner-table conversation. Try to schedule a weekly or monthly rhythm of being present to each other around meals.

Third, learn the art of listening well and deeply. Listen with curiosity. Listen to connect and explore, not to correct and instruct. Listen to their joys and pains. Listen as if nothing else matters than what you are hearing at that moment.

God is not in a hurry. Join the slow work of God. And as you go slowly in those ordinary moments of being with the "other," may the risen Christ reveal himself and meet you in slow motion. 



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. He and Chung co-authored *Joining Jesus: Ordinary People at the Edges of the Church* (joiningjesusbook.com).

BIG QUESTIONS

Relationships

Our college-aged children are living with their partners without being married. How do we convey our disapproval without breaking ties?

It's difficult to watch our children make poor choices. We want them to love God faithfully and flourish. We want to protect them from foolish mistakes. Yet those choices are theirs to make.

Our cultural norms have shifted, and it's now quite common for couples to live together before marriage. Some think of it as a trial run. Yet we recognize that God's design for sex is within the bonds of marriage. Numerous studies show that living together before marriage does not create a healthier relationship or a more successful marriage, but the opposite. Living together adds a conditional element of continually testing the relationship, which undermines a covenantal commitment to love one another through all of life's circumstances.

If you hope to remain in a position of influence, breaking ties is not a good answer. The best answer is honest conversation about your concerns. Enter the conversation prayerfully and with the best interest of your kids at heart. Check your motives so that you are not being guided by shame or anger. Approach the conversation with an eye toward positive outcomes; don't jump to condemnation and burn relational bridges. God calls us to love even those with whom we disagree. Once you have expressed your concerns, let the conversation rest.

Adult children living outside our home get to make their own mistakes. While you might not like their choices, they aren't yours to make. You don't need to approve of or fund the poor choices



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohórquez

your children make, but you are called to love. Your children are responsible for the decisions they make as well as the consequences of those choices, yet there is also no sin that is outside of God's capacity to forgive. God loved us sacrificially when we were dead in our sins, and we are called to love like Jesus. Let your love lead them to see Jesus.

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

Missional Living

We moved into a neighborhood where not many know about our Reformed faith. How quickly should we bring this into conversations?

When we move into a new neighborhood, we start out as strangers, so the first step is to become acquaintances. Becoming acquaintances usually begins with a wave and a greeting, but then requires that we be intentional about making connections by introducing ourselves and inviting conversation with good questions and attentive listening. In this way, we naturally begin to move from acquaintance into relationship—spending time together and talking about more than sports and the weather.

At this point, however, many Christians start focusing on how to bring up their faith. Unfortunately, this often shuts down the journey toward authentic relationships. People

don't appreciate people with agendas! In contrast, when we look at how Jesus shared the gospel, we notice it happened in the flow of everyday life, genuine conversation, eating together, living among, and coming alongside. To follow his example often requires us to make some shifts. We shift from wondering when we can tell to how we can listen and get to know. We shift from focusing on results, such as getting them to come to church, to developing authentic relationships.

What if sharing the good news is also about getting to know our neighbors in our ordinary, everyday lives such that we discover how God is already at work in our neighbors and recognize that our friendship is an opportunity from the Spirit for us to trust and join Jesus in bearing witness to God's good story and loving reign right where we live.

As you seek to discover and join God in your neighborhood, I encourage you to consider these questions:

- » How am I paying attention to my neighbors and my community?
- » How am I loving my neighbors?
- » How am I listening in such a way that conversations go deeper?
- » How might I do any of the above things differently or better?
- » With whom am I eating? When/how will I share meals with my neighbors? (A lot of good things happened around tables with Jesus!)
- » What signs of God's loving reign am I noticing in my neighborhood (e.g., peace, joy, equity, abundance,

goodness, generosity)? How am I participating, or how could I join in?

» Where do I sense the Spirit nudging me to take a risk toward relationships? When and how will I do that?

Karen Wilk, Ph.D., is team lead for Go Local/ Neighborhood Life with Resonate Global Mission and Forge Canada and is a contextual missional practitioner.

Faith Formation

A fellow church council member insists that 'real' believers don't have doubts about their faith. It's made me even more doubtful. What should I do?

There are many examples in Scripture of people who had doubts. Perhaps John the Baptist's life can be instructive.

Even before he was born, he leaped in Elizabeth's womb when he heard Mary's voice. As a baby, John seemed sure who Jesus was. But in Luke 7, we read, "John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'" That is quite a different posture from the one John took as a baby. John was in prison and heard about Jesus' healings and teachings. We don't know for sure why John asked this question, but Jesus was not doing the sorts of things that many Jews expected the Messiah to do—overthrowing foreign rulers, for example. So John wasn't sure. He had doubts.

Throughout history, many believers have had doubts. Because we are born into sin, our ability to believe perfectly is hampered by our humanity. Expressing doubts doesn't mean a person has given up on faith. It sometimes means that the way we have framed our faith needs adjustment or that the things we have grown up believing don't match our current

experience. Sometimes our personal life challenges can lead us to doubts. But God can handle our doubts. So bring them to God. Jacob was invited to wrestle with God, and we are too.

If you come across someone who is expressing doubts, listen to them carefully and without judgment, then share your thoughts about the issues, even (and perhaps especially) if you aren't sure what the answer is. Encourage the person to continue to be in conversation with other Christians about their thoughts, and walk alongside them during this time in their life.

Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer in faith formation with Thrive, the ministry agency of the Christian Reformed Church. Robert Keeley is a professor emeritus of education at Calvin University. The Keeleys attend 14th St. Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich.

Ethics

When someone needs help, is praying for them enough? Or should Christians do more to directly help?

Though Christians often struggle with prayer, praying for someone in need can seem much easier than doing something to help them, especially when doing something requires sacrifice. Yet the gospel clearly calls Christians to self-sacrificial service, following Jesus' example.

The apostle James writes, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:14-17).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a theologian in Nazi Germany, wondered why so

many Christian Germans did nothing to help Germany's Jews. He concluded that too many considered themselves righteous as long as they kept the Ten Commandments, regardless of the plight of their neighbors. Bonhoeffer responded by arguing that just as God took responsibility for us in Christ, so we must take responsibility for our neighbors.

But how can a Christian possibly take responsibility for all the needs in her community? Here Bonhoeffer turned to the idea of vocation. Each Christian has a particular calling to serve those in her immediate context as a parent, a church member, or a neighbor. Her resources and vocation limit what she can do for others.

The scenario James raises is that of a brother or a sister. The apostle Paul likewise writes, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). All some are able to do is speak or pray. Others can and should do much more.

We should also remember that we partly fulfill our responsibilities collectively, not individually. For example, we help others through our church's diaconate. We also do so by paying taxes.

Nor should we belittle prayer. While we should do more than pray for those who need our help, we should certainly not do less.

Matthew J. Tuininga is associate professor of Christian ethics and the history of Christianity at Calvin Theological Seminary.



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

Cambodian Fellowship: Recognizing a Second Generation's Call

NEWS

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

Follow *The Banner* on social media:

» [Facebook.com/crcbanner](https://www.facebook.com/crcbanner)
» On X: @crcbanner

Got a news tip?

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

When Sochet Na, founding pastor of Cambodian Fellowship in Holland, Mich., retired in 2023, the Christian Reformed congregation didn't have to experience a vacancy or seek to call a new pastor. Their leadership had prepared for a handoff by training and commissioning Sophat Duch seven years earlier. Gil Suh, pastor of San Jose (Calif.) CRC and a former missionary to Cambodia, says it's a “rare case of an older pastor intentionally mentoring a younger pastor and sharing power before retirement so that the leadership transfer becomes smoother.”

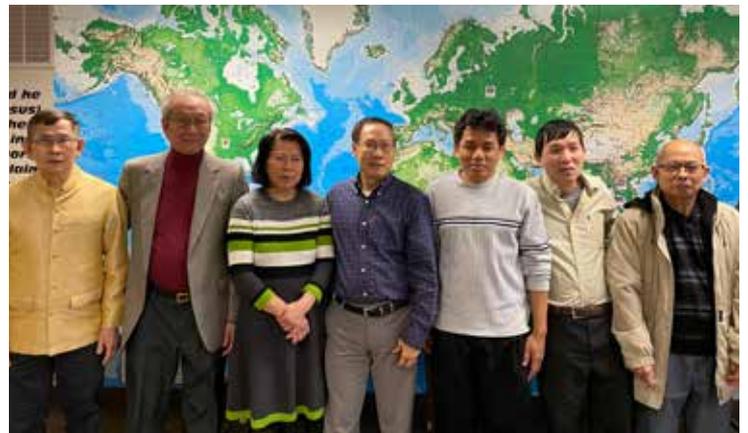
Cambodian Fellowship began as a Bible study for newcomers and refugees sponsored by CRC congregations in West Michigan. As attendance increased, a congregation was formed. Na became Cambodian Fellowship's pastor in 1991. In 2006 it was recognized as an organized congregation of Classis Holland. The congregation has a mix of cultural backgrounds, including Anglo Cambodian, Chinese Cambodian, and Cambodian Hmong.

Duch attended the fellowship as a child with his father and siblings. He first became involved in ministry as a young person when he volunteered to translate Na's English sermons into the Khmer language. Na recognized Duch's ability to communicate well and encouraged him to attend Kuyper College and Calvin Theological Seminary. As Na prepared to retire, Duch had already been mentored to carry on in Na's footsteps.

The leadership transition took four years, with Na preaching three times a month and Duch preaching on the remaining Sundays. During this time the older and younger generations worked together, Na explained. The older generation needed to understand that for the church to survive and move forward it needed the leadership of the younger generation. The younger generation needed to understand how it can be scary for the older generation to step aside for a younger generation, especially when they may fear losing their culture within the North American setting.



Cambodian Fellowship's younger generation of elders and deacons with pastor Sophat Duch (fourth from left).



Cambodian Fellowship's older generation of elders and deacons with pastor Sochet Na (center). Deacon Sovann Rathanak (fifth from left) is now an elder on the younger generation's leadership team.

Noteworthy

“There is a respect in the change of leadership and the new ways of leadership,” Na said. He believes the wisdom of taking the time to transition from an older team to a younger one nurtured this respect and might serve as an encouragement to other minority-culture churches.

“When it comes to Asian churches, there is often a clash of cultural differences, from the native culture to the culture that the younger generation is living in,” Na said. “There has to be an understanding as well as a communication to work together on those two aspects—for the older generation to be open to change, and for the younger generation to still be reminded of and not forget or discard where their family came from.”

“Socheth encouraged and was supportive of the young people of our church to use their gifts where they were comfortable,” Duch said, “and he opened opportunities for them to serve and grow.”

—Jenny DeGroot

Photo by CCAA



Photo by CCAA



The King’s University in Edmonton, Alta., earned two national badminton titles at the 2024 Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association's Badminton National Championships in King City, Ont., Feb. 28 to March 2. Women’s doubles champions Cecilia Wolski and Abby Ledda are pictured with head coach Naeem Haque (top photo); assistant coach Narayan Ramhandi is pictured with mixed doubles champions Khushi Vaniya and Mahdi Ahmadi.

Photo by Sean Baccam



Western Christian High School in Hull, Iowa, won its 11th boys basketball state title March 8. Its last title was in 2021.

Sid Jansma Jr., a 1965 Calvin graduate and an influential business leader, received the 2024 Kuyper Prize, presented April 3 as part of the annual Kuyper Conference hosted by Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary



Photo by Adam Vander-Kooij

at the Prince Conference Center in Grand Rapids, Mich. The award is presented each year to a scholar or community leader whose contributions reflect the ideas and values of Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper and his vision of Christian engagement in political, social, and cultural spheres.



Photo by Dordt Athletic Communications

The women’s basketball team of Dordt University (Sioux Center, Iowa) won its first National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics championship March 26.

“Winning a national championship is so surreal,” said Dordt Defenders coach Bill Harmsen. “Our women dedicated themselves to the improvement of their skills and mental approach to the game. ... To compete on the biggest stage on the last night of the season is certainly a blessing.”

READ MORE ONLINE

Classis Watch: Spring 2024

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, or regional assembly. The following are actions taken by classes, guided by articles of Church Order, since January 2024.

Candidates examined and approved for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church (Arts. 6 and 10): Marissa Walters, Anastaze Nzabonimpa (as a missionary to Uganda), Daniel Meyers, Evan Tinklenberg, Brandon Mick, Ryan Poelman, Jolene Veenstra, Dylan Harper, Robert Moore III, and Cathy Ferchau.

Ministers welcomed to CRC ministry from other denominations (Art. 8): Revs. Hyon Joong Lim and Jose Pinero.

Ministers released from a congregation (Art. 17-a): Revs. Steve Vandyk from Essex (Ont.) CRC; Rob Gruessing from Bauer CRC in Hudsonville, Mich.; Cedric Parsels from Dorr (Mich.) CRC; David Van Berkel from First CRC in Sarnia, Ont.; Jason Vermeulen (minister of the Reformed Church in America) from EverGreen Ministries in Hudsonville, Mich.; Eric Kas from Oakdale Park CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.; Jeremy Vandermeer from CentrepoinTE CRC in Edmonton, Alta., Grant Vander Hoek from Mission Hills Community Church in Mission, B.C., and Meg Jenista Kuykendall from Washington DC CRC.

Declared eligible for call: Revs. Steve Vandyk, Meg Jenista Kuykendall, and Ruth Folkerts. **Eligibility extended for:** Revs. Kevin teBrake, Joshua Amaezechi, and Brian Tebben.

Leaving Ministry in the CRC

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

Janina Krabbe, Justin Van Zee, Trent Elders, Seok Hwan (David) Joo, Chris

Fluit (effective May 21, 2024), and Rick Admiraal were **honorably released**.

Kelli Berkner and Yun Jin Kim were **released**.

Anthony J. Gretz was **dismissed** (Art. 14-c).

Ministers retiring (Art. 18): Revs. Bruce Adema, Samuel Cooper, Dan Brouwer, Paula Seales, Harv Roosma, Randy Blacketer, James Boer, Robert Boersma, Jung Ho Suh, William (Bill) Johnson, Maged Fayez, Don Cowart and Jim Kok (effective May 31), King Fai Choi (effective June 5), Philip Apol (effective June 15), Dan Jongsma and Bill Nieuwenhuis (effective June 30), and Sung Kwan Kim (effective Dec. 29, 2024).

Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors called to specific roles within their classes** (Art. 23): Mike Brummel (Classis Columbia, formerly commissioned pastor Classis North Cascades), David Beck (Lake Erie), João Pedro (J.P.) Macimiano Trabbold (Central California), Justin Roukema (B.C. South-East), and Frank Quijada (Pacific Northwest).

Brian Boucek (Georgetown) and Fred DeYoung (Kalamazoo) were **honorably released** and Ben Hoekman (Wisconsin) was **released** from ministry as commissioned pastors (Art. 24-d).

Commissioned pastor emeritus status (Art. 24-e) was granted to Bob Zoerman (Thornapple Valley).

New Ministries and Ministry Changes

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

The English ministry of CentrepoinTE CRC in Edmonton, Alta., **ceased** as of Dec. 31, 2023. The Portuguese ministry (Igreja

Ponto Central) continues as CentrepoinTE CRC with an **emerging** status.

Reclassified as **emerging**: Grace Valley CRC in Las Vegas, Nev., and Sacramento (Calif.) City Life CRC.

Formed a union church: Crosswinds CRC and Grace Community Church (Reformed Church in America), in Holland, Mich., formed Intersection Ministries.

Disaffiliated or withdrawn: VictoryPoint Ministries in Holland, Mich.; North Center Lao CRC, an emerging congregation in Brooklyn Park, Minn.; the So Mang congregation in Edmonton, Alta., (associated with The River CRC); and Bridge of Hope Outreach, formerly classified as emerging, in La Habra, Calif.

Closed or dissolved: Morrison (Ill.) CRC (last service Dec. 24, 2023); Smyrna CRC in Monterey Park, Calif.; Community CRC in Saginaw, Mich.; Good News Chapel in Walnut, Calif. (last service Feb. 26, 2024); and Crossroads CRC in Madison, Wis. (last service tentatively scheduled for June 2).

Affiliated: The Sarang Church in Port Washington, N.Y.

Other Matters

Classis Quinte, in response to a formal request from one of its member churches, **convened a "committee to explore the possibility of Canadian conversation" to help discern what is best for the CRC in Canada.**

Classis Hudson, in a protracted dispute with Queen's CRC in Jamaica, N.Y., declared "invalid" a 2021 "Amended and Restated Certificate of Incorporation" filed with Queens County on behalf of that organization.

In other words, Classis Hudson is operating as if the church's articles of incorporation from 1960 are still in effect. It recognizes Queens CRC as unorganized and under supervision of the council of Faith Community Church in Wyckoff, N.J.

Classis Grand Rapids East approved a mandate for its committee addressing alignment with the CRCNA's confessional declarations related to human sexuality.

The committee “shall listen to the churches of classis, describe where each church is on sexuality issues, with its rationale, and discuss with each church ways to follow synodical guidelines, given their position and their desire to minister faithfully with all.”

Classis Holland adopted guidelines from “Encouraging Acquiescence, Guiding Into Clarity: A Proposal for Classis Holland in Light of Synod 2022/2023’s Decisions.”

Classis minutes defined acquiescence as “submit(ting) to the decision(s) of a person or group without necessarily agreeing with that decision.”

Classis Ko-Am created a task force to make a “pastoral care plan for homosexuality-related matters in local churches,” and Classis Alberta North approved forming a hospitality cohort to look at “How do we effectively welcome and enfold people from the LGBTQ+ community?”

Classis Pacific Northwest affirmed “its intention to follow the directions of Synod 2023, and if Synod 2024 does not provide clear guidance, Classis PNW will provide a forum for conversations within our classis to hear and love each other well even in disagreement.”

Synod 2024

Classes may direct requests or communications to synod, according to the Rules of Synodical Procedure. See the online version of this story for more details.

Several classes are sending requests or communications connected to the previous two synods’ actions on matters of human sexuality and the effects of those decisions on officebearers and congregations who disagree that all homosexual sex is biblically prohibited. Requests include that synod:

- » call to repentance or voluntary disaffiliation “all CRC churches who publicly state they are no longer willing to call practicing same-sex relationships a sin” (Iakota).
- » declare “that Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108, along with all cases of unrepentant sin, addresses a salvation issue” and that any denial of that be worthy of special discipline (Iakota).
- » instruct classes to apply “limited suspension” for “officebearers that publicly refuse to comply with the CRC views on ‘unchastity’ in word or life” with “loss of all privileges at broader assemblies, denominational boards and Council of Delegates” (Zeeland).
- » “not allow faculty of Calvin University to take exceptions to the Covenant for Faculty in the particular area of our confessional definition of unchastity” (Minnkota).
- » rescind the instruction to classes “to guide into compliance the officebearers of their constituent churches who publicly reject the biblical guidelines affirmed by Synod 2022 regarding same-sex relationships” (Chicago South).
- » “hear these cries of the heart (protest communications) from (six of) our congregations” (Grand Rapids East).
- » include a timetable in Church Order guidelines for resolving confessional-difficulty gravamina and make clear that gravamina are not meant to be used for an assembly to tolerate an officebearer’s “settled conviction that a doctrine contained in the confessions is wrong” (Iakota and Zeeland).
- » maintain local council authority over discipline, timelines, and pastoral care for the confessional-difficulty gravamen process (B.C. North-West, Grand Rapids South, Huron, and Red Mesa).

Other requests include that synod:

- » review the “church in communion” status of the Reformed Church in America (Iakota).
- » have the Consejo Latino, a Hispanic ministry network in the CRC, report to synod on its work (Arizona and California South).
- » appoint a task force to study multisite churches (Chicago South).
- » make an addition to Church Order Supplement Arts. 82-84 that would spell out the process for broader assemblies to “apply special discipline in extraordinary circumstances” (Atlantic Northeast).

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

READ MORE ONLINE

Sharing Light and Power With Ukraine

Photo by Rachel Te Grootenhuis



About 40 people from First CRC in Orange City, Iowa, assembled Ray of Light kits for the people of Ukraine.

Working with New Horizons Foundation–USA, about 40 people from First Christian Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa, built 35 solar-powered lights to send to Ukraine. The March 6 event was part of the church’s mission emphasis week this year.

Lee DeJager, a deacon and member of the mission emphasis committee, told the congregation the following Sunday, “It was a hands-on project we could feel a part of.”

New Horizons partners with New Vision Renewable Energy to create solar light kits and distribute them with food and other supplies to communities experiencing displacement and power disruption. The nonprofit works with churches and other community groups to finance and build Ray of Light kits, which include a solar panel with a charging port, lithium ion batteries, three LED strips, a USB charging port, and the fixture’s housing. The volunteer assemblers may also write Bible verses and words of encouragement on the light boxes.

When the kits reach Ukraine, they provide light and the ability to charge cell phones when other sources of electricity are not available.

“Light brings hope, and hope keeps people alive,” New Horizons president Dave Nonnemacher said. He said New Horizons will continue to construct and distribute lights “as long as there is a need.” By mid-March, the nonprofit had worked with 15 churches to send 300 kits to Ukraine, including the cities of Kyiv and Cherkasy, with help from Hand In Hand Logistics of Isanti, Minn.

—Kyle Hoogendoorn

Colorado Church Hosts Code-a-thon for Missions



Visiting students offered about 35 hours of coding time during the 2024 Spring Break Code-a-thon at Cragmor CRC in Colorado Springs, Col.

Cragmor Christian Reformed Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., played host to a different kind of spring break experience this year, welcoming about 60 student computer programmers to a three-week code-a-thon organized by Colorado-based LightSys Technology Services. It was a first for Cragmor CRC but the 13th annual event for the LightSys team, which serves the world mission community through technology.

“Families in our church had hosted students in the past and helped with meals,” said church member Velda Baker, whose family hosted summer interns for LightSys in 2022. When the company was looking to move its offices last year, Cragmor offered space in its building, and the church’s fellowship room was a natural space to host the spring break effort.

Baker said students stayed at host homes, with six visiting Calvin University students staying at two homes of Calvin alumni who are also Cragmor members.

The event took place over three weeks to accommodate students from different schools whose breaks are scheduled at different times. “There were 40 students the first week from five universities. The last two weeks there were 20 students from three or four universities,” Baker said.

LightSys was founded in 1999 by Greg Beeley and Tim Young and offers no-charge services to Christian ministries focused on evangelism. The spring break code-a-thons allow them to have many hands working on a project at once for their mission partners. As described on the registration page, “Code-a-Thon is a time where Christian software developers, designers, project managers, and tech writers can gather for coding, fellowship, prayer, worship, learning about missions, and fun.”

Besides working about 35 hours on coding, the group had morning devotions and evening worship with one day off-site to ski, hike, and visit sites around Colorado Springs.

—Alissa Vernon

Monthly Wellness Focus Encourages Children's Services in Alaska

Working at the Office of Children's Services in Anchorage, Alaska, can be a stressful and difficult job, but since 2019, staff there have had the support and care of volunteer chaplain Joel Kiekintveld. With help from a Resonate Global Missions innovation grant, Kiekintveld and ministry partner Jessica Louwerse were able to expand their offerings to include a series of workshops and engagement opportunities in 2023.

Kiekintveld is a commissioned pastor of the Christian Reformed Church pastoring Reclaim, an emerging Christian spiritual community in Anchorage. He and Louwerse, a leader at Reclaim, codirect the Anchorage Urban Training Collective.

In applying for an innovation grant, Kiekintveld and Louwerse had originally planned to offer staff training but realized what was needed more, and often requested, was encouragement. They partnered with Beacon Hill, another agency that supports Alaskan children and families, to develop Wellness Wednesdays, monthly lunches for OCS staff focusing on different aspects of wellbeing. The first event, on July 12, 2023, looked at healthy relationships and social support; the final event, on Dec. 13, focused on stress-free family holidays. Soon after, OCS relocated.

The monthly events enhanced Kiekintveld's weekly on-site chaplain work, where he would check in on staff individually. "Whether it's conversations about life, work, health, (or) spirituality, I just try to be helpful in any way," Kiekintveld said. Once a month Louwerse would join Kiekintveld for HUSH, an hour of mindfulness and meditation designed for staff to relax, recenter, and refresh.



Joel Kiekintveld and Jessica Louwerse at the Office of Children's Services' first Wellness Wednesday event.

Participants in the Wellness Wednesday events expressed appreciation through survey responses at the end of the project. One respondent wrote, "I love the HUSH sessions and Wellness Wednesdays. ... Slowing down to check in with myself—HUSH—and to check in with my peers—Wellness Wednesdays—does make a big difference in my daily wellness! Thank you." Another responded, "I appreciate all of your efforts so much—it feels good when the hardship we experience in this work is acknowledged and effort is made to show staff that people care."

The office relocation at the beginning of 2024 caused a brief disruption to the regular chaplaincy schedule, but Kiekintveld has now returned to his weekly visits. He said he and Louwerse "are looking forward to continuing to support the workers there and deepen our relationships with staff."

—Dan Veeneman

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Anthony (Tony)
Schweitzer*

1943-2024

After Tony Schweitzer's death, Hope Centre Ministries, where he served for 22 years, posted this on Facebook: "Tony extended a welcome to everyone he encountered with warmth and compassion. His passion for the inclusion of people with disabilities left an indelible mark on our community. ... He modelled the teachings of Jesus with unwavering faith." Tony, 81, died unexpectedly in his sleep Feb. 25.

After graduation from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and ordination in 1970, Tony pastored First Christian Reformed Church in Brandon, Man.; Duncan (B.C.) CRC; and Cornerstone CRC in Chilliwack, B.C. From 1986 to 2008 he served as a home missionary with CRC Home Missions (now part of Resonate Global Mission) at Hope Centre Ministries in Winnipeg, Man.

Tony was creative, renovating every house he lived in. He built a beautiful wooden sailboat using old church pews. He enjoyed running, cycling, skiing, and hiking. One of the first things he did after retirement was cycle from Seattle to New York with the Sea to Sea Bicycle Tour. He also served as an interim pastor several times and enjoyed traveling with his wife.

Tony is survived by his wife, Clara; four children and their spouses; five grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

—Janet A. Greidanus

For Infertile Couples, the Fate of Frozen Embryos Is Deeply Personal

A recent ruling of the Alabama Supreme Court declared frozen embryos to be children. The ruling raises important ethical issues about in vitro fertilization that Religion News Service explored in this story by Bob Smietana.

This article is reprinted according to license and has been edited for length, for Banner style, and to include a paragraph on the Christian Reformed Church's teaching on life issues.

When Ericka Andersen, a freelance writer and author who lives in Indianapolis, and her husband started infertility treatment a decade ago, they were hoping for one successful pregnancy.

Using in vitro fertilization—better known as IVF—in which a woman's fertilized eggs grow into embryos in a lab and then are transferred to her uterus, the couple had two successful transfers and now has two children born three years apart. They also have nine embryos in storage. Andersen said she's left dealing with "the devastation of extra embryos."

"I have deep anguish at the lives that I haven't carried, the siblings of my children that they will never meet," she wrote in a recent essay about her experience. "The babies I will never know, whose eyes I will not see, whose bodies I will not rock, whose smiles I will not recognize."

The fate of frozen embryos has been the subject of renewed debate this spring after the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that embryos are "extra-uterine children" and protected by the state's wrongful death law.

Alabama Chief Justice Tom Parker wrote a concurring opinion to the court's majority decision, holding that embryos "cannot be wrongfully destroyed without incurring the wrath of a holy God, who views the destruction of His image as an affront to Himself."

After the ruling, almost all IVF procedures in Alabama were put on pause as fertility clinics try to sort out the implications of the ruling and the state legislature considers a proposed measure that would shield IVF clinics from liability if "damage or death of an embryo" occurs during treatment.

An attempt to fast-track a U.S. federal bill to protect IVF was blocked in February.

The political discussion since the Alabama decision has overshadowed the deeply personal side of IVF treatment. Patients, often deeply attached emotionally to their unimplanted embryos, can be torn about what to do with them.

Before starting IVF, Andersen said, she prayed she and her husband would end up with only the embryos they needed. Every month when the storage fees for

their frozen embryos come due, she starts thinking about their futures.

Donating the embryos to another couple "is the only real option for me," she said. "I'm not going to destroy them. And I am not going to give them to science because I think they are human beings. They deserve a chance."

The Christian Reformed Church in North America's published guidelines for pastoral advice on these matters say, "While Scripture does not explicitly teach what moral protection the unimplanted human embryo deserves, it is clear implicitly that as a unique human life it warrants significant human protection."

The National Embryo Donation Center, a Christian group in Knoxville, Tenn., connects couples looking to adopt children at this stage of development with implantable embryos given by their parents.

Jeffrey Keenan, director of the embryo donation center, said the Alabama ruling, or any legislation passed in the wake of it, will have little effect on the center's work. "We don't anticipate that any national or state legislation would affect us," he said.

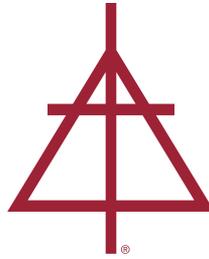
Founded in 2003, the center has accepted thousands of donated embryos from infertile couples, some of which date to the 1990s. From these have come more 1,400 births. The center plans to hold a celebration this summer for an anticipated 1,500th birth.

Even though the state of Tennessee refers to embryos as property, Keenan, a longtime fertility doctor and University of Tennessee medical school professor, prefers to see the center as a caretaker.

"We would be considered owners of those embryos—legally speaking," he said. "Do I think that's the right word? No. We are caretakers of these embryos."

—Bob Smietana

© 2024 Religion News Service



**Christian
Reformed
Church**

All our ministries under one roof. Well, sort of.

Okay, so we're not literally under one roof but the many staff and oodles of programs of the Christian Reformed Church are united in our work around the world doing missions (Resonate Global Missions), media outreach (ReFrame Ministries), disaster response and development (World Renew), and supporting churches (Thrive). Add two educational institutions (Calvin Theological Seminary, Calvin University) and three uniquely Canadian Ministries and you have a nice full house. Wouldn't you agree? [Thanks for your support of one or all!](#)



Christian Reformed Church
**Canadian Justice
Ministries**



**ReFrame
Ministries**

Resonate
GLOBAL MISSION

 **Thrive**

 **World
Renew**



**CALVIN
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY**

Calvin  **1876**
UNIVERSITY

Get the whole story here: crcna.org/OurHouse



**The Biggest Fears
About Evangelism—
and How to Overcome Them**

By Cassie Marcionetti, Resonate Global Mission, and Brian Clark, ReFrame Ministries

When you think of evangelism, what do you picture? Someone standing on a street corner or going door to door to hand out tracts? Do you imagine awkward conversations? If so, it's no wonder the idea of sharing our faith might seem scary.

Julia Kooy is a campus minister in Ontario who sympathizes with this evangelism anxiety.

"I think most of us have fears around evangelism," she said—"fears of rejection if we share the gospel, fears that if we pressure or push someone too much we will push them away, a fear of failure that we might say the wrong thing or not have the right answers to tough questions."

ReFrame Ministries and Resonate Global Mission staff share the gospel every day in their work. Here are some of the fears they hear from others and, in some cases, have overcome in their own lives and ministries.

'I Don't Want to Give a Presentation'

Many people in the church today might have learned that evangelism is about giving a one-time presentation of the gospel. Karen Wilk, who leads Resonate Global Mission's Go Local ministry, said this can not only create fear, but can be harmful.

Go Local is a Resonate ministry that equips believers to join God on mission in their neighborhoods.

"If we look at Jesus' 'gospeling,' we notice that it happens in the flow of everyday life, genuine conversation, and relationship," Wilk said.

What if sharing the gospel in our own lives looked something like Jesus' approach?

"What if sharing the good news is also about getting to know our neighbors in our ordinary, everyday lives and, as conversations deepen, paying attention to how God is at work in such a way that we not only speak about good news, but live it?" Wilk wondered.

Wilk helps equip believers to live into this lifestyle through Go Local—and lives it out in her own daily life. Recently she brought over some poppyseed cake to a neighbor she had been getting to know.

"When (the neighbor) saw it was poppyseed cake, she burst into tears. ... After some deep breaths and a tissue or two,

Resonate Global Mission missionary David Kromminga (right) says the best way to share the gospel is through building relationships first.



ReFrame's Hindi ministry partners host discipleship events for isolated believers and seekers in India.

she began to share about her mom, who always made poppyseed cake. They were so close, and she missed her so much," said Wilk. "I listened and gave her a hug. ... We are getting to know one another. She is lovely, and God is at work."

'I Don't Want to Go Door to Door'

When you think of evangelism, do you think of going door to door or handing out tracts on a street corner?

"These things sometimes do make a difference, but I believe a whole lot of energy and resources are put into this kind of thing with very little to show for it," said Resonate missionary David Kromminga. "I believe that the best channel for the good news to flow is through a relationship of trust between a follower of Jesus and someone who does not yet know him."

Kromminga and his wife, Mary Buteyn, planted a church with and for refugees in Berlin, Germany. One of the ways the two meet and build relationships with newcomers in the city is through language cafes at Berliner Stadtmission (Berlin City Mission). They sit with newcomers to Germany and speak German with them. As they get to know one another, Kromminga said it becomes natural to pray for them or invite them to church. While Kromminga always hopes someone will come to know the hope of Jesus, he says the relationship is not a means to an end.

"It's important to care for the person regardless of their response to the good news," Kromminga said. "Without

that unconditional care, the relationship can easily become manipulative, making a person into our evangelistic project.”

Kromminga said many people today are lonely and longing for friendships and community. He believes loneliness is a huge ministry opportunity for churches in Germany and throughout the world.

‘I Don’t Have the Gift of Evangelism’

Some people are hesitant to share their faith because they don’t feel they have a gift for it or they don’t have all the answers.

“There are certainly some people who are more gifted in the area of evangelism than others, and it comes more naturally to them, but evangelism is a command for all believers,” Kooy said. “The great commission is for all of us as followers of Jesus.”

Kooy said she has also wrestled with fears about sharing faith but has come to understand that evangelism is more about building relationships and learning to “follow the nudges of the Holy Spirit.”

“What I have found most effective in evangelism is to start with prayer, ask God for opportunities, and then build relationships, invite people to church, events, Bible studies, and lead people to Christ,” she said.

Kooy works at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ont., with Momentum Campus Ministries, a Resonate partner. She’s witnessed several students decide to follow Christ after first building friendships through the campus ministry.

‘I Can’t Invite My Friends to Church’

Some people worry that inviting their friends to church is a step too far. They fear it will make things awkward in their friendship or even place an inconvenient burden on their friend to ask them to change their schedule to visit church on a Sunday when they already have commitments. But in Indonesia, inviting a friend to visit church could mean asking for a day-long commitment.

Indonesia has more than 6,500 inhabited islands, and a journey to the nearest church could include a canoe trip, a motorcycle ride, and a trek over a mountain. Still, many Christians in Indonesia want to share their faith with others, find answers to their own questions about the Christian faith, and belong to a community of believers.

To help meet this need, ReFrame’s partners in Indonesia have formed media communities in 30 different locations—in homes, schools, or community centers—to listen to audio

programs and watch videos on one of Indonesia’s popular social media platforms and to discuss what they learn. In this way, small groups held in accessible locations at convenient times can overcome many barriers to attending church. More than 600 people now participate.

These groups are founded or led by staff of one of ReFrame’s partner ministries, but the goal is always to develop local leaders in each community.

“This work empowers Christian leaders in remote areas,” said Arliyanus LaRosa, ReFrame’s Indonesian ministry leader. “We’re providing them with new resources and skills to do the Lord’s work.”

‘I Don’t Know What to Do Next’

Perhaps the most common fear that Christians have when it comes to evangelism is a feeling of inadequacy. Once someone expresses an interest in Christ or the church, what do I do? How can I help them move further in their faith?

ReFrame’s partners in India are wrestling with this question as they notice an openness to the gospel there despite the country’s struggles.

“The economic and social challenges in India today have led many people to question their faith and become more open to Christianity,” said Avyaan,* ReFrame’s Hindi ministry partner. “But the challenge is discipling new believers to make them strong in their faith.”

Avyaan’s answer to this challenge is the same one that applies to evangelism in the North American context: relationship-building. Building friendships and being open to having conversations even when we don’t have all the answers is the best way to walk alongside those new to Christianity.

Although many relationships with seekers or new Christians in India begin on social media, ReFrame’s partners follow up with their audiences for a deeper connection.

“They may have an interest in health, technical skills, or skill development,” Avyaan said, “so we offer training programs to connect with them and to share the gospel. If they’re interested, we go to their nearest town and do a follow-up discipleship meeting, which helps us further develop relationships with them.” ^B

**Names changed or removed for security purposes.*

Calvin Theological Seminary Partners with Missional Training Center

IN FEBRUARY 2024, the Association of Theological Schools officially approved a partnership between Calvin Theological Seminary and Missional Training Center of Tempe, Ariz.

The idea for Missional Training Center came from the Surge Network, a collaborative group of more than 100 churches formed in 2007 to plant churches, sponsor community outreach programs, and train lay leaders. Its goal is “to put Jesus on display through the collective witness of God’s people in every part of our city.”

Founded in 2014, MTC is “committed to developing theological education that will effectively train missional leaders in the greater Phoenix area for the realities they face in equipping God’s people to be a faithful witnessing presence in life, word, and deed in our contemporary world.”

Missional Training Center recently celebrated its 10th anniversary and its new partnership with Calvin Seminary at an event led by Michael Goheen, director of theological education, and attended by Calvin Seminary president Jul Medenblik.

“Calvin Theological Seminary is excited about this new partnership, because its values align well with those of Missional Training Center,” Medenblik said. “Both institutions are equipping Reformed ministry leaders who are knowledgeable about Scripture and doctrine, yet skilled at Christ-honoring cultural engagement. The missional curriculum and creative pedagogy will help Calvin Theological Seminary continue to reevaluate how it trains leaders.”

MTC offers classes toward a master’s degree in missional theology. The curriculum is taught from a missional perspective, exploring how missional ecclesiology shapes the entire



Michael Goheen, professor of missional theology at Missional Training Center, leads a course for the master’s degree in missional theology.

theological curriculum to effectively equip church leaders.

Each year, MTC places students in cohorts of 12 to 18 members who spend four years meeting in homes to pursue their degrees part time. Many students already work full time in ministry and have families. Courses are a mixture of lectures and seminar-style discussions and are often cotaught by faculty members. MTC emphasizes a connection to the local church, pedagogical innovation, academic rigor, and assignments connected to local congregational ministry.

MTC’s pedagogical practices could inform the ongoing development of Calvin Seminary’s competency-based education and Latino Ministries programs. MTC can benefit from Calvin’s almost 150 years of experience in training pastors and leaders, including Calvin’s experience in assessing programs and overseeing accreditation matters.

This partnership will benefit not only faculty, but students of both schools. Calvin Seminary students can visit and learn from missional churches and leaders in the Surge Network as well as from MTC faculty through occasional courses, guest lectures, or lifelong learning events.

“Calvin Theological Seminary is grateful for this opportunity to partner with Missional Training Center as they seek to equip mission-minded leaders in Arizona and is excited for the coming years of collaboration, learning, and equipping church leaders together,” Medenblik said.

—Leah Jolly,
Calvin Theological Seminary

The View From Here

Love and Practice: Becoming Comfortable Sharing Our Faith

TWENTY-FOUR YEARS AGO my wife and I were aspiring young pastor candidates who felt a call to mission ministry but were not clear about where or what that meant. We knew that sharing our hope in Jesus Christ with nonbelievers was part of the call, but I had introverted tendencies at that age and found the prospect quite intimidating. Thankfully, I benefited from several mentors who helped me develop confidence in what God was doing in me and comfort in sharing my personal faith story.

Most Christian Reformed folks are like me. As a group, we tend to be fairly knowledgeable about the doctrines we learned in catechism class and through Christian education, yet we find it difficult to share our personal hope in Jesus Christ.

Every year, our CRCNA communications team sends a survey to a cohort of CRC congregations. Each congregation encourages members to complete the survey, and when the results are tallied, a predictable trendline emerges.

Every year, only a third of respondents claim that it is “definitely” or “mostly” true that they regularly talk to others about their spiritual lives. I suspect this is one reason our statistics (and our personal experiences) indicate that adult baptisms of new believers are rare in many of our churches. (If you are interested in learning more about these statistics, please visit crcna.org/yearbook or crcna.org/survey).

It is a comfort
knowing that in
evangelism God is
the primary actor
and we simply
cooperate with the
Holy Spirit.

How do we become more comfortable talking about our faith and doing evangelism? First, we acknowledge that it is the gospel of Jesus Christ through the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit that saves those whom God chooses (Eph. 1:3-14; Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 21). It’s not—and never will be—the result of a confident and polished presentation.

However, we also acknowledge that confessing this is not an excuse to neglect our witness. Rather, it is a comfort knowing that in evangelism God is the primary actor and we simply cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Instead of hanging back, Reformed believers can share their faith liberally and joyfully, knowing that in Christ seeds have already been sown.

Second, we realize that personal relationships are the primary vehicles of gospel communication. God can use apparent coincidences and providential appointments to bring people to faith, but more often God works through the obedient and intentional

efforts of believers to reach to the lost and hurting.

During the early days of the church, the most effective gospel witness happened when Christians cared for the sick, gave food to the poor, and rescued abandoned infants (see *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, by Alan Kreider). Today, the most fruitful witness often happens over a cup of coffee, a cancer diagnosis, or a lunchroom conversation with a confused coworker.

As I think about what I learned from my mentors about how to be a better witness, two words stand out: love and practice. Love for nonbelievers drives us to build relationships and attend to conversations. Practice at sharing our faith stories and a few special Bible verses helps us feel more comfortable. God will do the rest in God’s time. **B**



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

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

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

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

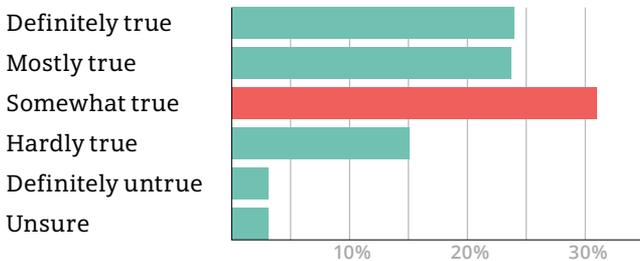
‘Survey Says’: Mission at Home and Abroad in the CRC

EVERY YEAR, the Christian Reformed Church conducts a survey of its members to measure the health and well-being of our congregations, to see how we are changing over time, and to track what resources and materials might be needed. To ensure the burden is not too great on any particular congregation, the survey is sent to only one-fifth of all churches each year with a request that they actively encourage their members to participate. While anyone is welcome to complete the survey every year, each church is expected to participate just once every five years.

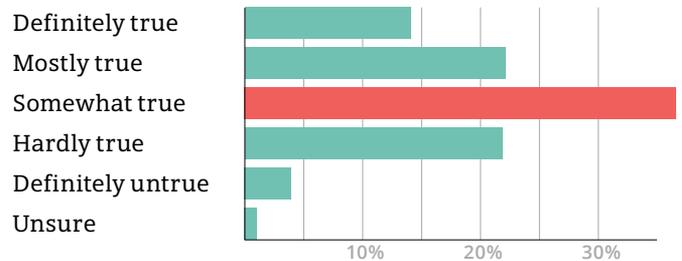
The survey closed in March.

Here are a few highlights from 2024 related to mission:

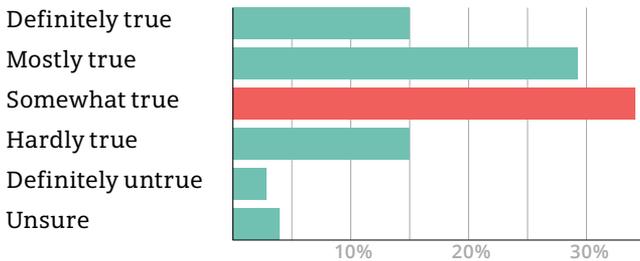
I intentionally build relationships with non-Christians.



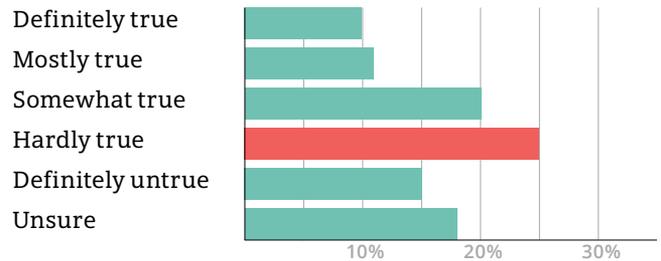
I speak regularly with others about their spiritual life.



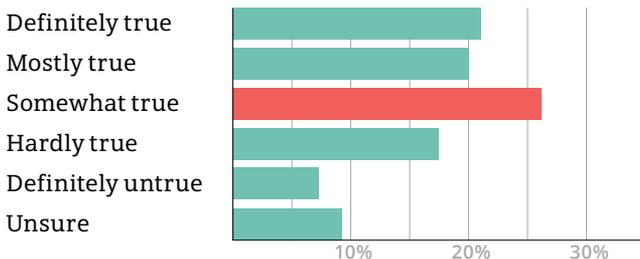
Our church clearly reflects a holistic commitment to reaching the unchurched in our community and beyond.



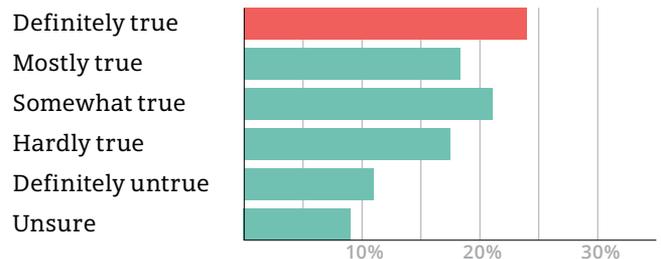
Our congregation is involved in the birth of new churches and discipling communities.



Our congregation actively sends members out to serve in local mission fields.



Our congregation actively sends out members to serve in remote mission fields.



Leading Worship in a Trauma-informed Way

“HOW DO YOU PASTORALLY tell the truth of the Good Friday story without retraumatizing and injuring those in your midst?”

The question stumped the panel. Between the six of us, we figured out that we had a septugenarian’s worth of years of experience in leading worship ministry in the church. Yet this question led all of us into a moment of silence and deep reflection.

This panel of six pastors and worship leaders from the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America was discussing Holy Week and Easter worship planning at the annual worship symposium hosted by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. We had covered topics such as intergenerational worship ideas, best practices for Palm Sunday, and creative ideas for contemplating the stations of the cross. Many useful and practical ideas were shared, and panel and audience alike were mentally taking notes for their own services.

But when we opened the floor to questions, we turned from practical and creative to pastoral and truthful.

“All of our congregations have someone who has been the victim of trauma or abuse,” one participant said. “This includes our children. How do you pastorally tell the truth of the Good Friday story without retraumatizing and injuring those in your midst?”

Several panelists weighed in. We talked about the importance of knowing your congregation well and being aware of people’s stories. We recognized that there are people who walk through the doors of a church fewer than five times a year. These visitors might not know what they are coming into. We need to be missionally sensitive, particularly during “high” seasonal services. We also wondered about the theological implications of



A panel discussing Holy Week and Easter worship planning at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship’s worship symposium included (left to right) Chris Walker (Covenant Life CRC, Grand Haven, Mich.), Elly Boersma-Sarkany (Covenant CRC, St. Catharines, Ont.), Rodrigo Cano (Community Christian Church, Aurora, Ill.), Katie Roelofs (Thrive worship consultant), Ruth Ann Schuringa (Mountainview, Grimsby, Ont.), and Chan Gyu Jang (Woodlawn CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.).

minimizing Jesus’ suffering and death in the message of Good Friday.

The variety of answers to that one question demonstrated to us, and to the room, that there was no easy answer.

As more churches discuss what it means to be a trauma-informed congregation, questions like this will continue to emerge, and leaders will be asked to make wise and pastoral decisions to protect the vulnerable in their pews. They will tackle questions such as:

- » How can we be leaders and congregations that speak and proclaim truth?
- » How are we forming empathetic worshipers who care for one another not only in their interactions, but in their worship practices?
- » How do we lead congregations to faithfully tell God’s story year after year in a way that leads to redemptive healing and shalom?

Thrive is grateful for its partnership with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, not only for the invitation to participate in its annual worship symposium, but also for the desire we share to see worship renewal in Christian Reformed congregations. We hope that each of our efforts plants a small seed in congregations across the denomination. As these seeds are cultivated and nurtured, we begin to see the beauty of faithful and vibrant worship practices growing throughout the CRC.

Churches interested in learning more about becoming trauma-informed can connect with Thrive. Our staff is ready to walk alongside you through both practical and pastoral concerns. Our abuse awareness resources have a particular focus on trauma-informed ministry. We have skilled practitioners available for consulting and training. We are eager to hear your stories and partner with you in your journey.

—Katie Ritsema-Roelofs,
Thrive

CRC Members Urged to Pray for Synod 2024

IN A FEW WEEKS, almost 200 people from across North America will gather on the campus of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich., for Synod 2024. As these delegates deliberate, discuss, and make decisions on matters related to the future of the Christian Reformed Church, they will be surrounded by and supported with prayer.

“In prayer, we humbly come before the God of the church and pray that the Father’s will would be done,” said Jon Hoekema, the CRCNA’s prayer shepherd. “It is before God’s throne that we realize that Jesus is head of the church, and together we belong to him. It is through prayer that the Holy Spirit mysteriously works. Without humbly seeking God’s face, without prayer, we work on in our own strength rather than being completely dependent upon the triune God to lead his church.”

This is the third synod Hoekema has supported through prayer ministry.

For Synod 2024, this prayer will come in many forms. A team of volunteers will gather on campus two days before synod begins. This pre-synod prayer gathering will include a prayer walk through all of the spaces that will be used by synodical delegates over the coming week.

Throughout the week of synod, an online prayer vigil will take place for which volunteers anywhere around the world can sign up. They will be emailed a daily prayer guide with specific requests and praises.

Luann Sankey is one of 188 volunteers who participated in the vigil last year. “Prayer is essential around an event like synod, where the Holy Spirit’s presence and guidance are vitally important to the denomination and its decision making,” she said.



Prayer is one of the most important things we can do to support the delegates, advisers, and staff at Synod 2024.

As a delegate to Synod 2022, Sankey saw people praying and said she could feel the movement of the Spirit in her advisory committee, the assemblies for worship, and at the plenary sessions.

“Last year I was not going to synod, but I really cared about the work,” she said. “One way I could support synod was to be praying every morning for whatever was happening. I prayed for those in Grand Rapids, I prayed for families of those attending, and I prayed for those reported to need prayer. I hadn’t planned to watch Synod 2023, but as I prayed I found myself drawn to the proceedings and ended up watching the final days’ work.”

A synod prayer team will offer a daily prayer on Facebook each morning of synod for those who want to participate in a virtual corporate prayer. A toolbox of prayer resources will be

available for congregations, and individuals can sign up to receive 40 days of prayers around the synodical theme of “God With Us” for the weeks leading up to synod’s start.

“We worked hard to achieve a diversity of ethnicity, gender, age, geographical location, ability, language, and perspective in the authors of the daily prayers,” said Anita Brinkman, who helped pull the 40 days of prayer together. “Twelve of the prayers are in 10 languages other than English, each with an English translation provided. We have writers from their teens to well past retirement. It’s our hope that these prayers will help to guide us all into God’s presence as we come together to pray for the Christian Reformed Church.”

Hoekema hopes that this buffet of prayer opportunities will help CRC members across the globe join together in prayer during this important week. Whether it is corporate prayer during a worship service, dedicated prayer during a time of personal devotions, or watching a daily video on social media, all of these prayer efforts can help us properly center our attention on God and discerning God’s will for the Christian Reformed Church.

To learn more or to sign up for any of these opportunities, visit crcna.org/synod/prayer. Those interested in participating in the on-campus, pre-synod prayer gathering are asked to register because space will be limited. Hoekema noted that room and meal costs will be covered by donations, but participants are responsible for their own transportation.

— Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
CRC Communications

Faith Alive's most popular children's ministry curriculum!



- ✓ Loved by Kids
- ✓ Distinctly Reformed
- ✓ Nurtures Faith
- ✓ Valued by Leaders



Dwell is a vibrant, faith-nurturing curriculum grounded in the Reformed tradition. It's used by children's ministries across denominations. It actively engages kids at every level from preschool through grade 8 using games, dramatic storytelling, colorful student pieces and fun activities.

dwell **DIGITAL** A subscription to *Dwell Digital* gives leaders convenient access to all 360 lessons of the *Dwell* curriculum from any device. So if you team-teach or need that last-minute substitute, *Dwell Digital* makes planning and preparing easy. **And CRC's get it free!**



Call 800.333.8300 or visit DwellCurriculum.org to learn more and download 10 free sessions.

The Rock Cycle

GOD IS A GREAT RECYCLER. When God said in Genesis, “Let dry ground appear,” God created solid, recyclable material. Do you know what I’m talking about?

Rocks! Rocks are being recycled all the time—just really, really slowly.

It doesn’t matter where you start the recycling process, so let’s start with a volcanic explosion! When the magma (underground) or lava (aboveground) cools, it creates what we call igneous rocks. Granite is a good example. It usually has three colors: pink, black, and white. The white is quartz, the black is mica, and the pink is feldspar.

The volcano explodes and cools, and time passes.

This igneous rock sits on the earth’s surface for a long time. It heats up, it cools down, it gets wet, it gets blasted by the wind, waves crash against it, ice forms on it, and time passes.

Pieces of granite get smaller and smaller and smaller until eventually we’re left with sand. If you look closely at a piece of sand, it might look like a miniature granite stone. This granite sand gets washed away by rain or a creek to a river to the sea, where it settles at the bottom of the ocean.

And time passes.

Layers of the granite sand start piling up—layer upon layer upon layer. A lot of pressure builds up on the bottom layer.

And time passes.

Finally, the bottom layer of granite sand is under so much pressure that it forms a rock. This rock is called sandstone. It is a sedimentary rock. You can often identify sedimentary rock by observing its layers.

But wait, there’s more! This layer of rock is moving—ever so

slowly—deeper into the earth. It can be pushed down by other layers, or it can get heated up by magma. It slowly, slowly, slowly moves to an area with more pressure and more heat.

And time passes.

The sandstone, which was sand, which was granite, which was lava or magma, has moved to a place with so much heat and pressure that it changes again! This time it becomes a metamorphic rock called quartzite. The bits of granite combine to form one rock with no layers.

And time passes.

The quartzite continues to be pushed deeper and deeper and deeper into the earth’s crust. It becomes hotter and hotter and hotter until it melts, becoming magma once again.

And time passes.

The magma moves slowly under the earth’s crust until it finds an opening. It rushes out the opening, and the magma that was quartzite that was sandstone that was sand that was granite that was magma becomes lava again. It all starts and ends with an explosion!

God creates rocks to move through the rock cycle. From igneous to sedimentary to metamorphic and back again—it is an amazing process! God truly is an amazing recycler! **B**



Albert Kok teaches eighth grade at Beacon Christian School in St. Catharines, Ont. He loves teaching science and exploring God’s order in creation as he hikes the Bruce Trail with his family.

Make Every Day Ascension Day

By Bob DeMoor

How does this make any sense? We go all out and celebrate Christmas, the beginning of Christ's humiliation. We commemorate how he "made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). To a lesser degree we also celebrate Good Friday and Easter, when Christ passed through the depths of hell and broke the cruel bonds of death. What we do not celebrate so much anymore is Ascension Day, the day on which Christ ascended into heaven and was enthroned at God's right hand. Go figure. We celebrate his humbling even unto death. We celebrate the turnaround from humiliation to exaltation, when Christ burst death's cruel bonds, all the while recognizing that Christ places that exaltation on pause for 40 days to regather his clueless, scattered disciples. But we largely ignore the crowning event of Jesus' ministry—pun intended. On Ascension Day Jesus took his seat at God's right hand as King of kings and Lord of lords. We let that pass with a yawn. Go figure.

In one of the last episodes of the Netflix series *The Crown*, Queen Elizabeth II realizes that at the celebration of her 50th year on the throne she will have to make a public appearance on the balcony of Buckingham Palace—this despite the fact that her popularity seems to be lower than that of Attila the Hun. She's tormented by the specter of watching the balcony doors swing open and stepping out onto the balcony only to find nary a soul to greet her except for the Queen's Guard and other troops paid overtime to show up.

Jesus had a similar worry: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Look around this planet. Who still takes Jesus' lordship seriously? Today the concept of

lordship seems to lurk only in Camelot movies and Monty Python sketches.

The Ascent of Ascension Day

What happened? Why has Ascension Day descended in stature among our liturgical celebrations? To gain some perspective, let's trace the trajectory of our commemoration of Jesus' ascent.

Ancient Canaanites observed a day for Baal's ascension to the throne. Baal was their god of rain, thunder, lightning, and fertility. Before growing season, Canaanites would sacrifice their first-born babies in fire and engage in orgies to celebrate Baal's yearly enthronement. It seemed to work. In the spring, rain would show up fairly often, making the worshipers assume that Baal must be, once again, ever-so-snugly reseated on his throne.

Bible scholars are divided about whether Israelites observed enthronement rituals for Yahweh. While it's clear from Psalm 47 that they routinely celebrated God's kingship over the world, there really wasn't a coronation to speak of. That's because Yahweh was known to be always on the throne. God didn't need to ascend to it. Nor did he ever descend from it.

Psalm 2 does mention enthronement, but of David, and later, the New Testament alludes to it in reference to Jesus. The prophets share this vision of a double fulfillment: in the near future another Davidic king will take the throne; in the far future the messianic king from David's lineage will.

Luke tells us in Acts 1 that the response to Jesus' enthronement by the graciously regathered disciples was underwhelming—a big "Huh?" They just stared heavenward until two angels came to tell them to stop rubbernecking and to wait for Jesus to send them the Holy Spirit so they could proclaim Christ's kingship to

the whole planet. After all, that's what Jesus had just emphasized to them: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18-19).

The apostle Paul makes a big deal about Jesus' enthronement: "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Phil. 2:9-10). Then Paul applies that incredible event directly to our everyday lives: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

There's not much direct evidence that the early church celebrated Ascension Day, although several of the church fathers mention that the practice goes all the way back to the time of the apostles themselves. What is clear is that, already in the third century, Christian churches celebrated the 50-day festival of Easter, in which Ascension Day was observed on the 40th day. Eastern and Western churches are a bit out of sync given the different calendars they use for observing Easter Sunday.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has carried on the tradition, calling its celebration "Analepsis," or "taking up." They highlight it because in Jesus' ascension they saw the completion of Christ's redemptive work for us. That's fine, but in our humble opinion as Reformed folk, that still doesn't do quite enough to recognize Jesus as not only our Savior but also our Lord.

The Ups and Downs of Ascension Day

The Reformers, including John Calvin, weren't so excited about Ascension Day. For that matter, they weren't so excited about celebrating Easter or Christmas either. They opined that

we should not bind ourselves to any specific church calendar, especially not one laid down by the Roman church hierarchy. Churches should be freed from any such “paper popes” and focus worship wherever the Spirit leads on any given (Sun)day. More importantly, the events celebrated on these days should be equally celebrated every day of the year. The Reformers resisted the common notion that by celebrating such feasts we’d done our bit and could now safely stow all that they signified away for another year, along with the Santa suits and Easter baskets.

But don’t misunderstand: despite this allergy to these liturgical “high days,” the Reformers were passionate about proclaiming, teaching, and living out Christ’s ascension. The Heidelberg Catechism, for one, has some amazing Lord’s Days on the topic (look them up!). It’s just that the Reformers didn’t want to get pushed around by ecclesiastical big shots, thank you very much.

The Synod of Dort was more amenable to celebrating liturgical holidays. It commended the practice of gathering the faithful for worship on feast days, but it did so by concession, arguing that it wouldn’t hurt to deflect the citizenry from idle pursuits on these civic holidays. Better to have them warm their hearts in church than to cool their heels in the bars.

Over the next few centuries, the celebration of Ascension Day in Reformed circles continued to gather steam. It became common practice. The faithful would gather in respectable numbers. That was until a half-century ago. Attendance has declined so rapidly that most churches, seeing the writing on the wall, moved the liturgical celebration of Christ’s enthronement from Thursday to the Sunday after.

The Reformers
were passionate
about
proclaiming,
teaching, and
living out Christ’s
ascension.

Sadly, many churches, including many in the Reformed tradition, now take no note of the occasion at all. Our kids know when Christmas is; gifts under the tree, lots of treats, and time away from school do an amazing job of refreshing their memory. Our kids also still know a bit about Easter from Easter bunnies and egg hunts. But Ascension Day? Nada. Not a clue. All they have to mark the occasion might be the odd Sunday school lesson with an illustration showing nothing more than the ascending Christ’s feet as the Savior passes through the top of the frame into the clouds.

How Now?

Given the present state of this planet, it’s probably more important than ever to realize, celebrate, proclaim, and broadcast Christ’s lordship anywhere and everywhere. That’s especially true when we realize the message of Oliver Wendell Holmes’ sobering limerick is still bang on:

God’s plan had a hopeful beginning,
but man spoiled his chances

by sinning.

We trust that the story
will end in God’s glory.

But at present the other
side’s winning.

To my mind, it wouldn’t make sense to turn back the clock and try to go back to Ascension Thursday worship services: been there, done that. But, Reformers’ protestations notwithstanding, I believe it’s still a good practice to roll with the liturgical calendar and make a point of celebrating Ascension Sunday—not out of obligation to ecclesiasts, to be sure, but just because God’s Spirit makes us want to. So why not celebrate?

On Ascension Sunday, let’s not just celebrate that Jesus is Lord, but remind ourselves *how* Jesus is Lord. The gospel assures us that the kingdom of God has already come, that it is among us. The risen Christ has already begun to reign, and much of that reign is hidden like yeast working through dough. But evidence of that deep-down work of the Spirit shows up all around us. And where it does, let’s show and tell. Let’s celebrate it. Ascension Sunday and the weeks around it are as good a time as any to highlight it.

To make the theme of that service concrete, consider:

- » inviting a principal or teacher from a Christian day school to tag-team on the sermon by laying out succinctly how our world-and-life-view matters in discipling our kids to follow Jesus daily in their tech-saturated lives.
- » allowing a professor from a Christian college or a medical doctor to show how we keep scientific and intellectual thought captive to Christ.
- » asking a representative of a Christian nonprofit, advocacy group,

labor union, pro-life agency, or other Christ-committed organization to lay out where they see Jesus' glorious and gentle reign pop up in the lives of those who are exploited, discarded, or just ignored by the rest of us.

- » planning a joint worship service with a church made up of Indigenous, Latino, or Asian believers and enjoying the riches of our diversity in our unity and unity in our diversity.

In tandem with a celebration of Jesus' enthronement during the service itself, plan some events for the week running up to it:

- » Put on a church-based event inviting the Christian artists in your church or community to display their work in the sanctuary, lobby, or fellowship hall.
- » Offer a *Discover Your Gifts* seminar (check out Eph. 4:7-8).
- » Organize a ministries fair inviting ministry groups to set up displays and exhibits, with a pot of coffee and boxes of fresh donuts available (faith and food make a great combination, as the Bible keeps showing us).
- » Dream up an event to highlight Christian education and interact with students.
- » Schedule a social action/justice event everyone can get involved in, like a letter-writing party asking your politicians to advocate for a pressing societal issue.
- » Provide a stewardship seminar to remind us that Jesus is Lord over every dime in our purses.
- » Plan an outreach event in tandem with a church plant in your community.

Make Every Day Ascension Day

Rethinking Ascension Day is fine. But it will only be window dressing unless we heed the Reformers' solemn caution: we need to celebrate Christ's enthronement every day.

But how?

The angels' message to those Galilean rubbernecks gives us an important clue: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

What we are to give witness to is not just a baby in a manger, a Savior on the cross, or a risen Shepherd regathering his sheep to turn them into shepherds. We are to bear witness to King Jesus, the Crown Prince of all creation, who has already inaugurated the peaceable kingdom of divine justice tempered with heaven-sent mercy and grace.

We once took that seriously in our congregations. We began Christian schools. We set up institutions of higher learning. We asked them not just to equip our youngsters to get good jobs, but to engage them in the important task of making every thought captive to Christ, and in the process equipping them to become better roommates, parents, friends, church leaders, and citizens. We began Christian organizations, seeking to follow Christ in the workplace, the marketplace, prisons, and voting booths.

Sadly, we're not witnessing a decline only of Ascension Day observance, but also of the kingdom vision to which we are called all year long. In many ways we no longer have that Spirit-led eye on the ball. In an age when the world's empires clearly demonstrate they have no good answers to the world's problems, we need to witness powerfully to that thoroughly biblical

reality of our ascended Lord. But we instead are allowing ourselves to backslide into fundamentalist irrelevance where we major in minors—what our Reformed tradition rightly calls "disputable matters." Our focus has turned inward. We proclaim Jesus as Savior. We neglect to proclaim him as Lord. So we ignore the devilishly difficult but delightful everyday challenges of living as subjects of the King of kings and inviting our neighbors to do the same.

In that Netflix episode of *The Crown*, Queen Elizabeth does step out onto the balcony at Buckingham Palace, but not into the nightmare she feared most. Instead, she's overwhelmed and deeply touched by the massive, adoring crowd stretching as far as the eye can see. And suddenly she's flanked by her family joining in the enthusiastic tribute to Her Majesty's half-century on the throne.

When Jesus returns, may it be so for him. He deserves it. 



Bob De Moor is a retired Christian Reformed pastor living in Edmonton, Alta.

1. What is your experience with Ascension Day observance in the church? Did you attend many Ascension Day services? Has Ascension Day observance declined?
2. Which of the author's suggestions for celebrating Ascension Day piqued your interest? Why?

READ MORE ONLINE

3 Strategies to Know When Seeking a New Pastor

The questions
on past
congregational
surveys
surprised me.

I RECENTLY SERVED on the pastoral search committee at my church. An initial task for our team was to determine what kind of person the congregation wanted as a pastor. The questions on past congregational surveys surprised me. Our congregation had been asked about their comfort level with categories such as marital status, age, first language, and disability. There was no ill intent in these questions, but what the congregation didn't know was that you simply can't discriminate against potential employees based on any of these categories without a very good reason.

As churches consider selection criteria for leadership candidates, they should consider the value of having a diverse leadership team. Many churches look for candidates who are squeaky-clean, middle-aged or older, and married (preferably with children). They also seem to favor those who speak English well and understand the congregational culture. A quick review of biblical examples, though, shows us that God didn't use the same criteria to choose leaders. When considering the 8-year-old king (2 Chron. 34:1) and the fierce female judge (Judges 4:4), it's safe to say that the church often has much more stringent standards for leaders than God did. Churches should take a close look at their leaders and ask themselves: Are we as diverse and inclusive as we can be, allowing us to draw and retain a diverse congregation?

Still, there might be times when you have to be selective. Is there a way for a congregation to legally and ethically rule out candidates based on certain demographics? Absolutely. Allow me to give you three strategies.

1. You must determine what candidate criteria are actually required for a pastor to effectively do their job. Because a pastor will minister to a Christian Reformed congregation, your church has every right

to hire only pastors ordained in the Christian Reformed Church. And because the position involves preaching, pastoring, and mentorship, ability and language requirements should be among the selection criteria.

2. You must clearly state legitimate selection criteria when advertising a position. Legitimate criteria are called BFORs, or "bona fide occupational reasons," and they're just what they sound like. If you have a genuine reason to be selective based on the requirements of the role, the law protects your ability to do so. But a church can't just "know" it has reasons. The job description needs to provide a clear explanation of the selection criteria and the required tasks that explain their purpose.
3. You must be up front and transparent about the job description and BFORs before candidates apply. This is of particular importance when considering the denomination's recent human sexuality report and its impact on your leadership criteria. While it might be somewhat painful for a candidate to realize they don't qualify, it's much easier for everyone if the candidates determine this on their own rather than being told they don't qualify after they've applied.

If the application and hiring process isn't done well, churches are at risk of consequences such as negative press and discrimination lawsuits. More importantly, churches might be hurting interested candidates. Churches must demonstrate that they are safe, caring, and inclusive places for the wonderfully diverse people God created. When we must exclude, we must also demonstrate sensitivity, both to protect the church and those who are thinking about joining us. 



Carolyn Wadsworth is a registered nurse living in Brooks, Alta. She operates Carworth Consulting, working alongside charities and businesses to support legislation and best practice alignment through advice, education, and support.

4 Ways to Avoid Clobbering Others With Our Prayers

When we make our prayers weapons—not against the enemy, but against one another—then we have stepped outside of what Jesus calls us to in prayer.



Jon Hoekema is from Bolingbrook, Ill. He is a bivocational pastor who serves Horizon Community Church and is a prayer shepherd for the Christian Reformed Church.

I VAGUELY REMEMBER once sitting around the dinner table as a child after the family meal and my dad asking me to close in prayer. My brother and I were two years apart, and, like brothers, we got into it once in a while. So I prayed, “God, help Jim to be nice to me.” And then Jim interrupted: “God, help Jon to be nice to me first.”

Those prayers weren’t really meant for God to hear, but rather to get another jab at the other in our ongoing squabble. We might excuse a couple of kids who pray that prayer at the dinner table because they haven’t quite learned that prayer is not for calling others out but for seeking the presence of God in our lives. But maybe we adults need to return to that lesson. When we make our prayers weapons—not against the enemy, but against one another—we have stepped outside of what Jesus calls us to in prayer.

Jesus’ Warnings About Prayer

Jesus teaches us to pray, but he also gives us some warnings about how not to pray.

In Matthew 6:5, before teaching the Lord’s Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns against praying like the hypocrites, who posture themselves to be seen by others. These are people who make sure everyone knows they seem to have prayer figured out.

And in Luke 18:11-12, Jesus warns us not to be like the self-righteous Pharisee who thanks God that he has it all figured out and makes sure everyone knows it.

As we read these two warnings about prayer, our reaction is most likely, “I don’t do that.”

But instead of seeing ourselves as the ones who actually get it right—the one who doesn’t pray to show off for everyone and the one who humbly begs, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner”—maybe we should ask the searching



question, “How do I pray like the hypocrite and the Pharisee?”

When my prayers are self-focused, self-centered, and all about me and getting my way, then my prayers are in the realm of those prayed by the hypocrite and Pharisee.

When we ask God to do what we want God to do instead of praying “Your will be done,” then our prayers have become manipulative.

Our prayers become weapons against one another when we seek to make a point to the person we are praying for and with instead of seeking God’s grace and love to be at work.

In any conflict between people, whether it is between friends going through a challenging time, a marriage argument, a church council disagreement, or our denominational conversation about human sexuality, it is easy to unknowingly turn our prayers into weapons to use against one another.

On the surface, our prayers might seem like good prayers:

“God, help us to uphold the centrality of your Word.”

“God, help us to boldly obey your Word.”



“God, lead us to be more loving to the world around us.”

“God, help us to forgive as you forgive us.”

In and of themselves, these are important requests to pray. But in the argument of the day, whether it is in friendship, marriage, church council, or our denominational conversation, we can easily guess which side the praying person might have come from and the point they were trying to make to the other.

How, Then, Do We Pray?

If prayer is seeking the face of God and God’s transforming presence, how do we pray so we don’t posture ourselves in an argument, so we don’t portray that we’re the ones who have it all figured out, so we don’t clobber each other with our prayers?

Pray as Jesus taught us to pray. Pray the Lord’s Prayer. Pray it not just in rote recitation, but with the rhythm of what Jesus teaches.*

Reverence: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Jesus teaches us to begin our prayers by focusing not on ourselves, but on God. We are to seek God’s presence, to seek God’s face. When we spend significant time in prayer praising God for

who God is and thanking God for what God has done, it begins to shape us.

We often quickly jump over this part to get to our requests, but when we linger in the presence of God, when we focus on the incomprehensible triune God, when we recognize in thankfulness all that God has done, it tunes our hearts to sing God’s praise.

Response: Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

When we catch glimpses of the greatness and glory of God, we quickly realize that God is God and we are not. That seems obvious, but sin continuously tries to put us in God’s place and God in our place. So we pray, in submission to God’s goodness and greatness, that God’s will be done.

It takes humility to recognize that we have little control of this world, our denomination, our churches, or even our own lives. But when we pray in submission to God, we recognize our limitations, our lack of understanding of the full story, and our complete dependence on God.

Requests: Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Out of the understanding that God is God and we are not, we then bring our requests to God with a transformed perspective. We can ask God to be at work in our lives, in our relationships, in our conflicts, and in this world, with the posture that God sits on God’s throne, high and exalted, and that though we are limited in our understanding, God wants to hear our heart.

We bring our requests after our prayers of reverence and response, when we are transformed by who God is. Our abiding with God informs our asking. Our prayers are then guided by God.

Readiness: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

When we pray this part of the Lord’s Prayer, we recognize our own inability to overcome the sin we face in our daily lives. We must trust our welfare to the one who has overcome sin and death already and is doing so in our lives as well.

When it comes to our arguments, conflicts, and divisions, this prayer is vitally important as we seek not to use prayer as a club to clobber others. We are asking God to deliver us from using prayer as a weapon against one another, such as by asking God to “deliver us from *this* evil.”

Trusting the Result to God

When we seek God and experience God’s transformational presence, we are changed at the deepest level. Our posture isn’t about being right; it is about God’s glory. And when it is about God’s glory in the church and in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:21), then we can hold our requests loosely, trusting in the One who is head of the church. **B**

* The rhythm of the Lord’s Prayer as *Reverence, Response, Request, and Readiness* comes from Daniel Henderson’s book *Transforming Prayer: How Everything Changes When You Seek the Face of God* (Bethany House, 2011).

1. Recount an incident when you experienced a prayer that was used as a weapon against someone. How did you feel? Why did you think it was inappropriate?
2. Besides the Lord’s Prayer framework suggested by the author, what other prayer frameworks or guides have you used? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

READ MORE ONLINE

5 AAPI Children's Books My Kids Love

Over the years, a few titles have become favorites.

AS A KOREAN AMERICAN mother of two, I've made it a priority to fill our shelves at home with children's books celebrating Asian American and Pacific Islander stories and cultures.

Over the years, a few titles have become favorites. Here are five books my children ask to read over and over again.

***Bee-bim Bop!*, by Linda Sue Park, illustrated by Ho Baek Lee**

A little girl helps her mother prepare the iconic Korean dish bibimbap, from shopping for ingredients to setting the table. Newbery Medalist Linda Sue Park's fun rhymes and onomatopoeia and Ho Baek Lee's illustrations bring the process to life while also capturing the precious bonds of family. Recipe included!

***Goldy Luck and the Three Pandas*, by Natasha Yim, illustrated by Grace Zong**

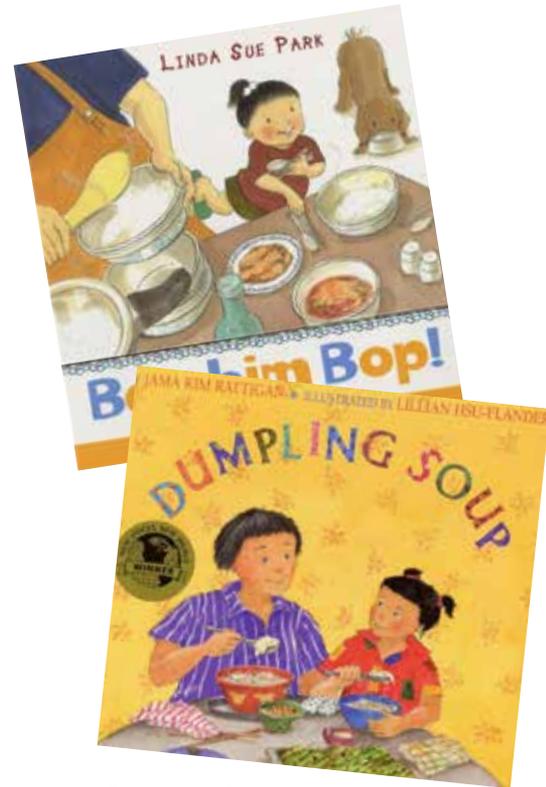
After a series of unlucky events befalls her at the Chans' house, can Goldy Luck help make things right with her panda neighbors in time for the Chinese New Year? Natasha Yim's eye for cultural details, along with a satisfying resolution, make this an excellent adaptation of the classic Goldilocks story.

***Tiptoe Tapirs*, by Hanmin Kim**

Long ago, the animals were not quiet like they are today. They were very loud! All except for Little Tapir and Tapir. When a hunter comes to shoot the animals, Little Tapir's quiet courage saves the life of a leopard—and perhaps even the whole jungle. Accompanied by unique watercolor illustrations, author Hanmin Kim champions the power of gentleness.



Sara Kyoungah White is a copy editor for Christianity Today. She lives in Grand Rapids, Mich.

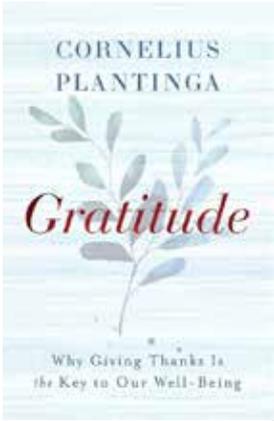


***Dumpling Soup*, by Jama Kim Rattigan, illustrated by Lillian Hsu-Flanders**

On the island of Oahu, Hawaii, the Yang family is gathering to celebrate the new year, and it's Marisa's first time helping to make dumpling soup—but she just can't seem to get it right. Will her grandma, cousins, aunts, and uncles like her dumplings? This story by Jama Kim Rattigan captures the bustle and warmth of a family gathering while also celebrating the small but significant milestones of childhood.

***Yoko*, by Rosemary Wells**

When Yoko brings sushi to school for lunch, her classmates tease her. But Rosemary Wells' Yoko is not afraid to take on the difficulties of showing how to respect one another's differences in the classroom, and its tender conclusion is not to be missed. For those who want more, check out the other books in the Yoko series. 



Gratitude: Why Giving Thanks Is the Key to Our Well-Being

By Cornelius Plantinga

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Throughout his insightful, accessible exploration of gratitude, Cornelius Plantinga reiterates the amazing fact that “gratitude is the single best predictor of human well-being.”

Plantinga’s questions touch on the realities people face: “Why does Scripture put such a premium on gratitude—urging it, commanding it, making a sacred duty out of it? ... How can I seriously thank God when the world seems so awful?” However, when there are numerous reasons to give thanks to God, Plantinga urges readers to consider asking ourselves, “What’s it like to savor and celebrate them?” and “How might I keep a record of my thanks for them?”

Not surprisingly, reading *Gratitude* stimulated this reader’s gratitude for God’s amazing grace and God’s world of wonders beyond counting. (Brazos Press)



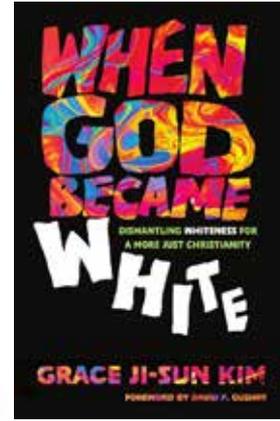
The Brothers Sun

Reviewed by Daniel Jung

Michelle Yeoh is everywhere these days, including on the Netflix series *The Brothers Sun*. Yeoh plays Eileen “Mama” Sun, an immigrant single mom raising her son, Bruce (Sam Song Li), in a quaint suburb of Los Angeles. But Mama Sun is not Bruce’s only parent, and Bruce discovers that his estranged brother and father run the most powerful crime syndicate in Taipei.

The Brothers Sun captures the struggle between family loyalty and personal liberty. Both brothers struggle with their identities as they navigate how to be loyal to the expectations of their parents or follow the dreams of their own hearts.

Mama Sun is clearly the head honcho. In a patriarchal society—both fictional and actual—Yeoh continues to rewrite the narrative for Asian Americans in Hollywood. (Rated TV-MA for violence and language.)



When God Became White: Dismantling Whiteness for a More Just Christianity

By Grace Ji-Sun Kim

Reviewed by Mary Li Ma

Korean Canadian theologian Grace Ji-Sun Kim sets out to “unpack the origins of whiteness and its implications for the church, Christianity, and theology.” From immigrating to being educated in a white school environment and converting to Christianity at a white Christian church, Kim witnessed a wide display of white identity and its privileges. She sees a need to “renegotiate justice by making this privilege visible to everyone and dismantling it.”

In recent years, many theologians have published books with a similar goal of reflecting on the white privilege of Christian churches. What makes this book stand out is Kim’s critique of white Western missionaries to other parts of the world during the era of colonialism.

This book is essential reading for a more whole and just future. (IVP)

The Lowdown

Beyond Ethnic Loneliness: Having grown up as an Indian American immigrant in white Southern culture, Prasanta Verma unpacks the exhausting effects of cultural isolation and how our places of exile can become places of belonging—to ourselves, to others, and to God. (IVP)

He Restored Sight to Millions: *Sight* traces Dr. Ming Wang’s journey from growing up facing persecution in communist China to becoming one of the leading eye surgeons in America and developing an innovative technology that has restored sight to millions of people. Starring Terry Chen and Greg Kinnear. (PG-13, Angel Studios; in theaters May 24)

Based on the Book: Based on the 2016 novel by Amor Towles, *A Gentleman in Moscow* is set against the backdrop of post-Revolutionary Russia, where Count Alexander Rostov is stripped of his title and material wealth and placed under house arrest for life in a grand Moscow hotel. Starring Ewan MacGregor. (Paramount Plus with Showtime)

Camino Ghosts: In John Grisham’s third Camino Island book, bookstore owner Bruce Cable reunites with Mercer Mann for another island mystery. A large real estate developer has his eye on an almost-deserted island between Florida and Georgia. All that stands in his way is the last living resident. (Penguin Random House, May 28)

Does God Always Accept Deathbed Conversions?

Many treat conversion as little more than a magic spell, like a “get out of jail free” card played at a crucial moment in a losing game.



Michael Wagenman is the Christian Reformed campus minister at Western University in London, Ont., where he invites undergraduate students to put their faith into loving service and mentors graduate students. His most recent book is *The Power of the Church: The Sacramental Ecclesiology of Abraham Kuyper* (Wipf & Stock, 2020).

MANY WEBSITES CONTAIN lists of people who are said to have converted to Christianity shortly before their deaths. Sometimes these stories are corroborated by relatives and friends. The truth of these stories are sometimes debated because both believers and non-believers sometimes use them to advance a religious or philosophical agenda.

Wikipedia, for example, mentions the debate about Charles Darwin’s deathbed conversion to Christianity. Those who take a dogmatic position in the “faith vs. science” debate can rally around and use his contested story one way or another.

I find the question of deathbed conversions unsettling. The topic is often engaged in an abstract and depersonalized way. But what if we reflect on how it might relate to a particular person’s fate before God?

Take your beloved grandmother as an example. Her rejection of God’s grace and the other choices in her life might have been for you a source of so much pain and misery. You’ve spent decades praying for her, pleading with her, and patiently hoping for her to experience the living God. All through the cancer treatments, it seemed that she was becoming even more bitter in her rejection of faith. But then, at almost the last moment, you witness a change of heart, a deep grief about the pain she has caused, and a desire to embrace the forgiveness and hope of Jesus. You are elated, even while you also know the heartbreak of this not happening earlier.

Could her change of heart have been a charade—a trick to comfort you in her dying days? It’s possible. Many treat conversion as little more than a magic spell, like a “get out of jail free” card played at a crucial moment in a losing game. Some might scheme that

a quick prayer with their dying breath could tip the scales of eternity in their favor. Some might think it’s a safe gamble, whatever the stories might be afterward.

But believing that we can outstrategize God with our cunning wouldn’t be a deathbed conversion. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it “cheap grace.” When it comes to the renewal God works by grace in the rebellious human heart, it is entirely God’s doing. We only respond—like taking a breath after CPR has been administered. Conversion isn’t really something that we do; it is always a free gift from God that we can only receive.

So what exactly are we seeking when we ponder this question? Are we looking for certainty, for ourselves or our loved ones (or our enemies)? Are we looking for a guarantee beyond the covenant grace and faithfulness of God? Are we struggling to trust God with another person’s life—or our own? Faith means being humble before God and acknowledging that God and God’s grace will accomplish the good God intends for us and our world. It’s not something we can ultimately figure out.

What we’re really grappling with in this question, I think, is God’s offensiveness. When we don’t live in grace, when we believe that everyone must pay their share, when we assume there’s no free lunch, when we must have ultimate control over our lives, then the idea of God’s boundless grace becomes a stumbling block—How could God accept *them*? How could God ignore everything they’ve done?—until, of course, we find ourselves in that place of last resort, with nowhere else to turn but to God. Then don’t we all want a God like the one we come to know in Jesus, one who will even take a thief on a cross with him, through a dying gasp, into paradise? **B**

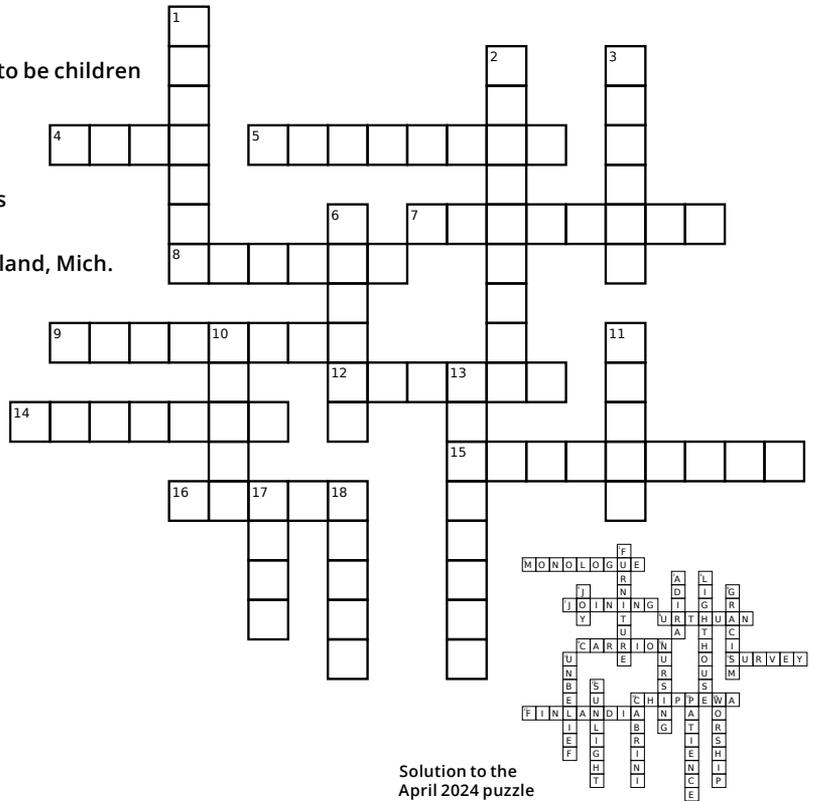
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions next month.
 (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

Down

1. A ruling of the Alabama Supreme Court declared _____ to be children
2. _____ is the newest book by Cornelius Plantinga
3. The scroll Jesus read from in Luke 4
6. The state where Joel Kiekintveld serves
10. Where the Missional Training Center, Calvin Seminary's new partner, is located
11. One of the cultures of the Cambodian Fellowship in Holland, Mich.
13. One of two items that will help us be better Christian witnesses
17. She leads Resonate's Go Local ministry
18. _____ traces Dr. Ming Wang's journey to becoming one of America's leading eye surgeons

Across

4. Legitimate selection criteria when posting a job
5. Sara _____ White wrote about Asian children's books
7. Greetings are too _____, according to Ken Nydam
8. Going _____ is one sign of a reimagined church
12. Annual conference hosted by Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary
14. The CRCNA's prayer shepherd
15. The day Jesus went up to heaven
16. Author of *The Four Loves*



Solution to the April 2024 puzzle

FAITH
 PRACTICES



HOLY HABITS THAT HELP US
 LOVE GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOR.
 LISTEN TO THE SPIRIT.
 AND BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS

New
 Resource!

Explore ways to draw closer to God in everyday life through this new and practical introduction to faith practices.

**Purchase your copy today at
 Faith Alive Christian Resources!**

faithaliveresources.org



DEADLINES: Ads for the June issue are due May 3, 2024; July/August issue: June 4, 2024. Subject to availability. Details online at thebanner.org/classifieds, or for display ads see thebanner.org/ads. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

PRICES: Most ads are \$0.45^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.38^{US} per character and \$65 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

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

Congregational Announcements

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.

Denominational Announcements

CALL TO SYNOD The council of Lee St CRC, Wyoming, Michigan, calls all delegates to Synod 2024, elected by their respective classes, to meet virtually for the convening session on Wednesday, May 29, at 7:00 p.m. EDT; followed by the in-person meeting in the chapel on the campus of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on Friday, June 14, at 8:15 a.m.

All area CRC members are invited to join the delegates in worship at the synodical Service of Prayer and Praise on Sunday evening, June 16, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. at Lee St CRC, 1261 Lee Street SW, Wyoming, Mich.

All CRC churches across the continent are requested to remember the deliberations of synod in their intercessory prayers on Sunday, June 9, and Sunday, June 16.

Church Positions Available

COORDINATOR/YOUTH PASTOR- Calvary CRC in Orange City, Iowa, is seeking a coordinator or pastor to oversee youth ministries, enhance congregational life, and preach as educated/gifted. Duties may include, but are not limited to youth meetings, service trips, counseling, as well as leading worship services. For more information, please contact Wayne Huisman at wayne@huismanglobal.com.

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 crosspoint-tillsonburg.com or email us at search@crosspointtillsonburg.com

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 the Lead Pastor to shepherd God's flock to assist with some preaching, pastoral care, youth ministries and outreach. Please contact Jack Huttinga at prjackhu@gmail.com.

FULL-TIME PASTOR Ideal Park CRC Wyoming, MI. We have been a mission church since 1961. Currently we are an older congregation, but we have a young community to reach. Our Gems and Cadet program is flourishing and made up entirely of neighborhood kids. We are seeking a pastor to help us grow in our faith and help us minister to our community. Please consider this calling and contact Dave Thacker at dthacker731@gmail.com

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

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.

Church Anniversary

CHURCH ANNIVERSARY 75 YEARS

AYLMER CRC, ON will be celebrating the 75th anniversary of God's faithfulness D.V. the weekend of June 1 & 2/24. Come join us for Saturday June 1st breakfast/games/tea-room and evening program with a special service on Sunday followed by a picnic. For further details, please contact the church office at 519-773-3025/office@aylmercrc.org.

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@maranathacrcwoodstock.com

Obituaries



BUURMA, KATHLEEN (BOSMA) age 88, from Northbridge, MA, passed away peacefully on March 5, 2024. She is survived by her children Robin Cunningham, Russell Buurma, Phillip (Kristin) Buurma, Bonnie (Scot) Olthof

and Thomas Buurma. Her brothers Melvin (Gayle) Bosma, Henry (Linda) Bosma and Leonard (Gwen) Bosma. She had 12 Grandchildren and 11 Great-grandchildren. 2 Timothy 4:6-7



JOHNSON, HELGA (HEERLING) age 82, passed away peacefully at home on Thursday, March 21, 2024. Helga is survived by her husband Gene; 2 sons Mark (Jody) and Scott, 4 grandchildren: Elan, Stefan, Shelby, and

Shane; sister Renate Parker; and brother Rainer Heerling. Her family is grateful for a long life filled with love, service, and generosity.



KOOL, SHARON KAY 84 of Melfa, Virginia passed away on October 24, 2023, surrounded by family at her home. She was born on April 1, 1939, in Muskegon, Michigan. Sharon is survived by her husband of 66 years,

John Kool, and their children: Renae (Dick) Feyer, Kristi (Jim) Harris, Cassie (Keith) Saagman, Ross (Kim) Kool and son-in-law, Todd Mangum. She was a sister to Ron (Mary) Boes. Sharon was also a grandmother to 16 grandchildren and great-grandmother to 23 great-grandchildren. Sharon was preceded in death by her parents, J.B. and Thelma Boes, and her daughter, Amy Kool Mangum. A memorial service is planned in Sharon's honor on June 15, 2024, in Norfolk, Virginia at Oceanview Christian Reformed Church. Condolences can be sent to John Kool at 28138 Fairway Drive, Melfa, VA 23410.

Employment

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTRIES Faith CRC of Pella, Iowa, is

searching for a full-time Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries. If you are interested in this position and would like more details, please contact office@faithcrcpella.org.

Products and Services

ABSOLUTELY BEST PRICES paid for religious books. Contact Credo Books, 1540 Pinnacle East SW, Wyoming, MI 49509, ph. (616) 249-9291. gvsbooks@gmail.com

CARING FOR AGING PARENTS? Visiting Angels has been providing in-home assisted living for over 20 years in West Michigan. Trish Borgdorff and her multitude of Angels offer meal prep, light housekeeping, transportation for errands and appointments, and joyful companionship. Whether you need a few hours a day or up to 24-hour care, for assisted independence in your home, call or text Visiting Angels at 616-243-7080.

I CAN LIST YOUR HOME FOR \$1000 OR 1.5%. 1992 Calvin grad will list your property using a Low Fee Business Model - full service, with savings. The system works! 160 closings in 2023, and over 125 lifetime Banner clients. We help clients buy properties as well. Contact Doug Takens of Independence Realty, 6801 Gettysburg, Hudsonville, 616-262-4574 or takens@sbcglobal.net

REMODELING? Call Ken DeVries today for a free estimate on windows or kitchen/bath renovation. 616-457-5880. Since 1985. www.homework-construction.com

Real Estate Sales / Rentals

ANNA MARIA ISLAND CONDOS Large pool, beach access, free WiFi, 1&2 Bedroom, 1 block to beach. \$900-\$1200 a week. Contact Tim at 941-704-7525 redekercondosonami.com

COTTAGE 4 RENT 4 bed, 3 bath, updated. Sleeps 12, Hess Lake, MI, private waterfront. \$2,000/week. Call Lonnie 616-942-0048

FOR SALE 38FT REFLECTION HOUSE TRAILER IN PORT CHARLOT FLA. 2023 38ft used 3 months. 3 slides 2 awnings with sun screens kitchen island two air cond. 40' tv fireplace his & her closets queen bed large micro & lg frost free fridg many other upgrades, 15 pictures on request Lighted pantry with full size door New condition Two theater recliners hidea-bed couch \$61,500 Ph Jack 616.494.9414

NAPLES AREA, FL Gated 2 br. condo. Great pool. Easy access. Beautiful walking area. Vermuda Pointe Check internet Vanderbilt Lakes. By month 616.560.2895.

Advertising helps you connect with the CRC
616-224-5882
ads@thebanner.org

Hey Worship Leaders!

Did you know there is a place to connect with other CRC worship planners? A place to share resources, ask questions, and find encouragement? Look no further than **The Network** (crcna.org/network).

You'll find a vibrant community with an entire section dedicated to all things Worship!

Just in the past few weeks, your peers:

SHARED

- Training Videos for Sound Technicians
- Disability Awareness Slides

ASKED

- Does Contemporary Christian Music Imply Sin No Longer Matters?
- What Copyright Licenses Do I Need?

Get involved today! After all, ministry is more fun together.

Visit crcna.org/network

network

Explore. Connect. Experience.



MORE INFO

A Taste of Spain and Morocco:
From Tapas to Tagines
Oct 10 - Oct 21

2024 GUIDED ITINERARIES:

CAA\CALL STRATFORD FESTIVAL

Jun 25 - Jun 28 OR Sep 16 - Sep 19
Debra Freeberg & Gary Schmidt

ENGLAND: HERITAGE & COUNTRYSIDE EXPLORATION

Sep 11 - Sep 20 | *John & Rachel Witte*

ICELAND: THE COUNTRY OF FIRE & ICE

Sep 12 - Sep 24 | *Rick Treur*

CAA\CALL AUTUMN IN APPALACHIA - WOMEN'S TOUR

Oct 9 - Oct 16 | *Debra Freeberg*

A TASTE OF SPAIN AND MOROCCO: FROM TAPAS TO TAGINES

Oct 10 - Oct 21 | *Eric Kuhn & Mindy Miller*

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER & ADVENT MARKETS OF GERMANY

Nov 29 - Dec 9 | *Mark & Lori Vermaire*

2025 GUIDED ITINERARIES:

RHINE RIVER CRUISE

May 24 - Jun 4 | *Nate & Deb Barendse*

COMING SOON:

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS IN GREECE

Mar 28 - Apr 8 | *Dr. Jeffrey A. D. Weima*

SIGN UP TODAY!
wittetours.com/banner

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING ELSE?

Our Vacation Consultants can help you get wherever you want to go!

Visit wittetravel.com to get started.

witte Travel & Tours

Grand Rapids, MI | 616.957.8113

RENEWING HOPE IN EVERY STORY

STORIES often start small. Like 1000 days of healthy food and care to start a baby's life. But rarely do stories stay small.

When you give a gift to a mother and her child, you are changing the story of health for an entire family. Please give today.

Samita
MOTHER, KENYA

Give to a story:
worldrenew.net
worldrenew.ca



Would You Share Your Story?

If you want to be sure to get my attention, start telling a story.

STORIES ARE MY FAVORITE. They always have been, ever since the time my sister opened the land of fantasy and fiction by reading stories to me before I could read. She would entice me to keep walking on long hikes by telling fantastical stories of giant lollipops and a fountain of rainbows on the moon. Throughout my childhood we had regular read-alouds in the evenings instead of watching TV, and audiobooks kept the peace on long car trips. If you want to be sure to get my attention, start telling a story. Even if I'm in a different room, I'll tune in.

Have you noticed how stories are woven into our everyday lives? Ask someone a question, and they often respond with some kind of story. "How are you doing?" "Why are you here?" and "Have you ever seen such weather?" all set the stage for a short story to be shared. Friendship, C.S. Lewis said, is born at the moment when one person says to another, "What! You too? I thought I was the only one!" (*The Four Loves*). We get to know and understand others through their stories. Not only that, but we are encouraged, inspired, challenged, and instructed through stories.

It is no wonder that God repeatedly instructed the Israelites to tell their children the story of their deliverance from Egypt, to tell of their wandering in the wilderness and of God's covenant faithfulness. "We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. ... Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands" (Ps. 78:4, 7).

I have had the privilege of sitting down with different members of my congregation to hear their life and faith stories and then writing them up for the church newsletter. I have

heard about how God was faithful in the realities of World War II, what it was like to immigrate to Canada, the people that planted seeds of faith in their lives, and the songs and verses that brought them through hard times. These stories inspired me, encouraged me, made me laugh, and reminded me of the sovereignty of God in our lives.

Older people who might feel that our modern world is moving too fast: you still have so much to teach us about how to live. Open up to us the world you grew up in, so different from our own. Tell us about your experiences of joy, or about times you struggled but found that God was enough. Remind us that you've messed up too, and that there is always hope. Show us how you learned to live, love, and trust God.

As a younger person still figuring out life, I need to hear those stories. They remind me that I am not alone on this journey. My story as a Dutch Canadian girl homeschooled in Africa is quite different from others' stories. But it is in the sharing of stories that I realize how much I can learn from others and notice the shared emotions and experiences that make us human. Hearing about how God has been faithful to another teaches me to put my trust in God, as the psalmist puts it. **B**



Michelle VanderMeer lives in Whitby, Ont., and serves as the director of ministry and administration at Zion Christian Reformed Church.

Depression Screening

My doctor is a fine doctor. She is very conscientious and thorough.



Rod Hugen is a retired co-founder of the Village Church in Tucson, Ariz. He disciples and mentors young pastors and leaders on behalf of Classis Arizona of the Christian Reformed Church. He is author of *Parallels: A Lenten Devotional*.

OUR FAMILY DOCTOR had decided to do a routine depression screening as part of her examinations. The young receptionist handed me a clipboard with a sheet of questions. "Please answer these honestly," she said, "and if there are things you'd like to share with the doctor, let her know."

I answered the questions as honestly and thoroughly as I could. I handed the clipboard back to the receptionist and sat down. Eventually the tech called my name and escorted me to the examination room. Blood pressure: good. Blood sugar: steady. Pulse slightly high. Weight: let's not talk about weight. I steeled myself for the inevitable lecture.

My doctor is a fine doctor. She is very conscientious and thorough. She cares a lot about her patients. We've been with her for years and greatly appreciate her. Besides, she was the only primary care doctor who would accept our insurance and who was taking new patients when we moved to Tucson. I scanned my phone while I waited for her to appear in the examination room. An ad for a new diet regimen popped up on my newsfeed. Great.

Dr. Iveson walked in looking deeply concerned. "Hi, Rod. Are you doing OK?"

"I'm fine," I responded cheerily, hoping she hadn't noticed the weight thing. "Just here so you can try to find something wrong with me."

"I'm wondering about some of your responses to the depression screening," she murmured, "particularly that you often think about death and dying. Talk to me about that."

"Oh, well, I'm a pastor." I laughed. "We think and talk about life and death issues all the time. It's kind of part of the job description."

"Really? I thought that was the realm of counselors."

"It is. But people often talk to pastors about the big things of life, so it's a fairly common occurrence for me to engage the subjects."

She frowned. "I guess I don't know exactly what pastors do. I've never been to a church, so I don't really know what happens there. I assumed that you just talked about God and being a good person and things like that. I didn't realize you counseled people."

"Well, when you talk about God, you're talking about something transcendent. So we spend a lot of time exploring mystery and the unknown. People come to us to gain understanding about things that are beyond the scope of the visible, with questions about death, suffering, and what happens after we die. Christian pastors explore those things with people all the time. We particularly engage from the perspective of the Bible."

"Wow! Who knew? I guess I need to explore that more. That said, I wonder if you are mildly depressed. Perhaps a visit to a specialist would be in order. I can refer you to some excellent doctors."

She wrote the referral.

She then noted that I had put on some weight. That was depressing. **B**

How Can We Help?

You and your church now have three options for easier access to CRC ministries and resources.



Click

Search hundreds of resources from CRC ministries and churches.

Try it out at
crcna.org/Resources



Call

Got a ministry question but not sure who to call? We can help.

Give us a shout at
[800-272-5125](tel:800-272-5125)



Chat

Oh yeah, we chat too. Type and we'll type back.

Chat from any page at
crcna.org

If you have a ministry need and wonder if your denomination can help, just click, call, or chat.

We're here to serve.



**Christian
Reformed
Church**

inspired by hope

1 Thessalonians 1:3

A SUMMER CONFERENCE

July 12 - July 13, 2024

Gordon College, Wenham, MA

www.globalcoffeebreak.org/events



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Kevin DeRaaf



Dr. Sora Suh



Tim Sheridan

REGISTRATION BEGINS AT
\$75/PERSON

* LIMITED OVERNIGHT SPACE
REGISTER BY JUNE 15.



GLOBAL COFFEE BREAK
DISCOVERING TOGETHER

Resonate
GLOBAL MISSION