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JUNE 2024

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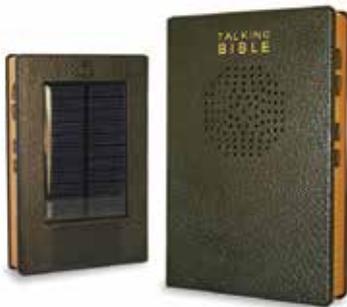
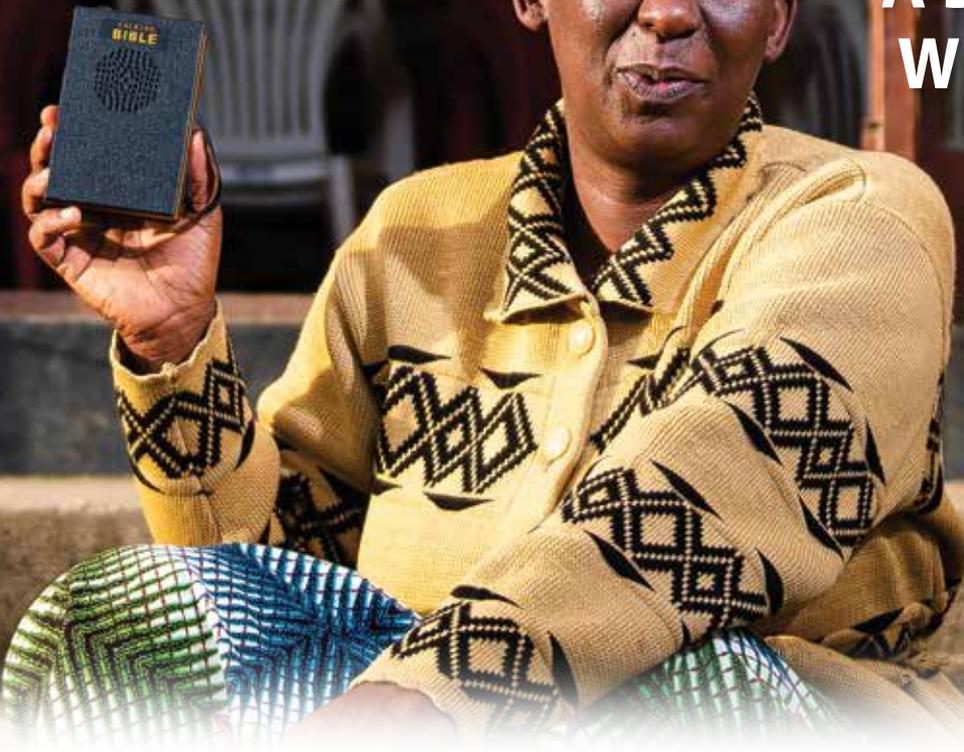


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PSALM 118:1



You Are Invited!



As the Christian Reformed Church prepares to move out of the denominational office building at the corner of Kalamazoo Ave. and 28th Street in Grand Rapids, we invite you to join us for a time of thanksgiving and worship. See how God has used this space for over 65 years, and join us in praising him for all that has taken place. All are welcome.

Thursday, June 27, 2024
Open House: 5:00pm - 7:00pm
Service of Thanksgiving: 6:00pm

1700 28th Street SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49508



BANNER

BY THE NUMBERS

Got something to say to synod? A lot of people (or councils or classes) have had a lot to share in the past five years, by way of official overtures (requests for action) or communications. Here's our count from the agendas (even though no synod took place in either 2020 or 2021):

5 Years of Overtures

- 2020** 12 overtures
4 communications
30 overtures
- 2021** 5 communications
56 overtures
8 overtures deferred from 2020
- 2022** 24 overtures deferred from 2021
9 communications
- 2023** 76 overtures
4 communications
2 unprocessed overtures or communications
- 2024** 45 overtures
26 communications
21 overtures deferred from 2023

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: Ontario Church Members Hunt for Church History
- » News: RCA's Restructuring Recommendations Include Less Frequent Synods, One Fewer Level of Assemblies
- » TV review: *Darby and Joan*
- » Movie review: *Unsung Hero*
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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

Soft on Sin?

They called Jesus a “friend of tax collectors and sinners.”



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 THINK THE PHARISEES perceived Jesus to be soft on sin. After all, they complained about Jesus eating with “tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 9:11; Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30; 15:2). In Jesus’ ancient culture, “table fellowship indicated intimate relations among those who shared it” (*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*). Rules for Jewish rabbis at the time would prohibit sharing meals with known unrepentant sinners. The “sinners,” on the other hand, would see Jesus’ eating with them as “a gesture of friendship and acceptance” (*ESV Reformation Study Bible*, note on Mark 2:15). Hence they called Jesus a “friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34).

Consider the story of Zaccheus, a chief tax collector, in Luke 19:1-10. Tax collectors were Jews who collected taxes for the Roman Empire from their fellow Jews. They earned a living by charging more than was required and pocketing the difference as their commission. Jews saw tax collectors as traitors and thieves.

Zaccheus likely was the most despised as a chief tax collector in charge of other tax collectors. He was getting wealthy off his fellow Jews’ oppression. This was probably why he could not make his way to the front of the crowd to see Jesus. The crowd would not make way for him as they might for others who were short. Hence, Zaccheus had to run ahead and climb a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus.

In *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Bible scholar Kenneth Bailey explains that it was customary in the Middle East for villagers to greet and welcome an important guest before the guest entered the village. This happened in Luke 18:35 as Jesus approached Jericho. The blind beggar on the roadside heard the commotion of a crowd of greeters meeting Jesus just outside

of town. This welcome party would include the customary offer of dinner and lodging for the night. Luke did not need to record this detail; his ancient readers would have understood what was happening.

Therefore, when “Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through” (Luke 19:1), it was understood that he had declined the offer (or multiple offers) of dinner and lodging from the welcoming party because he was just “passing through” rather than staying the night. According to ancient rabbinic writings, sycamore fig trees were allowed to grow only some distance away from town. So when Zaccheus was up a sycamore tree looking at Jesus, it was on the outskirts of town, and Jesus was on his way out of Jericho.

Imagine, then, the crowd’s shock and anger (v. 7) when Jesus asked to stay at the despised Zaccheus’ house after having declined the hospitality of more honorable hosts! Ancient rabbinic writings teach that if a tax collector enters a house, everything within it becomes unclean (*Mishnah*, Tractate Tohoroth 7.6). They would certainly see Jesus as being defiled, even sinful, by dining and staying in the chief tax collector’s house.

Note that Jesus, at the cost of his own reputation, offered Zaccheus his friendship and acceptance before Zaccheus showed any signs of repentance. But Jesus’ act of grace moved Zaccheus to repentance and a pledge to make financial restitution (v. 8). People’s judgment did not turn Zaccheus away from his life of greed, but Jesus’ mercy and kindness did.

Jesus told the Pharisees to learn the meaning of “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Matt. 9:13; Hos. 6:6). Mercy is how the healer heals the spiritually sick. “Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13). **B**



REPLY ALL

Conservative Compassion

Like Monte and Tammie, we have a daughter who identifies as LGBTQ. My wife and I know by experience what it's like to hold conservative Christian values and grapple with balancing grace and truth. Many do not share our conviction of unconditional love and acceptance of a family member who is LGBTQ. The choice for us comes down to either having no relationship with our daughter and the spouse to whom she's legally married or just accepting them. I understand that people who have not gone through what we have don't understand our position. I have to question myself: Am I showing mercy and compassion? Do I take Jesus' command to love my neighbor seriously? The reality is that we all struggle with sin, no matter who we are. If we shut the church doors to sinners, how will we get in?

» Greg Tiffany // Hudsonville, Mich.

Heeding Ben de Regt's call to compassion would make our churches and families healthier, more Christlike, and more loving. As a pastor, I've heard too many stories of children rejected by their Christian families and churches because of their sexual identity or orientation. Thanks for reminding conservatives that extending the love of Christ and the hospitality of his grace is not being soft on sin. But could that hospitality be extended further? Some of us have studied the Bible's teachings and come to biblical convictions that contradict some of the conclusions of the Human Sexuality Report of 2022. Such views have not been met with compassion in our denomination. Instead of the "cosmic hospitality" of the gospel we are being told that the Christian Reformed

Church is no longer a home where we are welcome. Perhaps "conservative compassion" might extend to those of us who disagree about biblical interpretation as well.

» Rob Jansons // Monroe, Wash.

I'm not sure how "conservative compassion" is different from ... any other kind of genuine compassion. Christian compassion should never be politicized. The 1973 and 2022 synodical decisions about homosexuality take pains to state that homosexuality itself is not a personal choice, but an inborn characteristic. Forbidding two committed homosexual persons from expressing their love for one another is as harmful and unloving as doing so for committed heterosexual couples. There are many serious theological questions surrounding just a few biblical texts. Should contested knowledge claims trump the Bible's overwhelming and uncontested teaching that love is the fulfillment of the law? Read 1 Corinthians 13:2. Humility and unconditional love are far better than the hubris of a certain faith about what the Bible might or might not say about how two people may love each other.

» Robert W. Bruinsma // Edmonton, Alta.

Thank you, Ben de Regt, for your article in the *March Banner*. Jesus' question "Why are you so afraid?" really struck me. What is it that makes us fear inclusion? Many of us learned John 3:16-17 as children. Those verses encompass God's story. We have split hairs and churches over the years about infant and adult baptism, women in office, and now LGBTQ issues. We are not the "deciders" of who God loves. Jesus did not come to condemn or exclude.

» Linda Siebenga // Blackfalds, Alta.

Monologue vs. Dialogue

Thanks, Dale Melenberg, for your excellent article on dialogic preaching ("Monologue vs. Dialogue," *March* 2024). One of my professors at Fuller Theological Seminary once remarked that "monologue preaching is the most ineffective means of communication ever devised." That may be an exaggeration, but for too long we have held this up as God's preferred way of communicating. It's not. Implementing your discovery will be most difficult for those preaching in megachurches—another reason to appreciate the advantages of a smaller congregation. The best size of all is the small group (having) conversations around tables.

» Rev. David Stravers // Fountain Hills, Ariz.

Faith Struggles

I just read the "Big Questions" page in the *March Banner*. I was very disappointed in the answer to the 50-year-old struggling with his faith. There was a lot more emphasis on reading and listening to what others say rather than letting God speak to him through the Bible, especially the words of Jesus in the gospels. I have found that joining a small-group Bible study using the *Discover Your Bible* study books is the best way to grow closer to God and understand his will for our lives.

» Jannette Bos // Cambridge, Ont.

On Questions and Criticism

Church Buildings

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema's concern espoused in "The Church Is Not a Building" (March 2024) must echo many in the CRC who question why some pastors call their church building the house of God. That's a biblical reference to Jewish places of worship. The Christian church is a spiritual entity, a gathering of believers regardless of place of worship. Christ's church is not built with bricks and mortar. Believers are living stones that make up the church—and Christ is the capstone.

» Joe A. Serge // Oshawa, Ont.

IF YOU'RE SEEING THIS COLUMN, you're at least a casual *Banner* reader, but if you're new to the magazine, there might be some things you don't know. Here's a quick primer:

1. If you have a question or criticism, *The Banner's* Reply All section is for you. We appreciate readers digging into the implications of articles and raising another point of view. Anyone can write to info@thebanner.org. *The Banner* doesn't shy away from sharing readers' thoughts when we've missed the mark on something. Go here before you go off on social media.

2. Different parts of *The Banner* have different purposes. If something is striking you as silly or useless or incomplete, consider the intent of the piece. For example, Discover is intended for younger audiences and "explores nature, science, and God's amazing, good world." *The Banner* has been tasked by synod to accommodate content particularly geared to children. The Discover column is a way for all readers to discover something they might not have known about God's creation. Other regular columns, such as The Other Six and Still, offer first-person accounts of "discipleship, challenges, and how life experiences shape our faith" or "a personal experience of God's grace in unexpected corners." One writer's personal experience might not be relatable to all readers, but over time, with a variety of writers, there should be something here that connects with all different parts of our readership. We learn from each other!

3. The Our Shared Ministry section of *The Banner* is written and edited by the communications team of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Here, separate from the editorially independent news, columns, or features, the ministries of the CRCNA contribute stories about their work that they think will be of

If you're new to the magazine, there might be some things you don't know.

interest. Discerning what to include is the choice of ministry staff. Questions about stories in Our Shared Ministry can be directed to that section's editor, Kristen deRoo VanderBerg, CRCNA director of communications and marketing (kvanderberg@crcna.org).

4. *The Banner*, as the CRCNA's denominational magazine, generally acts as a mirror and a forum. It mirrors to its audience what and who they are (particularly in the news, Faith Matters, and Cross Examination sections), and it provides space to air ideas—even ones that don't necessarily align with the views of the denomination or the editors—so we embrace as wide of a readership as possible, from appreciators of the Discover column to those wanting to chew on Big Questions.

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Note: You can read a longer version of this article at thebanner.org/behind-the-banner. 



Alissa Vernon is the news editor for *The Banner*.



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- » Following a Radically Inclusive Jesus
- » Passing On the Peace: Remembering Our Rituals
- » Called to Be a Friend

Turning Over a New Leaf

What My Houseplants Taught Me About Faith

By Lorilee Craker

I used to be the kind of person who inadvertently killed any houseplant to cross our threshold. One time I even watered an African violet without noticing it was not at all real. But in the past seven years or so I have become a Plant Person, graduating from succulents to spider plants to hanging a propagation station on my kitchen wall and growing new plants from cuttings to keep or share. I collect rainwater and infuse it with pulverized worm casings to nourish my indoor jungle, and I keep track of which plants need a biweekly misting or dusting and which ones do not.

At some point this hobby became a pastime that for me ranks up there with reading, writing, and travel as things I most want to do with my time off. The more I delved into the world of houseplants, the more I began to see life-changing spiritual metaphors all around me.

Faith Unfurled

One day I noticed that plants all over the house were unfurling like a sail or flag opening to the wind, expanding and transforming slowly from tight little buds or rolled-up leaves to openness and fullness. Currently, my *Monstera obliqua*, peace lily, golden pothos, and *Calathea* (commonly called a “prayer plant”) are all spreading out from a folded state, becoming fuller day by day.

I realized that faith is like that all the time. We are asked to hold on to faith every day, in big ways and small, but often our faith starts out like a tiny, tightly wound bud. Yet with God’s help, it can stretch and grow into open-hearted trust and reliance on God.



Recently, my faith was twisted into a little bud. Two freelance projects would not land, and I kept trying to be the air traffic controller. Finally I realized that I needed to trust that God would land those projects if and when the time was right.

Faith is “trusting that the presence of God is sufficient for you—wise enough to guide you and good enough to help you,” writes pastor Faith Eury Cho. Watching my plants unfurl day by day reminds me that my faith is also ever-becoming, ever-expanding.

Sunny Windowsills

I love to watch my plants stretch toward the sun. Most houseplants require “bright, indirect light”—about 20% of the strength of direct sunlight outdoors. How does one measure light? There are gadgets for this, of course, but first one must discover which plants love the sun and which are happier in low, dappled light reminiscent of their shady rainforest habitats. When plants are in a rooting state—say, hanging in vials on my kitchen wall—it is critical they receive enough light. Yet even just a few feet from the window, indoor light levels are usually 1% or less of the light outdoors.

The truth is that we too must stay close to the light of God’s care and wisdom if we want to bloom and shine. Are we stretching toward the light, or are we shrinking back into darkness?

Some of my favorite sun-seekers are the easy-peasy golden pothos; air plants, which thrive on air and feed themselves on photosynthesis alone; and the fascinating bromeliads. A bromeliad’s most intriguing feature is the water catchment device formed by

the concentric leaves in the center of the plant. I was taught to water mine directly into this cup, which in an outdoor setting would retain enough water to sustain the plant during a dry spell. God's children also have this indwelling source of refreshment and relief in a dry and weary land. Scripture often speaks of God being a refuge, a fortress, and a hiding place—someplace we can go when we are thirsty for guidance, protection, and comfort. "I will give you hidden treasures ... in secret places," says Isaiah 45:3.

Robust Roots

A good root system is crucial for a leafy, verdant plant. I am mesmerized when my little plant cuttings in water suddenly pop out thick, strong roots. The Bible mentions the concept of rootedness often. "Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness" (Col. 2:7, NLT). We are tethered to God, rooted in God's saving grace and love.

Roots have a dark side, though. A plant's roots become damaged and even ruined by overwatering. Yes, the No. 1 way to kill a plant is by overwatering it. Too much water overwhelms the root system, which then festers beneath the soil. We too can become overwhelmed and flooded with concerns. "The waters closed over my head, and I thought I was about to perish," Lamentations 3:54 says.

If a plant gets mired in the muck caused by overwatering, it can lead to deadly root rot. This summer, my family and I took a trip to South Korea, our daughter's homeland. Our

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housesitter, terrified she would kill one of my green babies by underwatering, watered and watered until my aloe vera was bloated, mushy, and soon quite dead.

Root rot is kind of like shame. The more we get swamped in the miry pits of shame, the weaker and unhealthier we become spiritually. Thankfully, we serve a God who is always watching over us, ready to lift us out of the dark, festering places and set us on dry land where the sun can find us and heal us. "He shall send from heaven and save me," Psalm 57:3 says; "He reproaches the one who would swallow me up" (NKJV).

Turning Over a New Leaf

My favorite plant to give to someone experiencing a life change is the Calathea, the prayer plant. The nickname describes the daily movements of their leaves, which curl up at night and straighten in the daytime, tracking with the sun's movements in the sky. These many-splendored plants

symbolize new beginnings. Just as God's mercies are new every morning, so the prayer plant unfurls its leaves and opens itself to the sun each day.

These days, my Calathea is also teaching me about hope. After lamenting the lowbrow tap water it was drinking and objecting to being moved too close to the window, it threw a fit, shriveled up, and seemed to die. "If there's still green in it, there's still hope," said my plant guru, Tony. I began researching and catering to its every whim with regular mistings of rainwater and appropriate shade. And then, in a kind of resurrection, my beautiful plant came back to life with new shoots and healthy, lush leaves that spread out every morning, inviting me to anticipate what God might do next in my life and asking me to place my hope in God.

"In some Native languages the term for plants translates to 'those who take care of us,'" writes Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. As I care for my plants, I witness them reaching for the light even as they anchor themselves to the earth. They also take care of me, purifying the air, calming me with their cascading greenery, and delighting me with the ways they flourish and grow. Most of all, they teach me to lean toward the Son even as I send roots deep into the ground. **B**



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

BIG QUESTIONS

Vocation/Calling

Friends of mine are struggling to decide whether they should move for a job. It sounds like a great opportunity for her, but she and her family are happy here. What advice can I give them, and how do I support them?

It can feel like the obvious answer is that they should move. Yet life and vocation are more than our jobs; they include our families, friends, and churches and the communities where we live. You can help your friends discern which direction glorifies God and allows them to love their neighbor as themselves.

As they think about taking the job, you can talk them through the reasons they might choose that direction. Accepting a job to get more money or prestige isn't necessarily bad, but is it worth uprooting their whole family? But if they're unhappy now and not using their skills and experience in their current situation, perhaps this job offer is God's provision. There's also a question of love and fairness: in the Christian Reformed Church's liturgical form for marriage, the vows end with the promise to encourage one's spouse to develop their God-given gifts. Does the job your friend is considering allow space for both partners to develop their gifts, especially if one person's gifts have been prioritized in the past? If it seems as if your friend's job is being prioritized with this move, it can help to have honest conversations about what to do if their spouse or other family members struggle to feel at home or use their gifts in this new place.

You could also help your friends name some of the good things they'd want

to find in a new place. You could help them look into schools, community programming, local attractions, and especially churches. You could plan together how you could visit them or how they might stay with you for part of a summer. If they struggle to imagine how life could be good in this new place, perhaps this is the Spirit inviting them to wonder if moving is really wise.

In whatever direction they sense God calling them, they will lose something—either their current community or the possibility of something new and good. If they take the new opportunity, you can help them create ways to say good-bye well and make space to acknowledge the losses alongside the hope and excitement of something new.

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

Church/Bible/Doctrine

What is the difference between spiritual warfare and a culture war?

The language of "spiritual warfare" comes from biblical passages that use martial metaphors to describe the struggle against the forces of evil and death. This is often understood primarily in terms of spiritual powers, as in Ephesians 6:12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

The language of "culture war" is more recent and usually has to do with the place of Christian ideals within a pluralistic culture. The process of negotiating the common good as Christians—seeking space for all to flourish—is complicated. The complexity can be exhausting, and some are concerned that due to shifting societal norms, Christians might lose the freedom to practice their faith.

There are real forces of evil at work in the world, so it can be tempting to conflate spiritual warfare and culture war. But it is also dangerous. One danger is that we can begin to see our neighbors as agents of evil and use this as an excuse to deny their dignity (Matt. 5:44-45). Another danger is that in our desire to win we will simply "wage war as the world does" (2 Cor. 10:3) instead of seeking the slower, peacemaking way of Jesus (Matt. 5:9).

Resistance to evil will look different as it plays out across various spheres. But in all cases, resistance must be set within the larger context of our creational calling. Genesis shows us that we were gardeners before we were warriors, and gardening requires so much more than destroying all the weeds. It requires the active planting of beautiful things. To use language from artist Makoto Fujimura, if culture is less like a battlefield and more like a polluted ecosystem, then the skills of culture care are more essential than those of culture war.

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



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

Science/Environmental

A friend with a serious illness recovered quickly. He believes God miraculously healed him. Medical websites say some people with that illness naturally recover quickly. Should I tell him?

You and your friend can praise God for the healing regardless of how it happened. Should you tell your friend about those medical websites? The answer to that question depends on your friend. Christian medical professionals sometimes face similar situations.

Many Bible passages praise God for miraculous acts of deliverance for God's people. Many Bible passages also praise God for ordinary natural events—things we can study scientifically, like the changing of the seasons or abundant crop growth.

Some people try to set science and miracles in opposition by claiming that if you believe in one you can't have the other. But if we start by saying that God is sovereign over everything, there's no need to choose. God typically governs the natural world with regular, repeatable patterns. By doing science, we can understand those patterns and develop new medical procedures. And God has given our bodies many natural ways to heal itself that we are learning about through science.

But God is not limited to working through those regular patterns. When it suits God's kingdom purposes, God works outside those ordinary patterns, and we might experience a miracle. Science is a great tool for telling us about the ordinary patterns, but it doesn't rule out that

God might occasionally work beyond those patterns for particular reasons known to God.

If you think your friend is comfortable praising God however God brought healing, and if your friend would enjoy learning more science, maybe you could discuss those websites sometime. If you think your friend might experience that information as a threat to their closeness to God, maybe hold off for a while. We don't know for sure what happened in your friend's particular case. However God brings healing—whether through medicine or the body's natural abilities or through supernatural miracle—it ultimately comes from God.

Loren Haarsma is a lifelong member of the CRC and is currently a professor in the physics and astronomy department at Calvin University.

Digital Life

Should I be scared of artificial intelligence?

My default position on any new technology is doubt and skepticism. Blame my Calvinist underpinnings for that, but has the latest-greatest ever really lived up to the hype? Even the experts aren't sure (or aren't sharing) exactly how AI works. Could this possibly take off?

It's been more than a year since artificial intelligence—especially *generative* artificial intelligence—took over technology news. Generative AI allows for untold amounts of information to be ingested by powerful computers that then can generate what appears to be original text or images based on requests (called prompts) from users.

If you've read anything about generative AI, you know about the massive investments being made and the innovations, efficiencies, and new worlds AI will open for us, but there are drawbacks too: the disruption we'll all be facing in our workplaces

and, of course, the fakery AI is capable of. Maybe you've seen (or created yourself) samples of this technology in action.

For me, a turning point for my skepticism was a test offered by *The New York Times* to see if people could determine whether pictures were real or AI-generated. I'm a visual guy and thought this would be easy. I failed miserably.

So, should we be scared? When it's not clear what is real and what is not, we're left to wonder—or worse, give up and just believe what we see. Yes, that is scary.

In a 2023 *Atlantic* article, philosopher Daniel C. Dennett calls people posing as someone other than their real selves “counterfeit people.” He makes a compelling argument that “creating [or passing along] counterfeit digital people risks destroying our civilization.” His solution? Treat counterfeit people like we do counterfeit currency.

Although he admitted it might be too late already, he argued for complete transparency of what has been created by AI and for making sure we have technology (smartphones, scanners, digital TVs, and so on) that can detect counterfeits. And then, just as importantly, we should make counterfeit content creators—including tech company executives and technicians—legally liable for the lies they are telling with AI text and images.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of *The Banner*. Have an example of a good or bad use of generative AI? Tell him at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.



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

CRCNA Purchases New Ministry Support Center

NEWS

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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.

While the sale of the Christian Reformed Church’s 12-acre property at 1700 28th St. SE in Grand Rapids, Mich., is not yet complete, the denomination’s U.S. director of ministry operations, Dan DeKam, announced to staff May 8 “that today we closed on our future Ministry Support Center location at 300 East Beltline Avenue NE,” also in Grand Rapids.

Staff from the Office of General Secretary, ReFrame Ministries, Resonate Global Mission, Thrive, and ministry support services—about 75 people in all—will relocate to rented space in the Reformed Church in America’s Grand Rapids office until the East Beltline property is ready for move-in.

The search for a new location began last fall when the 28th Street property was put up for sale.

U.S. Ministry Board president Michael Ten Haken said at the time, “The board desires to be stewardly with the resources we’ve been given.” DeKam had said the per-square-foot maintenance costs of the 28th Street building weren’t so high, “it’s just that there are so many square feet” and much of that space wasn’t regularly used. The new location, purchased from Cornerstone University,

is 21,575 square feet, while the still-for-sale original building is 130,000.

In April the board disclosed that grocery chain Meijer had an option contract on the 28th Street property, which means “that the property is off the market to other buyers, for a time, while the potential buyer does their due diligence.” That due diligence process, which included a public meeting for nearby residents, is still underway. Currently a Meijer gas station sits just south off the CRC property, and a Meijer superstore is across the street to the west.

At the May U.S. Ministry Board meeting, DeKam suggested that any profit after the sale and relocation could be used for building maintenance and ongoing capital improvements at the new property.

Recognizing the 65 years of history in the original denominational building, ministry staff plan to host a community worship and celebration June 27, before staff move to the new building.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor



Previously owned by Cornerstone University, the property at 300 E. Beltline NE in Grand Rapids, Mich., is rendered here with a Christian Reformed Church logo.

Women's Society Celebrates 100 Years of Extending God's Kingdom

The Baldwin (Wis.) Christian Reformed Church Dorcas Ladies Aid Society marked 100 years of continuous ministry April 30, still holding to its original purpose: "by means of the labors of its members to accomplish something for the extension of God's Kingdom."

The congregation recognized "Dorcas Sunday" on May 5 with the theme "Ordinary Women in Extra-Ordinary Times."

Taking its name from Dorcas, a woman described in Acts 9 as "always doing good and helping the poor," the group originally created and sold items such as rugs, quilts, aprons, and towels and set the profits aside for donation.

The society has a complete archive of its minutes from the last century that details what was raised and how it was spent. Bonnie Van Someren, a Dorcas member

since 1978, said the proceeds were used for things like electric lights for the church and parsonage, a pulpit and pulpit chairs, and "basement improvements, namely running water, sink, and drainage in the kitchen."

Along with making improvements to the church, the society "sent much of their funds away," Van Someren said. The Dec. 3, 1924, minutes record \$251.40 in the treasury (\$4,415 in today's U.S. dollars). The society gave \$100 to Baldwin CRC and split another \$100 between Classis Wisconsin, the local Christian school, and five other missions.

"Going through the minutes, I had so many questions, wondering why certain things happened," Van Someren said. "I wish they had written even more."

Today the society continues its mission of fundraising through bake sales and



The oldest known photograph of the Baldwin Dorcas Society, taken in 1936.

community suppers to support local missionaries and several aid organizations.

"We are humbly grateful for 100 years of God's bounteous blessings," Van Someren said.

—Sarah DeGraff

Scott DeVries, CRC's Synodical Services Director, Dies

Scott DeVries, director of synodical services for the Christian Reformed Church in North America, died April 27, a few days after entering hospice care after doctors discovered cancer in March. DeVries, 47, was a member of Faith Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich. He was appointed to the director of synodical services role in November 2022 after past director Dee Recker retired.

The CRC's general secretary, Zachary King, shared the news with CRC start. "We start this new week with difficult news," King wrote. "Our beloved brother in Christ, Rev. Scott DeVries, who served as director of synodical services, passed away last weekend," King wrote. "Those of us who had the privilege of conversing with Scott during the final weeks of his life witnessed the steady courage and unswerving trust that characterized Scott throughout his illness. That courage and trust was rooted in Jesus Christ and his

unshakeable promises to Scott and all his people."

Since March the synodical services team, with help from some temporary hires, absorbed some of DeVries' duties in order to prepare for Synod 2024, the general assembly of the CRCNA meeting June 14-20 in Grand Rapids, Mich. The Council of Delegates approved the appointment of a



Scott DeVries at Synod 2023

temporary associate director of synodical services to serve until Aug. 30.

DeVries was ordained in the CRCNA in 2008 and pastored two congregations in Michigan before serving as ministries coordinator in Classis Holland from 2016 to 2018. He then worked for the denomination, managing the Connections Project and coordinating the Thriving Congregations project.

DeVries is survived by his wife, Sara, and two children.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

Council of Delegates: May Meeting Roundup



Council of Delegates members completing their terms June 30 are John Lee, Classis Iakota; Ralph Wigboldus, Canada-at-large; Casey Jen, Thornapple Valley; Sherry Fakkema, Pacific Northwest; Paula Coldagelli, Wisconsin; Tyler Wagenmaker, Zeeland; Sally Larsen, Chicago South; and Wayne Brower, Holland.

The Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church in North America met May 1-3 at Cascade Fellowship CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., with the U.S. and Canadian ministry boards of the CRCNA hosting concurrent meetings.

The Council is the denomination's ecclesiastical governance board that works on behalf of synod between meetings of synod. It meets three times a year and is made up of one delegate from each classis (a regional assembly of churches) and a few at-large members. The ministry board in each country is composed of only the delegates from that particular country and is responsible for operational governance of ministries of the CRCNA that take place in the U.S. and Canada.

The Council **approved the appointment of a temporary associate director of synodical services, Joel Vande Werken**, to act as the officer for Synod 2024 and assist the synodical services team in completing preparations for the assembly, necessary because of the recent death and prior illness of synodical services director Scott DeVries. Vande Werken, pastor of Fairlawn CRC in Whitinsville, Mass., will fill the role until Aug. 31.

The Council remarked on DeVries' passing several times over the three days of meeting, signing cards of condolence for his family and using for Wednesday's opening devotions a *Today* devotional DeVries had written. General secretary Zachary King noted that DeVries had been present for five previous Council of Delegates meetings in his

role, and he thanked God for the vision DeVries set by infusing the meetings with worship, Scripture, and prayer.

Items addressed at the May meeting include:

- » an update regarding the ongoing review of the pledge-based ministry share program
- » a report responding to Synod 2022's instructions "to curate Human Resources-related best practices and templates including short-term disability options for congregational staff" and "to study possible denominational and classical benevolence funds for congregations facing short-term disability needs" (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 847)
- » a report responding to Synod 2023's instructions related to pension

contributions for two spouses who are ordained ministers of the Word (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 967)

- » a report addressing questions from Overture 3 to Synod 2023 about “about how and when the CRCNA organization comments on social, economic, or political matters”
- » a request to Synod 2024 to discontinue creating resources for an annual CRC Day of Justice, initiated in 2017

All of these will be included in the Council of Delegates’ supplement to the *Agenda for Synod 2024*. The Council also will include three “right of comment” responses to overtures on the agenda, permitted by Council of Delegates governance policies. Two comments relate to the requests about the ministers’ pension plan and one about the Dignity Team, a relatively new team formed at the request of Synod 2019 as part of its response to prevent and respond to abuses of power. Overture 10 requests that it be disbanded; the Council’s comment says the team is new and is still establishing its mandate, which is expected to come to the Council of Delegates’ October meeting.

The Council of Delegates acknowledged transitions as it recognized eight members whose terms are concluding, introduced some new members beginning terms, and **welcomed the interim president of Calvin University, Greg Elzinga, to address the group.**

Elzinga spoke briefly and not in detail about the departure of former Calvin president Wiebe Boer, and he expressed thanks for prayers and support. “I remain hopeful, as sad and disappointing as these events have been,” Elzinga said. Michael Ten Haken, the Council of Delegates chair, reminded delegates that their relationship to the board of trustees of Calvin University is to facilitate connection between the two entities, but neither has oversight or influence over

the other board. A later attempt by a member to address the matter was ruled out of order, and two votes against that ruling were registered. (See “Resigned Calvin President Files Breach of Contract Lawsuit,” p.18)

Over the three days of meeting, in times of devotional reflection and in some of the ministry director reports, there was a **recurring theme of wanting to refocus from “a narrative of scarcity and turmoil,” as general secretary King put it, to a recognition that “God is offering himself and his presence.”** Nonetheless, many reports reflected the financial reality of tighter budgets due to ministry share contributions being lower than they were five to seven years ago.

“As a decline in ministry shares continues (from \$7M in 2018 to \$2.6M in 2024-25), Resonate (Global Mission) is seeking every possible method to increase revenue,” the Resonate report said. Resonate executive director Kevin DeRaaf noted that for church planting, “the Spirit is working powerfully in raising up new communities of faith in the CRC,” but the denomination is experiencing a “capacity problem.”

Kurt Selles, executive director for **ReFrame Ministries (originally Back to God Hour and then Back to God International Ministries), said financial challenges are “the reality of doing ministry today—having to do more with less.”** ReFrame has been instructed to purposefully build a deficit into its budget and spend down reserves to cover it, but that isn’t how Selles would like to see the reserves used. “I hope we could use some of our reserves to help build ministries for the future,” he told ReFrame’s U.S. ministry corporation.

The projection of expected ministry shares is flat for next year, but expenses in the office of general secretary, such as for holding Synod 2025 at Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ont.,

instead of near denominational headquarters in Grand Rapids, Mich., will be higher, so ministries of the Christian Reformed Church, including Resonate, ReFrame, and Thrive, will get less funding.

The denomination’s official magazine, *The Banner*, will have to carry out its synodical mandate going forward without the use of ministry shares.

With a 26-17 vote with one abstention, the Council of Delegates accepted a proposal from its finance committee to “instruct *The Banner* to become self-sustaining through revenue and fundraising, not including support through Ministry Shares, beginning with the fiscal year starting July 1, 2027.”

Reduction in *The Banner*’s use of ministry shares will start in the coming fiscal year and continue to drop in the following years to get to zero by 2027. In the past six years *The Banner* has used an average of \$317,661 in ministry share dollars per year to offset the cost of production not covered by its fundraising and revenue, but next fiscal year that number will be capped at \$200,000.

An average of \$133,355 per year comes from service fees to denominational ministries for the publication of the “Our Shared Ministry” section of *The Banner*. That stream of revenue is expected to continue.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

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Resigned Calvin President Files Breach of Contract Lawsuit



Wiebe Boer, addressing Synod 2023 in the chapel at Calvin University.

After Wiebe Boer resigned from the presidency of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich., in late February, saying president Wiebe Boer resigned his position, there have been questions about due process for Boer, who was the subject of a report alleging “unwelcome and inappropriate communication and attention toward a non-student member of the campus community,” according to a Feb. 26 statement from Calvin’s board of trustees.

Attorneys for Boer and his wife, Joanna Boer, filed a complaint with the U.S. District Court April 12 seeking remedy for alleged “breach of contract and defamation, and violations of the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act.” Joanna Boer was also employed by Calvin.

Calvin’s board of trustees said Boer admitted to sending communications that the board described as “inappropriate and inconsistent with the high standard of conduct and character expected of the President of Calvin University.”

“This admission of guilt negated the need for any additional process,” the board said in an April 14 statement to counter what it says are “misrepresentations made in the Boers’ legal complaint.”

Previously, in response to requests for a third-party review of the board’s actions, the board stated, “Ultimately, Dr. Boer’s employment at Calvin was governed by an employment agreement that gives the Board the authority to determine his fitness to remain in the role. ... We remain confident that Dr. Boer’s decision to resign, and the Board’s decision to accept his resignation, are in the best interests of all involved.”

In the court filing, attorneys for the Boers claim “Calvin cannot show a case of ‘serious misconduct’ as defined by the Contract (employment agreement) against Dr. Boer.” The claim alleges “Calvin obtained Dr. Boer’s resignation

by advising him that it would fire him if he did not agree to resign, i.e., with a threat he was about to be fired, intimidation, and undue time pressure, constituting a constructive termination as a matter of law.”

The claim also states “Dr. Boer acknowledged it was a mistake to text Complainant—particularly considering how Complainant perceived it—but continued to deny other unprofessional or inappropriate conduct.”

The board said in its first public statement on Boer’s resignation that the report it received “did not include allegations of sexually explicit communication or physical contact, but the alleged conduct is concerning and inappropriate.”

In an April 14 video message to the Calvin community, interim president Greg Elzinga noted Calvin’s great respect for the legal system, which he called “the appropriate venue for adjudicating disagreements like the one between Dr. Boer and the board.”

Founded by the Christian Reformed Church in 1876, Calvin University is governed by its board of trustees, appointed by the denomination’s synod. The board has a mandate from synod to govern the institution according to the university’s bylaws, which includes supervision of and selection of a university president.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

Liberia- and Iowa-based Churches Worship Together

Peace Christian Reformed Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Gate of Testimony Church in Gbarnga, Liberia, have recently become “sister” congregations and are hopeful that both of their denominations, the Christian Reformed Church in Liberia and the Christian Reformed Church in North America, will soon become churches in cooperation with each other.

The two congregations, despite having 5,565 miles (8,956 km) and a six-hour time difference between them, worshiped and shared communion together Feb. 25 using technology and the gifts of people in their Cedar Rapids and Gbarnga fellowships.

Pastor Jessy Morndolo founded Gate of Testimony without denominational affiliation. Morndolo's connection with Darius Nupolu, an Iowa resident who once lived in Liberia, sparked the relationship with Peace CRC. Nupolu and his wife, Wealee, run Future Farmers of Liberia Empowerment for Women, an agricultural aid organization.

In March 2022, Thomas Beyan, manager of the future farmers group and a

member of Gate of Testimony, initiated the sister church idea.

Peace pastor Gary Brouwers told *The Banner*, that the council of Peace decided to explore the possibility of the Gate of Testimony Church affiliating with the Christian Reformed Church of Liberia (CRC-L). “We also explored the possibility of the CRCNA beginning formal relations with the CRC-L. In our minds, a sister relationship with the GoT Church would benefit from a more formal relationship between our denominations,” Brouwers said.

The CRC's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee notes in its report to Synod 2024, “Requests have been received from within the denomination to explore formal relations with the Christian Reformed Church in Liberia. Over the past year, meetings were held to draft a memorandum of understanding. The EIRC recommends that synod approve the Christian Reformed Church in Liberia as a church in cooperation.”

—Kyle Hoogendoorn



The congregation of Peace CRC worships with the congregation of the Gate of Testimony church through a video connection Feb. 25, 2024.

Noteworthy

Rehoboth (N.M.) Christian School won the New Mexico State Band Competition on April 20 against all the 1A-3A schools in the state. The band, directed by Kevin Zwiers, missed competing from 2020 to 2022 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. They finished fourth in 2023. “There was a level of nervous energy, but also a high level of focus at getting an opportunity to play again,” Zwiers said.



Photo by Ruby Folkerts

The Banner received an Award of Merit for Denominational-Digital publication from the Evangelical Press Association in April. College chaplain **Melissa Kuipers received a second-place Higher Goals award for her evangelism article “Being Missional Means Avoiding Insider Language”** (Sept. 2023, pp. 36-37).



Synod 2024: What to Watch

The Christian Reformed Church's synod will meet June 14-20 in Grand Rapids, Mich. Here is some of what delegates will deliberate over. (Find a longer version of this story on *TheBanner.org*.)

Confessions

One significant question lingering from Synod 2023 is how completely church officebearers must adhere to the church confessions and who decides. Can an elder or deacon express difficulty with one of the church's confessed doctrines using a confessional-difficulty gravamen (a tool described in Art. 5 of the Church Order Supplement) and remain an officebearer? Or must they resolve their difficulty before being permitted to serve? Does a church council need to disclose such difficulties to wider assemblies?

Gravamina (plural of gravamen) got a lot of attention after Synod 2022, when delegates to that synod declared as confessional that homosexual sex is among sexual behaviors to be considered unchaste and a violation of the seventh commandment. Several overtures (requests for action) on those matters were sent to Synod 2023, and an advisory committee drew up recommendations, but after some discussion the officers for Synod 2023 determined there wasn't sufficient time before the close of synod to reach a decision. The majority report called for gravamina to be temporary and resolved either by the officebearer's full

agreement with confessional doctrines or by resigning their office; a minority report suggested gravamina should not have a specified timeframe for resolution but "be revisited yearly by the council" that received the difficulty.

The *Agenda for Synod 2024* includes last year's requests, the 2023 advisory committee reports, 14 new overtures related to the covenant for officebearers and gravamina, and one overture that requests that Synod 2024 not consider all this material afresh but take up the 2023 advisory reports as its "first order of business."

There also are overtures asking synod to "Articulate What Is Expected of Confessing Members When Agreeing with the Confessions," to allow no exceptions to the Covenant for Faculty Members (similar to that for officebearers) for faculty of Calvin University, and to "review and clarify the implications of its (synod's) decisions concerning the definition of 'unchastity' in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108."

Synod 2024 also will consider a request to reassess a decision made in 1985 to footnote a paragraph of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession. The council of the Christian Reformed Church of St. Joseph, Mich., wants this paragraph, originally footnoted "because the language related to the Anabaptists seemed harsh, divisive, inaccurate, or inappropriate," reinstated. The decision to footnote this paragraph "has removed from the body of our confession important content that the church is desperately in need of in the days in which we live(:) ... content related to the subversion of justice through the introduction of common ownership of goods," the church council writes.

Discipline

Several overtures request that church discipline be administered for classes or congregations perceived to be acting in ways contrary to decisions of synod or the confessed teachings of the church; there are also requests for synod to refrain from enacting discipline on narrower assemblies. Classis Atlantic Northeast asks that the supplement for Articles 82-84 of the Church Order, which deals with discipline, include procedures for when "broader assemblies may apply special discipline in extraordinary circumstances."

Classis Chicago South is asking Synod 2024 to rescind the 2023 synodical instruction for "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," saying the 2023 decision was made on faulty grounds.

Immanuel CRC of Burbank, Ill., is asking synod "to declare as heresy the belief that Scripture sanctions homosexual marriage or relationships." Classis Lakota is asking synod to "declare that Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108, along with all cases of unrepentant sin, addresses a salvation issue."

Resources for Belonging or Leaving

Church of the Savior CRC of South Bend, Ind., is asking synod "to solicit resources and tools for LGBTQ ministry from Christian Reformed churches who are in agreement with the CRC's position on homosexuality." An overture from River Park CRC in Calgary, Alta., is asking synod "appoint a Gentle Pathway Task Force for ... congregations and pastors who have discerned a need to leave the CRCNA."

Communications

Communications to synod, unlike overtures, don't request a specific action but instead convey concern, protest, or other expressions of importance. There are

26 communications to Synod 2024 in the printed agenda.

Processes for Pastors

Synod 2024 will receive and consider the report from the Church Order Review Task Force (requested by Synod 2022) on articles related to the calling, supervision, release, and readmission of ministers of the Word. The report, found in Appendix B of the Council of Delegates' report to Synod 2024, suggests some updates for consistency and clarity, but it recommends no substantive change for pastor/church separations governed by Article 17a.

Synod 2024 also will consider Synod 2023's proposal to change Church Order articles 14, 15, and 23 and their supplements in support of bivocational pastors, though Classis Atlantic Northeast is asking synod not to adopt the proposed addition to Article 23-d and its supplement. "While well intentioned and aimed at developing a parity in terms of the ways churches support ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors," the overture says, "the proposal obscures the very real differences between these offices, particularly in the distinct ways in which these two offices serve the denomination."

The denomination's Candidacy committee recently surveyed classis leaders about the leadership landscape of the CRCNA. The results are included in the committee's report (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 299-311). There are notes on vacancies (a church with no ordained minister of the Word or commissioned pastor serving in a solo or senior role), classis support for leadership development, the various pathways to ordained ministry and how often they're used, and additional feedback. "We hope that the data compiled through this survey can fuel conversations and inform strategies to move the denomination toward the desired positive growth trend," the committee writes.

Ecumenical Relationships

Along with Candidacy, the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee and the Historical Committee make up the three standing committees of synod who report to synod every year. The EIRC is recommending no change to the current "church in cooperation" status with the relatively new Alliance of Reformed Churches, a network formed in 2021 of mostly formerly Reformed Church in America congregations.

The committee recommends approving the Christian Reformed Church in Liberia as a church in cooperation.

Synod 2024 will consider a request from Classis Iakota to reexamine the CRCNA's ecumenical relationship with the Reformed Church in America by exploring "current RCA practices and whether we really are aligned in doctrine and practice."

Revisiting Race Relations

Synod 2024 will consider two requests to "reaffirm the decision of 1996 regarding racial reconciliation" and "encourage observance of the 1996 declaration on racial reconciliation." Classis Chicago South says Synod 1996's requests to classes "were not fully and universally implemented by the classes of the CRCNA."

Renewal

The Office of General Secretary and the CRC's Thrive ministry have begun work on an assignment from Synod 2023 to work with "the Council of Delegates, each agency, and churches and classes to develop a comprehensive unified strategy and plan to arrest and reverse the trend of decline and bring about a positive trend of membership growth to our denomination" (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 976).

One response to that has been to host 10 conversational gatherings of five classes at a time to discover together "how God is already at work renewing the church." The plan for this "Gather" initiative is in the Council of Delegates' report to synod. Thrive is hosting a Sunday-afternoon presentation so delegates to synod can learn more.

Judicial Code

A review of the CRC's "dispute-resolution mechanism of last resort," the Judicial Code, appears in the supplement to the synod agenda. Found in Church Order Supplement Art. 30-c, the Judicial Code is to be reviewed every five years. The changes to be considered by Synod 2024 are described by the task force that carried out the review as "tuning, rather than an overhaul."

Global Vision

Synod 2024 will consider recommendations from the Global Vision Team, endorsed by the Council of Delegates, to help classes connect with international partners seeking to be affiliated with the CRCNA and to work toward a more formal network to honor and support these connections.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

READ MORE ONLINE

Breaking Barriers to Accessibility in Ministry



By Naomi Bula, World Renew, and Kristyn DeNooyer, Thrive

Everybody belongs; everybody serves.

This is a common refrain for Lindsay Wieland Capel, disability consultant for Thrive, the congregational support agency of the Christian Reformed Church.

Wieland Capel works alongside North American churches, ministries, and faith leaders to equip them to think and act in keeping with the biblical call regarding people with disabilities and to establish ministries with, for, and by people with disabilities and their families.

These values are echoed internationally by the team at World Renew, the CRCNA's community development and disaster response agency.

Everybody belongs; everybody serves.

While the sentiment might seem easy to embrace, its implementation takes intentionality and a willingness to examine the barriers to access that exist in our systems, our architecture, our communication, and our attitudes.

Economic Accessibility

In central Nigeria, people living with disabilities are often overlooked. According to 31-year-old Samuel Iorpuu of the Mbangye community in the Benue State, he and others with a disability often feel like they are not counted, let alone seen or consulted in community development.

That's why he was so excited to be participating in a conservation agriculture project through World Renew's local partner, the Ecumenical Centre for Justice and Peace. Iorpuu received cassava seedlings along with training in conservation agriculture techniques such as composting and using organic fertilizer. This intensive training, which included practice and demonstrations on working farms, boosted Iorpuu's confidence as both a farmer and a small business owner.

After planting the cassava seedlings and implementing what he learned, Iorpuu is now looking forward to a bountiful harvest. He hopes to have a high enough yield to process extra cassava into *garri* (a local staple starch) or cassava flour.

Through ECJP, Iorpuu also participates in a Village Savings and Loan Association. VSLA members meet regularly to pool their savings. Once the savings pool is big enough, group members can take out low-interest loans to invest in their farms and small businesses, pay off debt, or make

improvements to their homes. Iorpuu plans to take out a small loan to purchase even more cassava seedlings and use the harvest to produce *garri* for sale at the local markets.

Iorpuu's participation in the agriculture project has helped his confidence to grow, and that confidence is extending to all areas of his life despite the challenges of living with a disability. His farm is producing cassava plants and also new hope for Iorpuu's future.

Congregational Accessibility

In Hamilton, Ont., Wieland Capel consulted with a church community taking intentional actions toward inclusivity and accessibility. As more individuals with disabilities join their community, the congregation has realized the need to be more intentional in creating a welcoming environment for everyone. They discussed various aspects of their building, worship format, and classroom settings to identify areas for improvement and chart a path forward.

One of the first issues addressed was building access. Church members are considering installing a new ramp because the current one is too steep, making it challenging for individuals with mobility challenges to access the building. They are also looking into improving their elevator and installing push-button doors.

The church also has focused on inclusivity in classroom settings, and Thrive's disability consultant provided the church with ideas on how to include everyone in its educational programs. This included adapting teaching methods,



Samuel Iorpuu (left) weighs cassava brought by participants in World Renew's conservation agriculture project.

providing additional support, and fostering a sense of belonging for all children.

To further support its inclusivity efforts, Wieland Capel suggested a church disability audit to help identify areas where the church can improve its accessibility and inclusivity practices. She also recommended starting a book club to discuss Amy Kenny's book *My Body Is Not a Prayer*



Request. This book club would not only educate the congregation about disability and faith but also foster empathy and understanding toward individuals with disabilities.

The church has embraced these suggestions and is actively considering the disability audit and the book club. These initiatives demonstrate their commitment to creating a more inclusive and welcoming community for everyone.

As the congregation continues on this journey, it is setting an example for other churches to follow. By being honest about the barriers to inclusivity and accessibility in their own building and programming, members are not only making their church more welcoming to individuals with disabilities but also enriching the overall community experience. Through small but meaningful changes, they are creating a more accessible environment that welcomes everyone.

Ministry Accessibility

Thrive employees also are taking a look at the organization's own ministry practices to develop an inclusive posture and accessible resources.

Wieland Capel recently began collaborating with Jill Benson, resource developer for the DWELL Sunday school curriculum, to enhance the accessibility of the materials for children with disabilities, ensuring that every aspect is designed to be accessible to all children.

Together Benson and Wieland Capel are reviewing how Bible stories are taught throughout the curriculum. Are there unintentional slants toward ableism in how some stories are told? How can they ensure that children with disabilities do not feel "othered" or excluded by Bible stories? They also examined DWELL's language and narratives to ensure that they are inclusive and free from ableist biases.



Additionally, they're highlighting existing resources such as the late Barb Newman's tips in *Welcoming Children of All Abilities* and Victoria White's practical ideas from the *Nurturing Belonging: Exploring Hospitality, Disability, and Theology* event hosted by Thrive last fall.

A key goal of this collaboration is to identify what training is needed to support DWELL leaders in the classroom as they seek to include all children, using training formats that ensure its accessibility for all participants and effectiveness in equipping leaders to provide the best possible support for children with disabilities in their educational programs.

Looking to the future, DWELL developers are also considering how they might adapt the curriculum in the long term to



incorporate additional creative elements and suggestions to help leaders create a welcoming environment for all children. Benson and Wieland Capel recognize the importance of accommodating the varying needs of children in the classroom and are exploring new methods of teaching to achieve this.

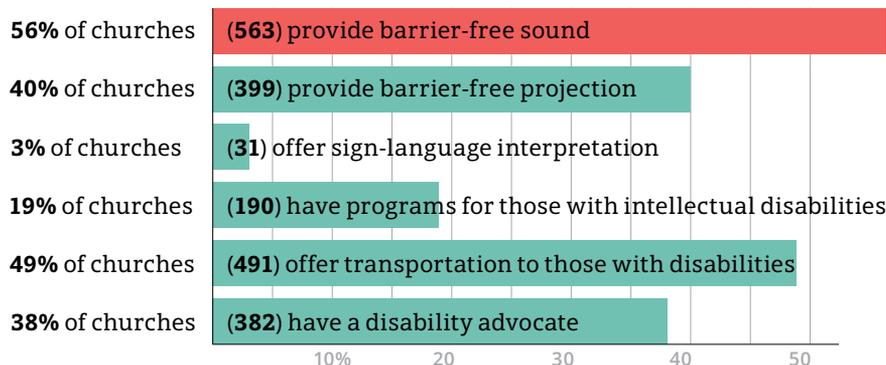
Wieland Capel is also consulting with the Thrive staff who manage the ongoing Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative, a project working to support family faith formation, to ensure the processes within the initiative consider and include families affected by disability.

Our Shared Ministry

Everybody belongs, everybody serves is a call to action, urging us to examine the barriers that exist and actively work toward inclusivity and accessibility in all areas of congregational life and ministry. The CRCNA is expanding its imagination for what is possible and taking intentional steps toward being a more welcoming and accessible home for people with apparent and non-apparent disabilities alike. 

How Accessible Are We?

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH has stated on multiple occasions its desire to be a place where “everybody belongs and everybody serves.” As part of this commitment, the CRCNA has pledged to be a caring community that recognizes the needs and gifts of people with physical, emotional, sensory, and intellectual disabilities. This has included adopting a Resolution on Disabilities in 1985, recommending compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1993, encouraging a network of disability concerns consultants and congregational contacts in 2000, recommending a church-wide celebration of Disability Awareness Week every October starting in 2009, and pledging in 2011 to make sure synod is fully accessible. It also asked all CRC congregations to adopt disability policies and to appoint at least one person to serve as the congregation’s disability advocate. So how are we doing? Here are a few statistics as reported in the last *Yearbook* survey.



The View From Here

God With Us

SOME OF MY MOST DIFFICULT childhood moments came in middle school when I had to spend several months far from home in a pediatric hospital in Chicago. While at this hospital, I underwent an experimental orthopedic treatment that required constant monitoring. The toughest part was not the pain or getting woken up by beeps, buzzes, and blood pressure readings. It wasn't even the hospital food (which, let me tell you, wasn't great). The toughest part was being alone between my parents' visits. While the hospital staff was kind and supportive, I missed my family.

Isn't it interesting that we humans, both the introverted and extroverted among us, long to be with others? Being alone evokes fear and trepidation. Being with others provides courage, resilience, and hope.

Not surprisingly, Scripture repeatedly invokes the image of God being with us. In the Old Testament, God promises Israel: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" (Ex. 6:7). Amid exile and suffering, God reaffirms this commitment to Israel (Jer. 31:1; Ezek. 37:23). In the concluding verses of the New Testament, a voice repeats this declaration to Christ's vindicated church: "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

Isn't it interesting
that we humans,
both the
introverted and
extroverted
among us, long to
be with others?

Jesus Christ is God with us (Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14). Jeremiah 31:1 "At that time," declares the Lord, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people." and Ezekiel 37:23 "They will be my people, and I will be their God."

This month in Our Shared Ministry, we read the stories of people living with disabilities. Like all of us, people with disabilities desire the witness that community provides. In fact, the presence of people with disabilities enhances the Christian community as we learn to appreciate God in each other. In any and every situation, we are better when we are with God and each other in gracious, supportive, and honest ways. To borrow a phrase from Scripture, "The LORD is our God, and we are his people" (Ps. 95:7, CEV).

This June the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America will meet on the campus of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich. When the synod delegates gather to pray, worship, and deliberate, they won't be alone. God will be with them. The prayer and worship theme of Synod 2024 is, appropriately, "God With Us." Synod delegates will need God's presence and wisdom as they take up matters both joyful and difficult. Please join me in interceding for God's gracious presence as our delegates meet, pray, and discuss the work of the church.

In tough times it can be hard to remember, but "God with us" leads to abundant life. In his book *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God*, author Skye Jethani writes that life with God "begins and ends with love. God's love provokes us to treasure him, and in our treasuring we discover the joyful truth that he also treasures us. Love is the beginning and the end, the origin and culmination of our relationship with God. And along the way it provokes wonder, illuminates discoveries, and ignites joy." 



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.

Reconciliation and Doughnuts



Participants at the Canadian National Gathering enjoy doughnuts together.



HAVE YOU EVER MET someone for a meal and afterward walked away feeling closer and more connected to that other person? Has a friend ever introduced you to a new food? These moments can take on particular significance when they happen in intercultural relationships.

In the early 1600s, the Haudenosaunee, an Indigenous group in North America, invited Dutch settlers in their area to live together under the Two-Row Wampum Treaty. Every winter as the groups lived side by side, the Haudenosaunee saw the Dutch settlers celebrating a holiday called *Nieuwjaar* (New Year). Traditionally, the first person awake on the morning of New Year's Day would serve ale and deep-fried dough balls called *oliebol-len* to members of the household.

The Dutch children would then run from house to house in hopes of being the first person at each doorstep in the new year. The first visitor at a house was rewarded with *oliebollen*, coins, and fruit.

After a while, Haudenosaunee people began to adopt the celebration of their Dutch neighbors. Haudenosaunee children would also run door to door in their community on Jan. 1, yelling “New Yah! New Yah!” and being rewarded with homemade donuts and other treats.

Adrian Jacobs, the Christian Reformed Church's senior leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation, said the Haudenosaunee still celebrate *Nó:ia* in his home community of Six Nations despite its coming from another culture centuries ago.

Sometimes deep-fried dough can offer us hope for how to live in peace together.

“My vision of reconciliation,” Jacobs said, “is sitting down to eat together, laughing and maybe even crying together, enjoying one another's music, and perhaps getting up to dance! This is a vision of friendship that motivates me.”

As Canadians look toward National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21, we can celebrate the resiliency of Indigenous people in Canada and learn more about their traditions. Find resources for Indigenous Ministry Sunday and other materials at crcna.org/Indigenous.

—Victoria Veenstra,
Indigenous Ministries

Pulled from the Mud

PAVLO, A NATIVE of Ukraine, whose name was changed because he spoke on condition of anonymity, was naturally stoic, slow to show emotion. But on the morning that Russian tanks started rolling into his home country, fear and uncertainty rushed through him.

As Pavlo arrived for class on the LCC International University campus in Lithuania, his ears rang with the news being passed between students and staff: Ukraine was under attack.

Resonate Global Mission missionary Erin Bronsink locked eyes with Pavlo in the hallway. Erin and her husband, Brian, are Resonate missionaries serving as teachers at LCC. Pavlo had been a student of Erin's last fall, so she knew his home and his family were in Ukraine. Erin offered Pavlo a hug, and he collapsed into her arms. She invited him to their home as a safe place to process the news.

As Pavlo sat quietly at the Bronsinks' kitchen table, Erin gently asked, "Do you want to sit? Pray? Talk?"

Pavlo began sharing his frustration, fear, and uncertainty. He came from a Russian Orthodox background, but today his world had turned upside down, and he expressed doubt about everything from world leaders to God.

Brian offered to pray. With a sigh of defeat and a mutter of God being "the only thing left," Pavlo reluctantly agreed. Though Pavlo's heart was



Pavlo and the son of Resonate Global Mission missionaries Brian and Erin Bronsink, who serve as teachers at LCC International University in Lithuania.

weary, God's peace was near, and accepting prayer that day marked the moment Pavlo's life and relationship with God changed.

That fall, Pavlo accepted Brian's invitation to join his Alpha group for an eight-week introduction to Christianity. Over weekly meals and video lessons, students shared foundational wonderings about Christ and the gospel, such as "What is the Bible?" or "Can God really help me?"

Ivan, a student who sat at Pavlo's table, was already a believer. The pair engaged in vibrant dialogue about what walking with God looks like and what praying in relationship with God sounds like.

The ability to speak directly with God at any moment intrigued Pavlo. As he grew deeper in his understanding of God, he began to appear more alive. He started attending church on Sundays, helping Brian set up for events, and talking about Jesus with others.

During its last meeting, the group drew pictures representing their spiritual life before and after its eight-week journey. Pavlo, an artist at heart, drew two pictures—the first, a messy and muddy pit, and the second, him walking hand in hand with Jesus, who was pulling him from the mud.

"Before, I was stuck in a mud pit, covered in the muck and messiness of sin," Pavlo shared. "Now, though I still have some mud on me, Jesus walks beside me, helping me every step of the way."

Brian pointed out the striking parallel to Psalm 40:2: "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand."

Resonate missionaries like the Bronsinks are sharing the gospel with people like Pavlo all around the world. While it is still not safe for Pavlo to return home, and his parents are unable to leave Ukraine, Pavlo's hope and comfort in Jesus grows deeper each day—and the Bronsinks are there for him.

"He has a desire to surround himself with Christian community, and his outlook on life is noticeably more joyful since growing closer to Christ," Erin said.

—Ashlynn Howe, Resonate Global Mission

True Happiness in Dark Days

MORE THAN 30 YEARS AGO, Jessie stood in her wedding dress exchanging vows with her beloved Martin at an evangelical church. It marked the beginning of a journey filled with unexpected twists and important faith discoveries—a journey in which the Christian Reformed Church has played an important role.

Jessie grew up in the Roman Catholic tradition, but her faith in God and her understanding of Scripture were limited—as is the case for many people in Brazil today.

"Many Brazilians say that the Catholic church feels like an institution rather than a community," said Pastor Hernandes Dias Lopes, ReFrame Ministries' Portuguese ministry leader. Lopes is also the author of June 2024's *Today* devotional series, "True Happiness."

In general, many Brazilians who consider themselves Catholic have very little to do with the church. They attend Mass on major church holidays but otherwise think very little about their faith or beliefs.

When Jessie married Martin, her apathetic faith began to change. Her husband and his family helped her see that church and faith could offer her more.

In the Presbyterian Church in Brazil, Jessie "found her spiritual identity, professing her faith and building a blessed family," Lopes said.

Through the church Jessie had easy access to the programs offered by Luz Para o Caminho (Light for the Path), the shared media ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Brazil and ReFrame Ministries. It is made possible by support from Christian Reformed congregations and individuals.

Over the years, Jessie and Martin listened to the programs, first on the



Many churches in Brazil teach non-biblical beliefs such as prosperity theology. Pastor Hernandes Dias Lopes tries to use his widespread influence on social media and in Brazilian churches to rebut those teachings.

radio and more recently online. Lopes offered Jessie answers to some of her most challenging questions about the Christian faith.

In 2023, Luz Para o Caminho became a lifeline when Jessie and Martin needed it most. Each had received a cancer diagnosis.

As the couple navigated the health and financial challenges of three combined surgeries and 12 combined months of radiation treatments, they often found themselves exhausted and unable to attend church. Yet they knew they had somewhere to turn.

"I always follow your sermons on YouTube, and I am grateful that you bring the Word of God to so many places," Jessie said. "Your videos gave me strength, increased my faith, and gave me joy and hope in the most difficult time of our lives!"

"By God's mercy," Jessie recently shared, both she and Martin are in remission.

"Their testimonies stand as a testament to God's unwavering love, his healing touch, and his ever-present grace," Lopes said.

Listeners to ReFrame's Portuguese media ministry and the other language ministries reaching almost every country are thankful for the prayers and support of CRC members.

"I have no words to express my gratitude to God and gratitude for your videos," Jessie said. "I can't imagine people, countries, or places that don't have access to God's Word."

On June 26, readers can join a special online event to hear more about how God is working in ReFrame's Portuguese-language ministry. Visit ReFrameMinistries.org/Hernandes2024 to sign up for the live event or to receive the recording.

—Brian Clark,
ReFrame Ministries

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Harmony and Dissonance

ALL MY LIFE I HAVE ENJOYED different types of music. I have found that music tends to move me on a different level. Often in our Western way of thinking and learning, we value head knowledge. We understand things with our minds by having them explained to us in a logical fashion.

One of the things I love about music is that it affects us more at the heart level. Music tends to make us feel. There's fascinating science behind what makes music work and what allows us to enjoy music.

Sound is measured in hertz. A hertz (Hz) is one event per second. In the case of music, it is one sound wave per second.

The fascinating thing about making different tones blend together using harmonies or orchestration is that the frequencies need to fit with each other mathematically. A note with a frequency of 110 Hz is an A2. Double the frequency and you have 220 Hz, which is A3—the same note, but in a higher register. Double it again and you have 440 Hz, which is A4. These are all the same note, just in different octaves.

To create harmonies, musicians need to apply different mathematical formulas. Multiply that A2 frequency—110 Hz—by three to create a 330-Hz note, which is an E4. Multiply 110 Hz by five to make 550-Hz note, a C#5. If you play the A2, E4, and C#5 together, along with the 220-Hz note and the 440-Hz note, you'll hear a wonderfully harmonious chord. But throwing in a 500-Hz note will clash. It does not fit the math of the existing frequencies, so it causes dissonance; it doesn't sound right. It's math, and it's music!

So you see, if the numbers "fit" with each other mathematically you can

form a harmony. If they don't, we have dissonance.

Sound is created by vibrations. I play guitar and bass. Those instruments create vibrations when the strings are strummed or plucked. Players affect the length of the sound waves by pressing on the strings to change their length. When those vibrations are in a mathematical ratio, we hear a beautiful chord. When those vibrations are off, like when my guitar is out of tune, they form a dissonance, which we generally don't find enjoyable musically.

This is how Beethoven could write music even when he was deaf. He could hold his hand on the piano or touch an instrument and feel the harmony in those vibrations. He could then write beautiful music even when he could not hear it.

This reminds me of our roles in our churches and communities. When we work together toward a single goal, even with our different talents and gifts, we create beautiful harmony. We are all different, but together we create a beautiful chord and lovely music.

When we each seek our own way and don't work toward harmony, we create unpleasant dissonance.

Be harmonious! **B**



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



Reimagining Church: Being Patient

By Moses Chung and Chris Meehan

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

From its start in 2011, The Table has been a nontraditional Christian Reformed Church ministry community. It calls itself an urban farm, and its focus has been on gathering people from the Platte Park neighborhood and nearby areas in southwestern Denver, Colo., who want to help plant and harvest food, mostly in front- and side-yard garden plots offered by local residents.

People who have been drawn to The Table are generally not regular churchgoers or even believers. Rather, they have been attracted by the chance to help plant and harvest vegetables and fruit for the local community and to spend time together. Evangelism for this community means personal, heart-to-heart transactions; it is about God being made real in the life of the group. Only recently has The Table

obtained a building in which to gather and do its work.

Jeanine Kopaska Broek, who pastors The Table along with her husband, Craig, sees the words “small” and “slow”—words we have been discussing in this series of articles for *The Banner*—as important descriptors of their efforts. In essence, The Table has stayed small and evolved slowly, and Kopaska Broek believes being patient has been crucial.

“Initiating a faith community in the context of a farm has presented every opportunity to practice patience,” she wrote in an email. “In our efforts at The Table, the practice of patience has looked like showing up, sitting alongside, facilitating opportunities, and repeatedly telling ourselves that God has to make the seed grow. ... We leave the truly hard work in God’s hands. We pray for the power to be patient and the willingness to be ready.”

In this third and final article of our series, we want to touch again on the words “small” and “slow”—words that help define our thinking about the shape and pace a church could take when reimagining how to be a church

joining God’s mission in the world. But, building on The Table’s approach, we also want to look at one other word—“patient”—and how patience is a virtue crucial for the growth and survival of our church communities.

Patience Can Help Get Us Unstuck

As I (Moses) travel across the U.S. and Canada and see the conditions of congregations, I have come to grasp why so many churches feel stuck and don’t know how to get unstuck. Beyond the typical statistical reasons, such as aging congregants, young people leaving the church, lack of evangelism growth, and the pervasive culture of secularism, consumerism, and hyper-individualism at work in our society and in our churches, I wonder about other, perhaps more profound challenges at work that blur our focus on Jesus and his mission.

When there are problems and challenges for our churches—and there are many today—it is natural to try to fix those problems. But we get frustrated and discouraged when the plans we make don’t go as we intended. Impatience grabs us. When we get

impatient, we try to control change and force change. The result is the church sinking to another level of stuckness even worse than before.

I believe there is another way. It's the way of patience. In thinking "small and slow," your church can grow in patience by focusing on God's patience, by developing practices such as discernment of the Holy Spirit and prayers of submission, and going after relationships rather than quick results.

Alan Kreider wrote the insightful book *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*, a telling, deeply chronicled history of the role of patience in early Christianity. He writes, "(Early) Christians believed that God is patient and that Jesus visibly embodied patience. And they concluded that they, trusting in God, should be patient—not controlling events, not anxious or in a hurry, and never using force to achieve their ends." In addition, "the early Christians believed that God was in charge of events; they knew they were not."

What Is Patience About?

Patience is about discovering, discerning, and joining God's initiatives and graces. We can relax from our anxiousness, slow down from our hurried pace, and release ourselves from control because, at the end of the day, God's got our church, and we do not. At the same time, God's invitation to us is not to idleness, but to active participation in the Spirit's work through our waiting prayers, obedience to the Spirit's promptings, and trusting God's presence among our church community even through hard times.

Let's look at the dynamic effect of being patient and how, with the Spirit's leading, it can help to offer real hope to your church.

When we get impatient, we try to control change and force change. The result is the church sinking to another level of stuckness even worse than before.

Think of what a small, slow, and patient church means. It means a change of mind, approach, and perspective. It means a church that moves from being a host to seeing itself as a guest or even a servant. It means moving from a focus on outcomes to a focus on faithful obedience, from being driven by our agendas to discovering where God is at work and how we can join God's mission.

Embracing patience and waiting for God to lead the way also means moving from simply offering institutional programs to embracing incarnational presence, from "come to church" to "be the church." It means moving the church from an emphasis on seating capacity to a seeking and sending capacity, from being consumers to being missionaries, and from results to relationships.

How Do We Move Into This Process?

There are a few things we can do in our churches to shepherd a transformational change in outlook and the practice of patience. To start, we must look and discern deeply our habitus inside ourselves, our congregations, and our neighborhoods. As we observe, assess, and adapt to our own sacred inclinations and to those of our community, we start to form new habits. Most of these will be instinctive and become second nature to your own walk of faith and to your church. Formed by repetition, we will do things—good things, holy things—over and over so they become habitual and reflexive. We concentrate on developing practices that contribute to a habitus that characterizes individual Christians and Christian communities.

But we don't stop there. As the early church often did, we pay special attention to the notion of attraction instead of promotion in opening our community to others. We want people to see what we are doing and, being intrigued, to want to join. In welcoming people to our church, we find and use the right resources, fit to our context, for teaching newcomers about the ways, beliefs, and worship practices of our church. We are formed as God's people as we share the Eucharist, God's meal for us, as well as with sit-down dinners and other types of meals. Eating together brings us together.

Now to the Growth

All of this said, we come to the reality of ferment, a bubbling energy, a bottom-up inner life, a time—for however long—of letting things happen. By allowing the Spirit to slowly shape us and work on the world around us, we realize God is at work and will, when the time is right, open

the next door, the next story of our life together.

I know this process sounds hard, but through its sheer simplicity it promises to upend your communal life. Truly, it is tough. But it works! We've seen it work. Many Christian Reformed congregations we found reflect those three words—small, slow, and patient—in different ways.

A Time With the Monks

Seeking patience and some solace, I (Chris) stood in the dim light of the church at St. Gregory's Abbey in Three Rivers, Mich., one Friday this winter. It was late afternoon as the Episcopal Benedictine monks began chanting vespers, one of seven daily times of corporate prayer.

Soft voices filled the air as the monks chanted a few psalms. I closed my eyes and took in a deep, steadying breath, thinking that the handful of black-robed men singing in their stalls in front of the altar had hardly changed in all of the years I'd been coming here.

What hit me as the service unfolded is that these men exemplify the virtue of patience through their year-after-year, under-the-radar commitment to prayer and worship. To me, they embody the small, slow, and patient way of life we've been writing about.

After vespers and dinner, I sat in my room and got online to see what the Rule of Saint Benedict, the sixth-century document guiding the life of all Benedictine monks, has to say about patience. This is what I read: "In truth, those who are patient amid hardships and unjust treatment are fulfilling the Lord's command: When struck on one cheek, they turn the other; when deprived of their coat, they offer their cloak also; when pressed into service for one mile, they go two."

Those words hit hard. In other words, patience is more than calmly waiting or enduring. Patience is alive and active. Practicing patience is a core way of living in the way of Jesus and being his church in the world.

A Small, Slow, and Steady Process

True, being patient is not easy, but there is a sustaining clarity to it. You choose the path of patience realizing you are not on a fast track. You accept the fact that all of this takes time. You slow down and face doubts and challenges. Whether you are a monk or a simple churchgoer, you lean into God to help you on this uncertain journey. Even as you go, this might seem like something you aren't able to do. You might want to return to the get-it-done-now mindset. Still, there are so many stories out there—if you pay attention—that buck the trend of pell-mell fragmentation, of being gripped by a galloping fear of the future. For our book, we met and learned from people who are bearing witness to perseverant yet joyful participation in God's activities in their local contexts, usually in small acts of obedience and with a slow pace of progress. They are "such a great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) for Christian Reformed congregations and many others in abbeys, cathedrals, and storefront churches who need hopeful signs for churches in North America today.

We think of ourselves in the CRCNA in relation to Hebrews 12:1-2: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The early Christian church knew what we are just starting to realize: that patience and persistence are paramount. Whether it's two members or 20 or more, we believe churches across our denomination are stirring with a renewed life born of hope. In a world of so much woe, those of us who follow Jesus are starting to do exactly what the author of Hebrews commands—to fully fix our eyes on Christ. Even if Jesus takes us into places that confuse us, even if Christ requires us to wait, stay put, and move on at the same time, we are coming to know in small, slow, and patient ways that we can make it. Ferment has begun. Grace is flowing, and joy is not far behind. Truly God has called his many witnesses to live lives bounded by love and defined, scary as it can be, by a willingness to change, even if that means having to wait for our questions to be answered. 



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).

1. Where in your church do you see or experience "small and slow"? How do you feel about it?
2. Do you think your church is currently patient or impatient? Why?

READ MORE ONLINE

Celiac Facts

Every Church Should Know

The only treatment for celiac disease is a lifelong adherence to a strict gluten-free diet.

COMMUNION, after-church cookies, church meals, and even snacks at Bible study can be awkward for me.

Why? Because I have celiac disease.

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder. If you're a celiac, eating even tiny amounts (crumbs) of gluten can trigger an autoimmune reaction that damages the small intestine. (Gluten is a general name for the proteins found in wheat, rye, and barley.)

The only treatment for celiac disease is a lifelong adherence to a strict gluten-free diet. But it's not enough for celiacs just to avoid bread and pasta. Gluten can be found in soup, cereal, sauces, salad dressings, food coloring, and so many other things!

If you have more than 100 people in your congregation, odds are at least one of them has celiac disease. Celiac disease is estimated to affect one in 100 people (celiac.org).

Although it's called a disease, celiac isn't contagious. It's genetic. I avoid gluten the best I can, but in case of accidental ingestion, I feel very sick and suffer intestinal damage. That intestinal damage makes it hard for my body to absorb nutrients, which can lead to malnourishment and a host of other issues.

You might be saying, "All that is great information, but how can I help celiacs feel safe and welcomed at our church?" I'm glad you asked!

1. Make communion safe.

When I first started attending Westend Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., I noticed they had gluten-free bread cut up and passed around on the communion plates with the regular bread. While I appreciated the effort, this gluten-free bread was at risk of accidentally coming into contact with gluten from the neighboring pieces of regular

bread on the plate or even from the shared knives and cutting board used to prepare the elements.

I reached out to Westend's leadership to tell them how to have safer communion options for celiacs. Now our church offers individually packaged gluten-free wafers and communion cups. I am so happy to be able to participate in communion now without having to worry about accidentally consuming gluten.

2. Don't pressure people to eat something.

If someone isn't eating the cookies after church or isn't participating in the meal, it's OK to invite them to partake. But if they politely decline, please don't pressure them. They might have celiac disease or another condition you don't know about.

3. Let people know it's OK for them to bring their own food.

Food is everywhere at church functions—after-church cookies, snacks at Bible study, potlucks, pizza parties, and more. Before these events, be sure to let people know they are welcome to bring their own food or snack.

Most celiacs I know (including me) are more than happy to supply their own food and snacks wherever they go. We don't want to be an inconvenience to anyone! But if you want to have gluten-free snacks available for celiacs, go for individually packaged store-bought gluten-free snacks. This helps avoid accidental cross-contamination.

Fellow celiacs, what tips would you add to this list? **B**



Laurel Dykema has more than a decade of experience as a professional nonprofit writer. She lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., and attends Westend Christian Reformed Church.

The Comeback King

According to Jesus, the best way to keep watch is to faithfully live day to day doing the small, ordinary things of life with love.



Sam Gutierrez is the associate director of the Eugene Peterson Center for the Christian Imagination at Western Theological Seminary. More of his creative work can be found at printandpoem.com.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.” —Matthew 25:31

IN A SMALL STUDIO in Memphis, Tenn., Elvis Presley and his newly formed quartet of musicians recorded a song with a pulsing eight-bar blues progression. Called “Heartbreak Hotel,” it was released in January 1956 and rocketed to No. 1 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 chart.

Presley’s popularity continued to soar as he released more hit singles, including the title song of his movie “Jailhouse Rock.” Then, in 1958, Presley was drafted into the U.S. Army and stationed overseas. Released from active duty after two years, he returned to acting and found a cookie-cutter movie formula that proved wildly successful. For the next eight years, Presley starred in more than 20 films and gained immense cultural popularity as a movie star.

But Presley grew increasingly dissatisfied. He longed for more dramatic roles and felt stuck in the superficial scripts that defined his movie career. Moreover, while he was starring on the silver screen, the sound of American music had shifted dramatically. By the late 1960s, Presley had been largely sidelined as a touchstone musical artist, and many considered him to be a nostalgia act of a bygone era.

But out of the blue came a resurgence that surprised everyone: the ‘68 *Comeback Special*.

On Dec. 3, 1968, NBC aired this 50-minute Elvis concert. An astounding 42% of TV-watching Americans tuned in to watch Presley curl his lip, rock his pelvis, and sing his greatest hits. At the very end, in a moment that has become iconic, Presley emerged from the shadows wearing a white suit and singing a new

song on an otherwise bare stage. His backdrop was five giant illuminated letters: ELVIS.

Presley’s comeback was heralded a triumph.

A Biblical Comeback

Two thousand years ago, on the island of Patmos, the apostle John had a vision of the greatest comeback of all time. With trembling hands and eyes full of wonder, he managed to write, “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. ... On his robe and on his thigh, he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:11,16).

The early church believed that Christ would come back within a generation. These first Christians could never have imagined that 2,000 years later the church would still be waiting. But we continue to wait with expectant hope because Jesus promised that he would come back, though no one knows the exact day or hour.

When we think about Christ’s return, we eagerly pray with generations of Christians, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” However, the unknown timeline can cause an uneasy feeling to settle in the pit of one’s stomach. In Matthew 25, Jesus paints a picture of his surprise comeback with three parables of people who were ready and people who were not. When we read these stories, our hope is to be counted among those who were prepared, but many of us are still afraid we’ll be caught unaware, unprepared, or preoccupied with nonessentials. But notice that Jesus’ conclusion is not “Therefore, be afraid.” Rather, his teaching at the end of the first parable is “Therefore, keep watch.”

To “keep watch” means to live our everyday moments in harmony with



the everlasting melody of how everything will be one day.

According to Jesus, the best way to keep watch is to faithfully live day to day doing the small, ordinary things of life with love while paying special attention to those around us who are most vulnerable. In the last of these three parables, Jesus lays out some practical ways to harmonize with the everlasting melody of heaven. Matthew 25:35-36 says, “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

However, our uneasy feeling might persist if we put these simple instructions into practice while viewing God as a cosmic critic marking a checklist. The key to “keeping watch” while avoiding a stress-induced ulcer is to have a clear understanding of who is coming back.

Philippians 2 is clear: Christ, the King of heaven, took on human flesh, died on a cross, rose from the grave, defeating sin and death, and then ascended

to sit down at the right hand of God. This King of heaven who humbled himself in generous, self-giving love for the salvation of the world is such good news that the apostle Paul boldly declares: “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:31-32).

Elvis and Jesus

After the success of the 1968 *Comeback Special*, Presley embarked on a seven-year residency at the International Hotel in Las Vegas. At a concert in 1974, under the flare of the lights, his sequin-covered white jumpsuit sparkled while a throng of passionate fans pressed against the stage. One devoted fan was holding a sign that said “The King.” When Presley saw the sign, he said, “Thank you, darlin’, thank you very much. ... But I can’t accept this

kingship thing because to me, there’s only one, which is Christ.”

When Presley came back in 1968, he was crowned the king of rock and roll. When Christ comes back, riding on the clouds, everyone on earth will see him, bow their knee, and declare Christ the undisputed King of heaven and earth.

No one knows the day or the hour, but when history crescendos and Christ returns, God’s generous love will calm our fears as we put our faith in him. Trusting that God is completely for us, we can rest in the promise that nothing we do or fail to do can ever separate us from God’s faithful love. Because of this reassuring truth, keeping watch for the greatest surprise comeback in history need not be anticipated with fear, but with confident hearts full of thanksgiving and with grateful hands and feet always ready to serve.

On that day we’ll surround the throne and sing with full voice the same song we’ve been gratefully humming in our hearts every ordinary day of our lives. 

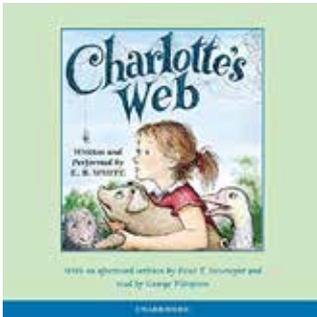
1. What have you learned about the second coming of Jesus? Did you learn this from primarily Reformed sources?

2. How did you feel about Christ’s second coming? Did it bring forth hope or fear? Or some other emotion? Why?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

Dip Into Summer Reading

A little something for every bookworm as we head into the warmer months.



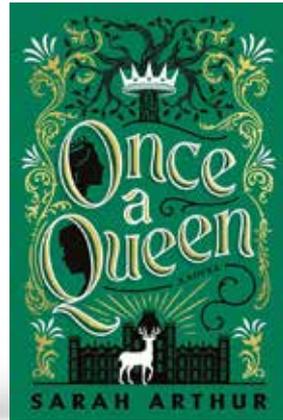
Charlotte's Web (Audiobook)

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

I've always loved this story of a pig named Wilbur, a girl named Fern, and a spider named Charlotte, but the audiobook version, read by the late E.B. White himself, is, as Charlotte described Wilbur, "radiant."

Listeners will be transported to an old-fashioned barnyard with all its creatures as White envelops them in his timeless tale of friendship and sacrifice. White, who died in 1985, is said to have written *Charlotte's Web* after watching a spider spin a web on his farm, so it makes sense that his narration is so wonderfully intimate. Who better to give life to these characters?

Listeners of any age will fall for Wilbur, Charlotte, and the gang all over again as they immerse themselves in this tender, wise, and life-giving classic story. (3 hours, 34 minutes, Audible)



Once a Queen: A Novel

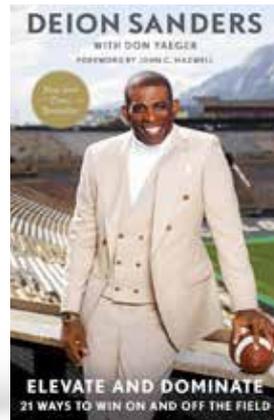
By Sarah Arthur

Reviewed by Ann Byle

Sarah Arthur, author of numerous nonfiction titles, offers young adult readers her first novel, a tale of queens, faraway lands, and mysterious happenings.

Eva Joyce, an American 14-year-old, spends the summer at the English manor house of her grandmother, a woman she's never met. As she explores the house and grounds, Eva discovers that the fairy tales she loved as a child are perhaps more than simply stories. Her frosty grandmother's nighttime ramblings add even more mystery as Eva and her new friend Frankie try to unravel what's going on.

Young adult readers will identify with Eva as she struggles to know herself and her family, and they'll love the richly layered story Arthur weaves perfectly to its satisfying conclusion. (WaterBrook)

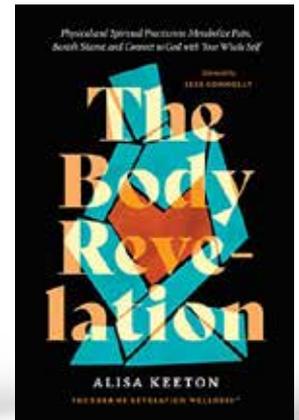


Elevate and Dominate: 21 Ways to Win On and Off the Field

By Deion Sanders

Reviewed by Paul Delger

Sports personality Deion Sanders makes headlines. Folks either love the guy or they dislike him and question his tactics. Love him or not, the former professional football and baseball player, now the head football coach at the University of Colorado, is on a mission to influence especially young people's lives. His book *Elevate and Dominate: 21 Ways to Win on and Off the Field* is an inspirational tool that can motivate athletes, coaches, parents, and business or community leaders. The book also discusses parts of Sanders' personal story of being raised by a single mother and having a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. The book affably draws the reader in and offers plenty of encouragement and hope. (Gallery Books)



The Body Revelation

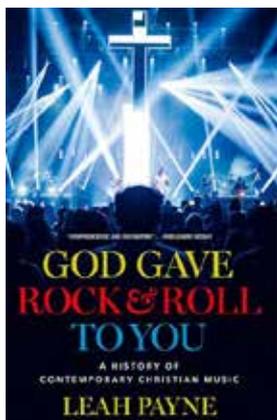
By Alisa Keeton

Reviewed by Mary Li Ma

God created us as embodied human beings. The body has a natural healing ability to overcome adversity, pain, and even trauma. When we consider all things as coming from a benevolent God, including how our body experiences its surroundings, it brings a new revelation about the guidance of God in our life. This book seeks to restore a holistic view of human beings as embodied and sacred.

Alisa Keeton guides readers to embrace the truth that we are called to honor God with our bodies instead of living "disintegrated lives."

"The bodies He's given us are useful for metabolizing, not just food, but also mental and emotional pain," she writes. As we partner with our bodies to understand this intricate dynamic, we can progress from merely surviving to thriving. (Tyndale)



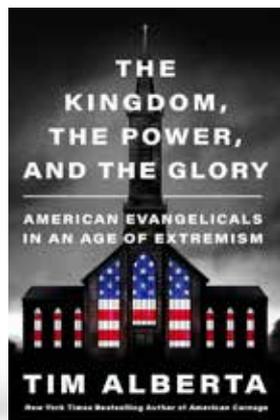
God Gave Rock and Roll to You: A History of Contemporary Christian Music

By Leah Payne

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

God Gave Rock and Roll to You is not a lightweight treatment of the contemporary Christian music industry that developed in the 1970s and became a major economic force in the 1990s. In this carefully researched book, Payne, a professor of American religious history at Portland Seminary, weaves the story of how pastors and other Christian leaders fought against music with a beat, tried counterprogramming with youth musicals, and finally embraced Christian rock and pop as a good alternative to what mainstream music was offering to young people.

The story is complex, and Payne takes us through many of the twists and turns of what was going on in music and in the broader evangelical community. If you lived through any part of this history, you will be fascinated. (Oxford University Press)



The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism

By Tim Alberta

Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory draws a through line across decades of events to locate where Evangelicalism has fractured.

Each chapter recounts stories from different cities: Atlanta, Ga.; Montgomery, N.Y.; Columbus, Ohio; and Washington, D.C. Whether we delve into the Southern Baptist fracas or a lone pastor's shattering, the patterns align.

I found Alberta's book a worthy and troubling read. Why? It articulated well the knife edges I now feel in my world.

This book scares me. After all, no matter which party we align ourselves with, trouble abounds, as Frederick Douglass says, when we confuse the Christianity of the land with the true Christianity of Christ. (HarperCollins)



Remaining You While Raising Them: The Secret Art of Confident Motherhood

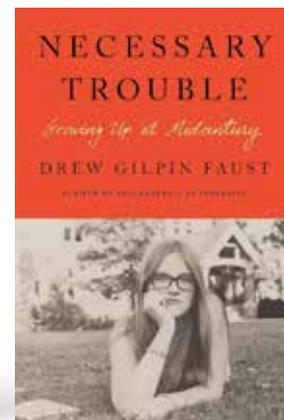
By Alli Worthington

Reviewed by Mary Li Ma

Motherhood might be intuitive for some people. But according to Alli Worthington, it might also be a season of lost identity, perpetual guilt, outsized expectations, and emotional suffering.

This book applies the gospel of grace to help moms realign their roles and priorities in motherhood. The author explains how society tends to impose a uniform purpose on mothers, as if self-sacrifice were the ultimate goal. But even in the lives of our children, we mothers are only passers-by. The truth is that "we carry a weight that God never intended us to carry."

The author takes a strengths-based approach to help mothers discover their "superpower," whether it is encouragement, steadiness, commitment, excellence, or joy. Instead of fixating on our weaknesses, mothers can focus on their strengths when raising their children. (Zondervan)



Necessary Trouble: Growing Up at Midcentury

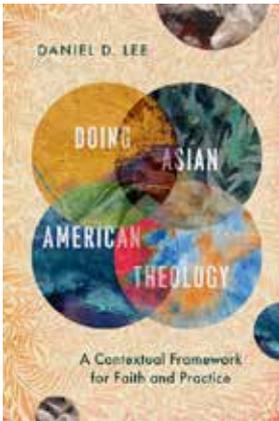
By Drew Gilpin Faust

Reviewed by Reginald Smith

Historian Drew Gilpin Faust turns her pen to her own family's history of living in the South and her coming of age as a baby boomer who challenged her upbringing during the civil rights movement.

Faust, who is white, realized she was living in a racially contradictory context in Virginia. "I grew up in a constant company of Black people, human beings central to my life, yet I somehow came to understand that an unspoken hierarchy required our distance—both physical and emotional—from them. . . . We had—and came to assume we deserved—better houses, better education, a better future."

This memoir comes from the mind of a historian who truly believes that "history is about choices and about how individuals make those choices within the structures and circumstances in which they find themselves." (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)



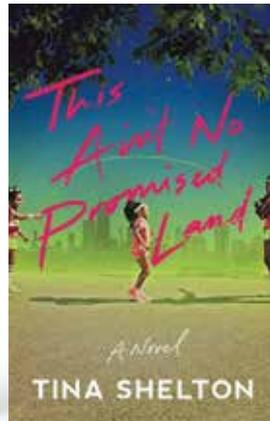
Doing Asian American Theology

By Daniel D. Lee

Reviewed by Daniel Jung

Doing Asian American Theology, by Daniel D. Lee, Ph.D., is particularly helpful for two audiences: non-Asian brothers and sisters who are interested in or currently serving an Asian American ministry context, and Asian Americans who are parishioners in those contexts.

But the book is also useful for anyone who has lived experiences as an Asian American. Lee, the academic dean for the Center of Asian American Theology and Ministry at Fuller Seminary, draws from his professional training and his personal experiences to create the Asian American Quadrilateral—a four-fold framework that helps Asian Americans understand themselves, their faith, and their ministry. Whether the reader is Asian American or not, the book is essential for anyone who wishes to “perform their cultural analysis with a scalpel instead of a sledgehammer.” (IVP Academic)



This Ain't No Promised Land

By Tina Shelton

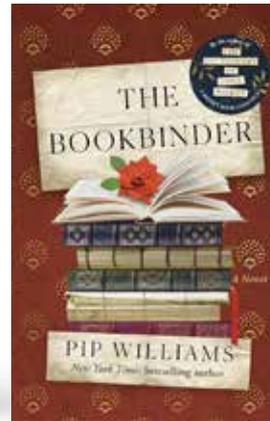
Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In this emotionally complex and well-crafted debut novel set in Chicago in 1987, author Tina Shelton narrates the story of one family from the alternating perspectives of mother Charlotte and her 14-year-old daughter, Gracey.

When father Moses dies of a heart attack, the family is unmoored. Shockingly, Charlotte abandons her children in order to deal with her traumatic past.

Though the neighbors in their tightly knit Black community gather around the girls to help them survive, the consequences of Charlotte's decision pile up, and an irrevocable chain of events is set in motion.

Shelton subtly includes commentary on the fallout of slavery in the United States that continues through the generations, and she shows how, even though “this ain't no promised land,” God is at work healing families and bringing justice. (Kregel Publications)



The Bookbinder

By Pip Williams

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Twenty-one-year-old twins Peggy and Maude have worked as bindery girls at the Oxford University Press since they were 12. Now it's 1914, and World War I is ravaging Europe.

Though Peggy and Maude look identical, they are vastly different. Peggy dreams of an education at Oxford's Somerville College for female students. But she knows college is not for bindery girls.

Maude, on the other hand, is seen as “feebleminded” by those who don't know her. But Peggy knows otherwise.

Soon dreams of any kind seem pointless as the horrors of war are brought home to Oxford.

The Bookbinder, which includes several sexually explicit scenes, addresses themes still relevant in the world today, including the tremendous sacrifices offered by men and women alike in times of war and pandemic. (Ballantine Books)



The Warsaw Sisters

By Amanda Barratt

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Set in Poland during World War II, this richly detailed historical novel for adults narrates the stories of twin sisters Antonina and Helena Dabrowska.

Though the 17-year-old sisters had known hardship, nothing could have prepared them for the terror, deprivation, and indignity of living under German occupation. Antonina and Helena look on in horror as German forces assault the Jewish population and finally create a walled-in ghetto for Jews.

Antonina and Helena each make choices that involve great danger and lead to a devastating rift in their relationship.

Author Amanda Barratt deftly explores the spiritual landscape of war: how it might cause people to turn away from God and how it might throw people on the mercy of God as they seek God with renewed desperation and fervor. (Revell)

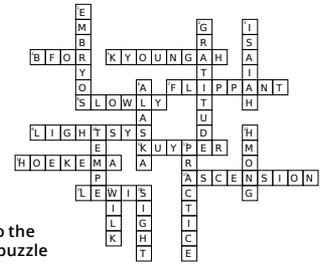
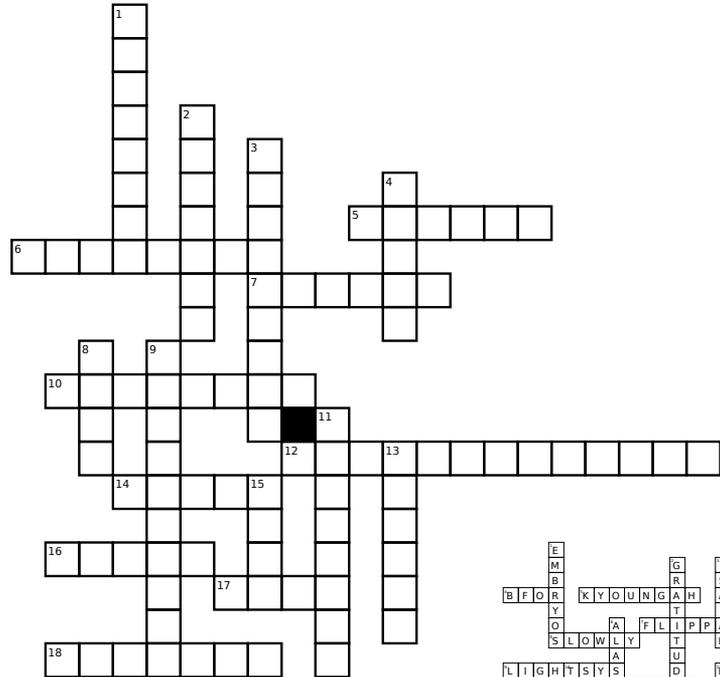
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions next month.
 (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

Down

1. Commonly called a "prayer plant"
2. Ministry _____ Center
3. Each classis may send four of these to synod
4. Disability consultant for Thrive
8. Title of Skye Jethani's book
9. _____ and Interfaith Relations Committee
11. A crucial virtue for church growth
13. Woman who was "always doing good and helping the poor"
15. One of the two names the white horse rider is called in Rev. 19

Across

5. *The _____ Sisters*, a novel set in WW2 Poland
6. Zaccheus climbed up one of these
7. Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder that reacts to _____
10. *Banner* section intended for a younger audience
12. An Indigenous group in North America
14. *The Banner* received an award of _____ from the Evangelical Press Association
16. "Jailhouse Rock" singer
17. The little girl who raises a prize pig
18. Tina _____, author of *This Ain't No Promised Land*



Solution to the May 2024 puzzle

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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.

Church Positions Available

FULL TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR Join Cottonwood CRC in Jenison, MI as an Associate Pastor with the opportunity to grow into our Senior Pastor. Lead community connections, manage ministry opportunities, and contribute to worship services. If you're ordained or an ordination candidate with a strong commitment to the reformed Christian faith, become part of our impactful team. Learn more about our church at cottonwoodcrc.com. Questions, cover letters, & resumes can be emailed to searchteam@cottonwoodcrc.com.

FULL TIME CO-PASTOR POSITION at Crosspoint Community Church, Tillsonburg ON. Check us out at <https://crosspointtillsonburg.com> to see the exciting journey we're on! We are striving for 30% time community outreach. See our profile on the CRCNA website 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

FULL-TIME PASTOR AT FIRST CRC DETROIT We, the members of First Christian Reformed Church of Detroit in Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan, are prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor to lead our congregation. We are seeking an enthusiastic, insightful, open-minded individual to lead and work in conjunction with a small staff, our Council, and our congregation to continue the discipleship and strong traditions upon which our church is built. Interested applicants should send their resume to pastorsearch@firstcrcdetroit.org.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR A FT SR. PASTOR at Golden Gate CRC (ggcrc.org) in San Francisco to provide leadership, direction and vision for our 3 diverse congregations and 4 associate pastors. 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.

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 Anniversary

CHURCH ANNIVERSARY 40 YEARS

CHURCH ANNIVERSARY 40 YEARS Community CRC in Richmond Hill, Ontario Canada will be celebrating 40 years of faithfulness and serving the community. Join our Celebration service and lunch on Sunday, June 9, 2024 @ 10am. To RSVP email marleenclements@community-church.ca

FAITH CHURCH IN BURLINGTON ONTARIO IS CELEBRATING ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY! With joy and thankfulness to God, we invite you to celebrate with us. Our family-friendly events will take place on Sunday, June 23rd with a worship service at 10:00 am and a Party in the Parking Lot from 3-5:00 pm. All are invited! For more information email info@faithcrc.ca "The Lord is good! He is faithful through every generation!"

—Psalm 100

Employment

TEACH IN NICARAGUA! Nicaragua Christian Academy - an English speaking PreK-12th grade school is looking for a 6th Grade Teacher and a MS English/Social Studies Teacher. Learn more at www.nca.edu.ni/teach and apply online at <https://bit.ly/ncai-apply-teach>

Obituaries



ADDINK, MARY (WALCOTT) passed away at home on April 1, 2024 in Gilbert, AZ. She is survived by 4 siblings, 3 children, and 11 grandchildren. Mary did everything humbly with a servant's heart, bringing joy and comfort to those around her, and will be greatly missed by her friends and family.

CREANEY, Helena "Babe" nee Beukema, age 103, went home to be with the Lord on April 18, 2024. Beloved wife to the late Gerald P. Creaney (1998). Loving mother of Nancy (late Richard) Sweders and the late Gerald (late Sharon) Creaney. Cherished grandmother of Gerald Sweders, Michele Sweders, Richard Sweders, Timothy (Melissa) Sweders, Erin (Devin) McGuire, Beth-Anne (Jon) Seeley, Bill (Michele) Creaney

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and Patti (Jim) Jibbens. Dearest great-grandmother of 18 and great-great-grandmother of 11. Fond sister of Jean Heersma. Preceded in death by siblings Clara DeBoer, Ida Bruinius, Alice Kerkstra, Nell Bruinius and Albert Beukema. Dear aunt of many nieces and nephews.

DE YOUNG, HAROLD age 97 of Allendale, Mich. passed away April 29, 2024. He was preceded in death by his wife of 75 years, Edna. He will be lovingly remembered by his children Charles (Lorie) De Young, Christi De Young, Mary (Bill) Espinoza. Grand children Justin De Young, Morgan(Travis) Ernst, Jeremy(Leigh) Espinoza. Great grand children Sawyer, Laurel, Weston and Sadie Ernst. Harold and Edna both volunteered many years for CRWRC and were members of Second Allendale CRC. His family is grateful for a long life filled with love, service and generosity.



DEVRIES, REV. SCOTT, age 47, of Holland, passed away Saturday, April 27, 2024, five weeks after being diagnosed with stage 4 cancer.

Scott was a 1994 graduate of South Christian High School, earned an engineering degree from Michigan State University and his Master of Divinity degree from Calvin Theological Seminary. He pastored at West Olive Christian Reformed Church and Bethany Christian Reformed Church. He also served the Christian Reformed Church Classis Holland and was currently the Director of Synodical Services for the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Scott was an adventurer who loved enjoying the beauty of God's creation through backpacking, fishing, camping, hiking, biking, and skiing. He was an avid reader, a loyal friend, dedicated husband, and loving father.

Scott is survived by his wife, Sara (Dalman) DeVries; his children, Samantha and Isaiah DeVries; his parents, Mike and Mary (Dykstra) DeVries; his brothers, Jeff DeVries and wife Becky, Rick DeVries and wife Lisa, Ken DeVries and wife Carley; sister, Katie Statler and husband Corey; parents-in-law, Rodger and Ruth (DeGuzman) Dalman, siblings-in-law, Arjan Hodges and husband Shannon, as well as Nate Dalman and wife Sabrina; and the blessing of many nieces and nephews.

Visitation is planned for 5:00-8:00 p.m. Thursday, May 9, at Langeland-Sterenbergh Funeral Home, 315 E 16th St., Holland. A memorial service is scheduled for 2:00 p.m. Friday, May 10, at Faith Christian Reformed Church, 85 W 26th St., Holland, with Rev. Jen Rozema officiating. Burial will be in Pilgrim Home Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to a scholarship fund for the DeVries children with checks made payable to Edward Jones.

Condolences may be left online at www.langelandsterenbergh.com.



HUIZENGA, AUDREY (NIEBOER) age 95, from Munster, Indiana, went home to her Lord and Savior on Sunday, April 21, 2024. She is survived by her children Christy (Bud) Van Genderen, Jerry

(Kathy) Huizenga, Mark (Lucinda) Huizenga, Brian (Karen) Huizenga, and Alan (Mary) Huizenga. She was a proud grandmother to 15 grandchildren and 25 great grandchildren. She is preceded in death by her faithful husband Gerald. Audrey and Gerald were charter members of Hammond Christian Reformed Church and served there faithfully for many years.

VENEMA, AUDREY JEANNE (NEE KALMINK) July 19, 1924-April 15, 2024. From Holland MI and Sarnia ON. Beloved wife of Rev. Henry Venema (deceased 1972) for 25 years. Children: Gayle Grin & Gary Stairs, Tom & Jan Venema, June & John Tenyenhuis, Ted Venema & Kim Redlin, Ken & Pia Venema. 12 Grandchildren (1 deceased) 17 Great Grandchildren; and Audrey's sister: Norma Venema. An adventurous, open-minded, risk-taking and non-judgmental woman of faith in the Lord.

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 50 YEARS



MILLER Gene and Lois (Sterk) celebrated their 50th anniversary in May. Their children and families are grateful for God's grace in uniting and guiding their parents' lives and stories.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS



KERSSIES, REV. JOHN & JOYCE (HUIZENGA) of Brockville, Ontario celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on June 6, 2024. They give thanks to God for his faithfulness and blessings as they celebrated

with children, Sonja & Eric Verwijs, and Heidi & Albert Blokland and grandchildren (William, Michelle, Elizabeth, & Christopher Verwijs) and many friends.

VAN DONSELAAR Rev. Marvin and Esther, Sioux Center, IA, 60th Anniversary on June 3, 2024. Five children: Marla (Gary) De Jong, Brian (Carey), Sheryl (Brent) Vande Kamp, Karen (Jason deceased) Soodsma, Mark (Diane). 12 Grandchildren. All praise and thanks to the Lord for His faithfulness.

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Sep 11 - Sep 20

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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*

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS IN TURKEY AND THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION
May 27 - Jun 8 | *Dr. Jeffrey A. D. Weima*

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WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS

HAARSMAN, HENRY & BETH celebrate 70 years together on June 1. They along with their children, Norm & Deb, Gayle, and Loren & Deb give thanks to God for His blessings in their lives.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 75 YEARS



SEVEN DECADES OF SCHIERBEEK LOVE: A PLATINUM ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION! Henry and Dorothy Schierbeek will be celebrating their 70th anniversary this year. They were married at the

Prosper Christian Reformed Church in Falmouth, Michigan on June 25, 1954. They have been blessed with three children: Greg (Betsey), Mary Beth, and Bob (Mary Jo). Additionally, they have nine grandchildren: Nathan (Lauren), Sara, Alex (Jenna), Joe (Molly), Leah (Chad), Gina (Will), Nick (Mallory), Jackson, and Elizabeth. They are also fortunate to have three great-grandchildren: Rhoda, Henry, and Graham. They have built an amazing life together with their family enjoying summers at Stony Lake, enjoying time with friends from their church Fuller Avenue CRC, and with extended family. Their love for each other and love of God has inspired many within their family and community.

75TH ANNIVERSARY Rose and Al Vanden-Bosch celebrate their 75th wedding anniversary on June 17, 2024. 301 Fifth Ave. N. Apt. 509 Edgerton MN 56128 Thanks be to God!

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Church Potlucks and the Sharing of Blessings

Sharing food,
basic as it is, has
become a strong
embodiment
of fellowship,
selfless giving,
and the sharing of
blessings.



Mary Li Ma is a member of Plymouth Heights Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. She holds a Ph.D. from Cornell University and now works as a research analyst for a national research center on education equity.

“NEXT WEEK IS church potluck again! My favorite!” says my 11-year-old son while reading the upcoming events listed in the church bulletin. He’s a food enthusiast, but interestingly is not a huge fan of eating at buffet restaurants. I think he prefers the celebratory atmosphere at church.

My mother had seven siblings, and every family reunion while I was growing up in China involved a huge meal for over 50 people. I have fond memories of being part of that big, warm family and sharing food together.

Today, my immigrant family does not usually have large gatherings at home. Our children do not have grandparents around when schools host Grand Friends Day. I think this might be why my children are happy to hang out with our large church family, who all bring their well-prepared dishes, especially a wide variety of desserts. My children will chat with their elderly prayer partners, Cadets and GEMS counselors, and youth group teachers.

The church potluck tradition is a hallmark of my own spiritual journey. As an international student studying in a foreign land, there is nothing better than meals prepared by welcoming local friends. It was something to look forward to on a Friday evening. The small Chinese church in upstate New York I regularly visited has faithfully upheld this tradition for over 30 years, reaching hundreds of students with Christian hospitality. Sharing food, basic as it is, has become a strong embodiment of fellowship, selfless giving, and the sharing of blessings.

The early church also had regular potluck meals that evolved into what we know as communion. The church knew that following Jesus by sharing meals with each other is a tangible representation of God’s abundance and generosity. Simply sharing the

space of eating nurtures a sense of community and togetherness.

Like these meals of the early church, where the rich and the poor mingled, today’s church potlucks also engage a diverse community. Everyone brings a dish, and no matter how simple or elaborate, that food is an equally delightful gift from God. There were a few times in the past I forgot to bring prepared food and felt hesitant to stay, yet the invitation was always enthusiastic: “There is plenty of food here!” This invitation is just like the words of the psalmist: “Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him” (Ps. 34:8). At this moment, we feel overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude for this community.

Church potlucks are a time for being human together. Little kids run around while people line up, chat while waiting, and serve each other. There is a joyful, celebratory spirit in the air. During conversations, we lay bare our human needs and manifest joys. With time, people get familiar with each other’s recipes and recognize which dish is prepared by whom. Families with young children exchange information about fun activities or plan play dates. I am grateful to God that our kids belong to this extended church family. 

The Biggest Cup

With those four words, my son sent me on a journey of self-reflection.



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

IT WAS A TYPICAL SUNDAY afternoon on the West Coast of Canada. The unrelenting pitter-patter of rain on the windows had me feeling a little Noah-esque. My family and I had just finished our bowls of Sunday soup when my son broke the silence.

“Dad, I have a question about church.”

I took a sip of my coffee and braced myself for what was coming.

“Dad, was the thing we did in church with the small cups called the Lord’s Supper?”

“Yes, it was,” I answered.

“This morning, why did the pastor get a bigger cup and bigger piece of bread than everyone else? It doesn’t seem very fair. His cup was huge, and he had, like, an entire loaf of bread.”

I knew this required a second sip of coffee, and quite possibly a third.

“Come sit over here, and let’s talk about it,” I said, buying enough time for that precious next sip.

I started with the story of the Last Supper, explaining the symbolism of both the cup and the bread, wrapping up the lesson as I drained the last few drops from my coffee cup.

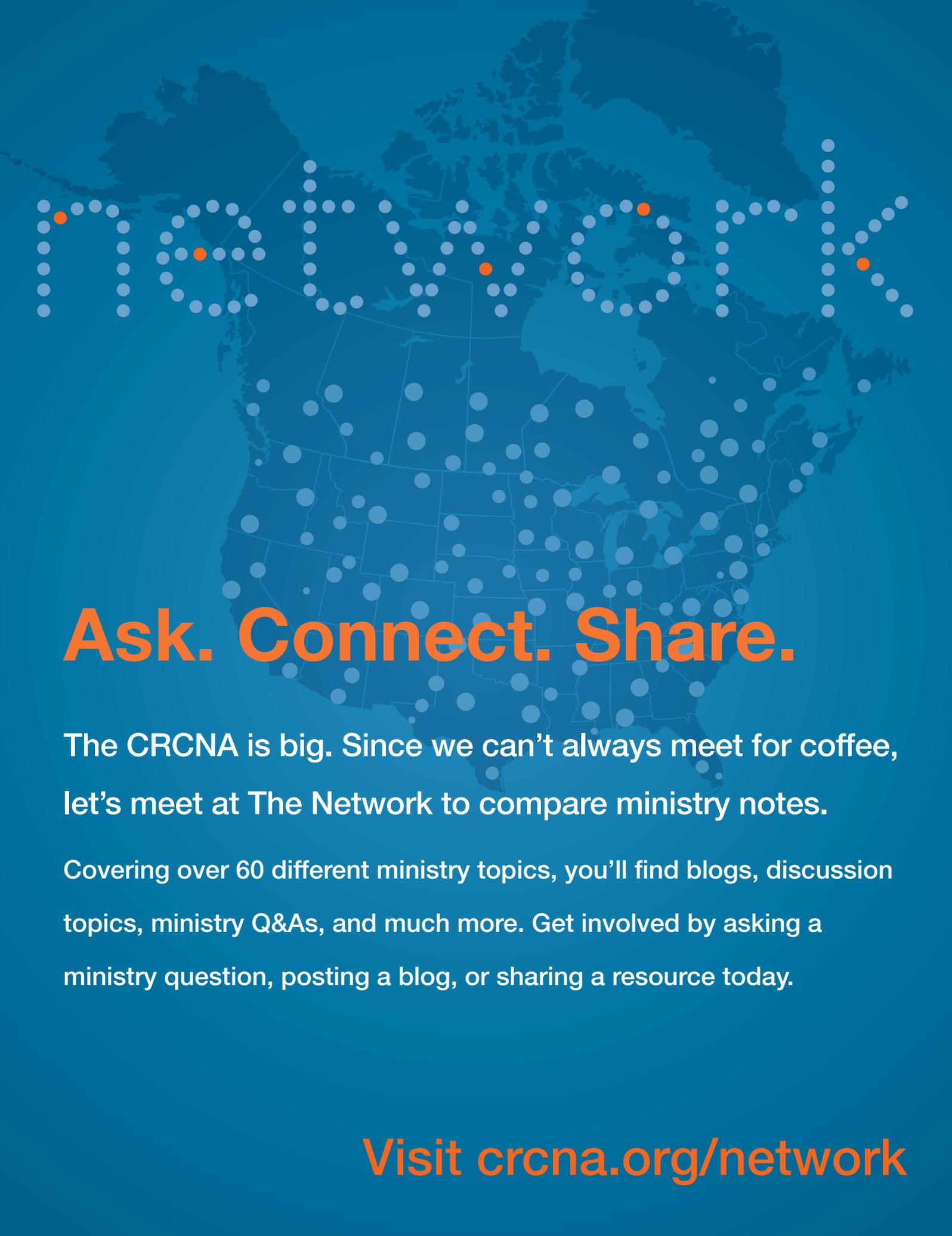
“Wow, that seems pretty important,” my son replied.

Having apparently found contentment in my explanation, he left to build another space vehicle with his LEGO collection. Nevertheless, the gravity of my son’s words weighed on me. With those four words—“That seems pretty important”—my son sent me on a journey of self-reflection. Did I truly comprehend the sanctity of the Lord’s Supper? Did my actions during the service genuinely reflect that belief? Had I truly grasped the profound significance and symbolism inherent in our communal act that morning

during church, or had I merely been going through the motions? I was reminded of Paul’s words about the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17-33, and they laid bare a disconcerting reality about my attitude. Lately, I had completely missed the mark, and the words of Scripture stung as I was reminded just how far I was away from the target.

Through an unassuming question, my son unwittingly reminded me that the chalice and loaf on our communion table suddenly seemed inadequate—far too modest to capture the profound essence of what we were celebrating and remembering as a congregation. Inadvertently, my son had issued me a challenge to prevent the Lord’s Supper from becoming for me just another part of the Sunday-morning worship service. He encouraged me to perceive the bread and the cup for what they are: unassuming symbols conveying profound truths.

As you partake in the sacred elements of the Lord’s Supper, may my son’s question serve as a solemn invitation to reflect earnestly on your actions. May you listen closely to the words of our Lord and immerse yourself in the rich imagery in this sacred ritual. Allow the bread to satiate a hunger deeper than the physical, and let the cup quench a thirst beyond the tangible. **B**

A map of North America, including the United States, Canada, and Mexico, is shown in a dark blue color. Overlaid on the map are numerous small, light blue circles representing network nodes. Some of these nodes are highlighted in a darker orange color. The nodes are distributed across the continent, with a higher density in the eastern and western coastal areas.

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