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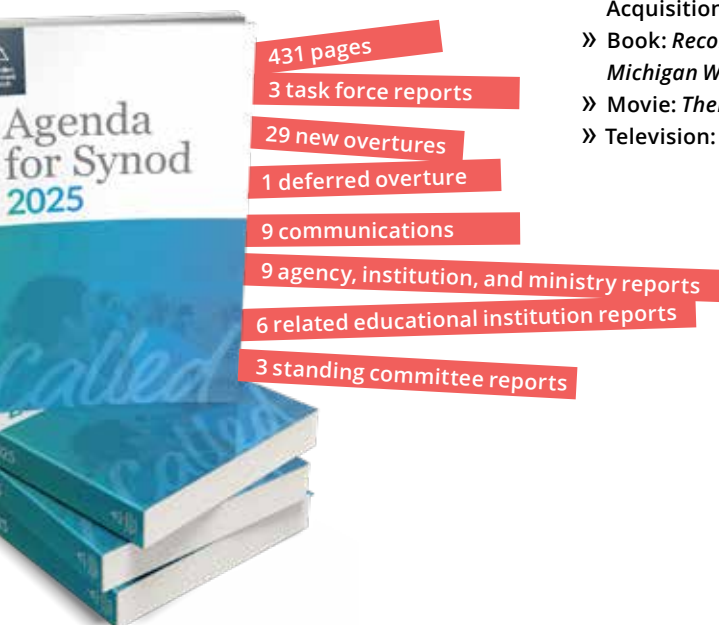
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BY THE NUMBERS

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Synod 2025's Agenda



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- » Book: *Reconciliation in a Michigan Watershed*
- » Movie: *Thelma*
- » Television: *Frasier*

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A Pastor, Disconnected

Andy Littleton // God can work all things for good.



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BANNER

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**Christian
Reformed
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Power, Authority, and Love

Sacrificial love
is what earns
authority.



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

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

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

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

POWER DIFFERS from authority. According to the late Christian sociologist Tony Campolo, power is the coercive ability to control what happens, even against the will of others. Authority, however, is “established when someone is able to elicit compliance because others want to obey” (*Choose Love Not Power*, 2009). Sacrificial love is what earns authority. This is a classic sociological formulation, though not how we normally use the word “authority.”

In a past editorial, I distinguished between power-over and power-with (“Power-With,” January 2017). Campolo’s distinction between power and authority maps well onto that framework. Power-over is coercive, controlling, and manipulative. Power-with is collaborative and, in Campolo’s terms, authoritative. It elicits or invites obedience rather than forcing or threatening obedience. Sacrificial love for others is how one earns and exercises power-with.

For example, a frail old mother might not have much physical power to coerce her grown son to obey her wishes. Nonetheless, she has huge authority over him because he recognizes her years of sacrificial love for him. He does not obey out of fear. He wants to obey her because of her love for him.

Campolo warns the church that it has too often confused power with authority or, in my terms, confusing power-over with power-with. Jesus rejected Satan’s temptations to use power to save the world (Matt. 4:1-11). Instead, he exercised sacrificial love, even to death on a cross, to save us. But the church often uses power-over—whether economic, political, or religious—to achieve kingdom goals. The so-called Christian Left, for example, might use political power to try to eradicate poverty and racism. The so-called Christian Right might use

political power to try to end abortion and promote family values. Either way, we might have unwittingly given in to the demonic temptation of using power-over to fulfill God’s mission. The “how” matters.

For Campolo, “the world is saved through (sacrificial) love, and power (or power-over) is used only to restrain what love cannot redeem.” Governments, for example, have power to restrain evil and injustice (Rom. 13:1-5). But even the most righteous governments will not save the world or bring forth God’s kingdom. It is always and only through Christ’s sacrificial love, exercising power-with, that God’s kingdom becomes reality.

Our confusion and sinful tendency to prefer using power-over extends to religious power plays in both local churches and denominations. These power plays can take various forms, from harsh criticism and gossip to rigid rules and wrong use of discipline.

The 17th-century Anglican poet-priest George Herbert coined the proverb “Love rules his kingdom without a sword.” Genuine love exercises authority without coercive weapons. Power-over weaponizes even truth to control others, while power-with uses truth to serve others. Transformation does not happen via outward coercion and conformity. Genuine transformation only happens from the inside out when the Holy Spirit works through sacrificial love to elicit obedience and change. Power-with invites willing obedience rather than imposing compliance. It allows itself to be vulnerable, to be rejected even as Christ was rejected.

Is this not how God relates to us and to God’s world? Does not God rule us through power-with rather than power-over? Let us follow God and Christ’s example in our dealings with the world and with each other. **B**



REPLY ALL

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

Synod Decisions

C.S. Lewis once iterated that “it is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him. ... We must not use the Bible ... as a sort of Encyclopedia out of which texts ... can be taken for use as weapons (*Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 1993, p. 428). There are about 45,000 Christian denominations in this world. The Christian Reformed Church's synod decision that our churches cannot allow Christians who disagree that homosexual sex is sinful to be leaders in our worship communities will cause fractures or splintering among our current and future churches. ... Can we please agree to disagree and have our churches stay together as strong and inclusive places to worship Christ our Savior? Are we all not sinners and at the same time God's children? ... Perhaps synod could decide to manage the issues of gender and sexual orientation similarly to the previous decisions around women holding office in the church—letting each congregation decide for itself. May our God's love guide us all in these and future decisions.

» Suze J. Mast // Chatham, Ont.

Close to God

In the March *Banner*, Justin Ariel Bailey talks about why God sometimes seems so far away. May I offer another reason? Hezekiah was a good king. In 2 Chronicles 32:31, we read that “God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.” God never leaves us, but God can and does withdraw our awareness of his presence to determine if we will continue to love, worship, follow, and obey him even when we do not experience his closeness.

» Mac Wiener // Elmhurst, Ill.

Empathy

Thanks so much for your much appreciated editorial on empathy in the March *Banner*. I have asked my pastor to specifically remember the plight of undocumented immigrants and refugees in the U.S. in his congregational prayer.

» Gerrit W. Sheeres // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Evolution

I am very disappointed in the response to this Big Question (March 2025), as the writer seems to dismiss Christians who read the biblical events in Genesis literally. It leaves the impression that if you don't hold to the “millions of years” theory you are not being scientific. There are many Christian scientists who agree that God made our universe in six literal days. All you have to do is check out organizations like Answers in Genesis or Creation Ministries. The main problem with the writer's message is she starts her scientific analysis looking through an evolutionary lens instead of a biblical lens.

» Gerry Lankhof // Chatham, Ont.

Merism

Editor Shiao Chong defines “merism” as “a rhetorical device in which a combination of two contrasting parts of the whole refer to the whole.” One must then ask, are Adam and Eve also a merism? Two contrasting parts referring to the whole of human gender expressions? He does say what we already know, that “Adam and Eve were already to some degree like God.” Personally, I think that it does function as a merism.

» Douglas Houck // Tacoma, Wash.

Christian Contradictions

SOMETIMES the Christian life seems full of contradictions.

For instance, I care about the environment. I care about it for biblical reasons. When Scripture says that God made and gave us this world to steward, cultivate, and take care of, part of that, I think, means taking care of the environment.

I also believe in being financially generous. Again, I believe that for biblical reasons. When Scripture says that everything belongs to God and that God merely “loans” us some of God’s resources during our time here on earth, I take that to mean that we need to be generous toward others with the resources God has given us.

We’ve made some recent decisions in our family that we hope reflect those biblical values.

Among other things, we’ve decided that camping will be our primary form of vacationing from now on, in part because camping seems to get at both of those biblical values. First, it allows us to be outdoors in God’s creation, enjoying the natural world God has made. Second, it costs less than some other forms of vacationing, and the money we save will allow us to be more generous toward others.

The only problem is that in order to make camping our primary way of vacationing, we’ve had to make some other decisions that seem to contradict those values.

First, to accommodate our growing family, we recently decided to upgrade to a bigger camper.

That cost money.

Then, like the cascading events in *If You Give A Mouse a Cookie*, because we got a bigger camper, we also had to get a bigger, more fuel-inefficient vehicle.

That also cost money.

What kind of
long-term effects
eventually
outweigh
short-term
consequences?

And it’s worse for the environment.


We’re currently living with the inconsistency, the cognitive dissonance of trying to pursue good, gospel-focused things for what we believe are good, gospel-focused reasons while at the same time making some decisions that seem less good and gospel-focused than the good, gospel-focused things they’re enabling.

That’s led me to wonder a bit.

Do the ends justify the means? Is it the thought that counts? What kind of long-term effects eventually outweigh short-term consequences?

To be honest, I’m not sure.

The only thing I think I’ve settled on is the thought that sometimes being a Christian means trying to be as faithful as you can, even in the midst of the contradictions it creates.

Then again, maybe I’m contradicting myself. 



Brandon Haan serves as the senior pastor at Ivanrest Church in Grandville, Mich. He lives in Grandville with his wife, Sarah, and their three children, Levi, Titus, and Audrey.

As I Was Saying

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- » Gather’s Good News
- » Charlie Kirk Doesn’t Feel Safe in Bethlehem. It’s His Worldview to Blame, Not My City.
- » Are We Expecting Too Much of the Church?
- » Walking in Love: Embracing Diversity with Every Step



Community: A Healing Balm

By Rod Hugen

I was invited to speak to a community college class about spiritual warfare and mentioned the importance of getting a medical evaluation to determine a person's mental health. After my talk, a student came forward and said, "Pastor, I love your church. I am a nurse in a mental health facility, and you have occasionally sent people to us who are in need of care. I am so impressed with the community your church provides to folks struggling with mental illness. A loving, supportive community is what our patients most need, and that's what you offer. Even though I don't personally believe in God, I often tell the people we release to consider your church, knowing that they will find a helpful community there. It's like your church is healing our city one person at a time."

"Healing the city one person at a time" became a catchphrase for our church. It expresses our longing to be used by God to bring about healing in the lives of the people around us.

In our often broadly distributed and perpetually online culture, it is easy to forget the call to be a parish church—to minister in, with, and throughout our neighborhoods. Neighbors who are hidden behind screens or who would not think to darken the doors of a church building are still folks we are called to serve. And it takes a community to love and serve a parish—a community that loves God and loves its neighbors.

A gentleman approached me to suggest that we open our church building to unhoused folks, particularly on the occasional freezing nights we experience here in the desert. It made sense. We have a sanctuary full of comfortable couches, a wonderful kitchen, and other amenities folks might need. I told him it was a great idea and invited him to get to work on making it happen, reminding him there would need to be folks who opened and closed and who kept watch through the night. He was a bit confused and said, "Oh, I don't want to do it. I just think it is something we should do." I asked him who he thought "we" were.

Therein lies the problem, of course. We can fall into the trap of believing the church is its leadership staff. We easily miss the reality that *we* are the church. All of us. I had a sign above my desk that read, "The church is not here for you. You are the church, and you are here for the world." It daily reminded me of my call.

Pushback comes quickly, of course. *I'm not gifted. I have to work that day. I don't feel called. I'm really busy.* It is easy to come up with reasons to not be involved.

Sitting at home watching a worship service on a screen can feel like participating in the church community, but it isn't. Certainly, for some, it is the only way they can be a part of the church at all, and that is a huge blessing. When I was hospitalized, it was a joy to join my community for worship. But it is not the same as being there in person.


Community is messy. Interacting with people can be exhausting and difficult. Social anxiety and struggles with self-worth can convince us to withdraw. But the call to collectively serve the parish remains.

A beautiful thing that Scripture reminds us of is that we are all an integral part of a body and that we all bring to it our unique gifts and talents. Each of us has a role to play in maintaining the health of the body and in serving the parish. There are many ways to find your place in the community:

- » Take a spiritual gifts assessment and ask friends and church leaders where you fit in. Often we are unaware of what we have to offer. Those who experience us regularly are invaluable in helping us discern our role.
- » Try something new. Experiment by offering to help with things you have never tried before. Take excellence off the table. No one is good at something the first time they try, but try anyway.
- » Open your eyes to see opportunities to serve. The Holy Spirit is always putting people in front of you who need what you have to offer. Notice them.
- » Respond to your church's list of needs. Ask God if these are some ways you might serve. At my church we pass around a sign-up sheet at each service. At the top of the page we list all the tasks that need to be done each week—nursery help, cooking the post-service meal, cleaning the building, teaching in children's ministries, washing dishes, and so forth—and down the side are the dates. Every member is expected to sign up for five or six slots over a five-month period. If for whatever reason a member can't fulfill any of these tasks, they are invited to meet with the elders to determine what they might be able to do. It shares the burden broadly and is a very effective way to involve everyone in the ministry.

Community is
messy. ... But the
call to collectively
serve the
parish remains.

- » Look for ways to serve in the community doing the things you enjoy. Do you like to fish? Invite neighbor kids to go fishing. Are you a gamer? Use it as an opportunity to meet new people. Do you enjoy cooking? Invite some widows over for dinner. Do what you love to do with others.
- » Be a good neighbor. Take out the neighbor's trash cans. Be aware of the elderly and what their particular needs might be. Always buy a candy bar when neighbor kids come selling.
- » Do little things. Sometimes we think we only have an impact when we do big things. I've developed the habit of thanking people for doing what they do. Recently at the grocery store I noticed there was only one checkout line with quite a few people waiting. When I was finally in front of the clerk she apologized for the long line and told me everyone had called in sick. I said, "Wow! Thank you for coming in today. It must be very difficult. Thank you for what you do." She burst into tears and came around the counter to give me a hug. "That's the nicest thing anyone has said to me in a month." Sometimes little things are the biggest things.

People might struggle with being in a church. There are requirements and expectations that we don't always fully understand or believe. We deal with social anxiety and with relationships that make us uncomfortable. We might have physical difficulties that make attendance difficult. When those things are combined with the false belief that we have nothing to offer, it's easy to just turn to a screen and watch a Sunday livestream. But you are a valuable member of the body. No one can do what you do or be who you are. You are needed so that we can go and make disciples in our parish. Whether you are called to lead a program to help those who need a place to sleep when it's cold, to wash dishes after a community meal, or to sit in a corner and pray, your presence is greatly valued by the One who created you and gave you all you have. Come, offer yourself! In doing so you will find joy. 



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

1. What are some ways your local church is serving or helping its particular neighborhood community?

2. "The church is not here for you." Discuss how prevalent the attitude is that "church is here for me." How can we change that?

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BIG QUESTIONS

Relationships

My parents need more support, but my siblings don't want to help. How can I get them to step up and honor their father and mother?

It's disorienting and emotional to see our parents needing increased support, and all sides might struggle to see the needs and the best way to meet them. Needs constantly change as parents age and their health declines, and it's a role reversal on both sides for children to care for their parents. Honoring our parents involves respectful, compassionate care, yet there are different ways to provide it.

If you can divide the workload among the siblings, that can make the burden lighter. Meet together to discuss how best to care for your parents, but realize your parents might also have strong opinions about what care they will accept. Sometimes the needs must be seen in concrete terms to discern what help is needed. Spell out your parents' needs and what you can and cannot do to meet them. Sometimes siblings might see things completely differently, and it might be challenging to make a plan together. It might take time



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

for some siblings to understand their changing roles. Do your best to work as a team for the sake of your parents.

Choose to believe that your siblings are doing the best they can with what they have available to them. Some siblings might struggle emotionally to step in to care for their parents, especially if that relationship has had tension. Some siblings might lack the emotional or physical capacity to be supportive. Believing in their best intentions will free you from being angry with them.

If the needs progress beyond what you are able to do, don't hesitate to widen the circle of support. Trying to do everything is a recipe for burnout and conflict, so enlist professional help. Perhaps a social worker can help you find community resources, bring in medical help, or point you to a supportive living situation to meet the needs of your parents. Don't let caring for your parents become a dividing wall in your family.

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

Faith Formation

I need to spend more time on Bible study. Is there a best way to do that?

While there likely isn't one best way to study the Bible, there are some things to keep in mind as you read.

Read paragraphs, not verses. The chapter and verse numbers, as well as the section headings found in many Bibles, are helpful when navigating such a big book, but they can cause us to concentrate on tidbits of the writing rather than reading it like we would any other book.

The Bible is one book. In order to understand what a portion of the Bible is saying, you must put it in the context of the rest of the Bible. Continually ask yourself how the section you're reading fits into the book of the Bible that it's in as well as how it fits into the whole Bible.

Get help. The Bible is a book written in different languages and in and for different cultures thousands of years ago, so we need help to understand those contexts. Study Bibles have a treasure trove of information and can be very helpful in setting the stage for

your reading. Be prayerful and invite the Holy Spirit to teach you as you read.

Find a friend or two to study with.

Talking about what you're reading will help you articulate your thoughts and ask questions, and it will give you the opportunity to hear other thoughts on a passage. Having a scheduled time to meet helps with accountability too.

It's about God. Not every passage is about you, but they all tell us something about God and about the human condition. As you read, ask, "What does this teach us about God?"

Be patient. The Bible is a book that people spend their whole lives studying. You are not expected to understand it immediately. But the Holy Spirit will make your study fruitful.

Finally, choose a method that will keep you reading. The best method is one that you enjoy and will keep you coming back to the Word. A method you won't use isn't helpful.

Laura Keeley is a former regional catalyzer in faith formation with Thrive, the ministry agency of the Christian Reformed Church. Robert Keeley is a professor emeritus of education at Calvin University. The Keeleys recently retired after 31 years as directors of children's ministries at 14th St. CRC in Holland, Mich.

Ethics

How should I treat a brother or sister who leaves the church to avoid discipline?

I hear it all the time: How can a church discipline its members for unrepented sin if they can simply leave the church and go somewhere else? Few people, it seems, take the church's authority very seriously anymore. That is just as true at the local level (consistory) as it is at the regional or denominational levels (classis or synod).

The purpose of church discipline is to restore to Christ those who are sinning. Paul writes in Galatians 6:1, "If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently." However, as Paul recognizes in 1 Corinthians 5, people do not always respond well to correction, no matter how loving or pastoral it is. "If they refuse to listen even to the church," Jesus says in Matthew 18:17, "treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

Jesus' point is not that we should treat such people badly, let alone ostracize them. After all, Jesus was known for his love and generosity toward pagans and tax collectors. He even shared meals with them! His point, rather, is that we should be all the more devoted to such people: "If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look

for the one that wandered off?" (Matt. 18:12). When Peter asks how many times he should forgive someone, Jesus declares that he should forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven (Matt. 18:22).

Our hearts should break for those who abandon fellowship with us. Rather than resign ourselves to the lie that their departure is a good thing that will make our lives easier, we should do everything in our power to restore them, starting with prayer but extending to ongoing conversation, shared meals, and friendship. Jesus' very purpose in becoming flesh was to pursue us in love and restore us to the Father. We are called to do the same for our brothers and sisters.

Matthew J. Tuininga is professor of Christian ethics and the history of Christianity at Calvin Theological Seminary. He lives in Wyoming, Mich. He is the author of *The Wars of the Lord: The Puritan Conquest of America's First People*.



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

Remembering the CRC's First General Secretary Emeritus

Rev. Leonard Hofman, 1928-2025

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.

Leonard John Hofman, who served as general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church in North America from 1990 to 1994, died April 11 at age 97.

Hofman has been described as a thoughtful, caring, encouraging, and approachable pastor and a respected pastoral administrator with a gift for orderly governance who always demonstrated a deep love for the church. He was also known for his quick wit and sharp wardrobe.

After his graduation from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and his ordination in 1951, Hofman pastored Wright Christian Reformed Church in Kanawha, Iowa, and Kenosha (Wisc.) CRC before moving on to serve congregations in West Michigan for the next 23 years. He pastored for six years at North Street CRC in Zeeland; 12 at Ridgewood CRC in Jenison, where he was the founding pastor; and five at Bethany CRC in Holland. After he left parish ministry and during his retirement, Hofman was a member for more than 42 years at Shawnee Park CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

After 31 years in the pastorate, Hofman became the stated clerk of the CRCNA in 1982 and its general secretary in 1990, a role he held until his 1994 retirement. He earned the respect of many church leaders. A 1994 *Banner* article by Phyllis Ten Elshof quotes the general secretary of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church at that time, who said he appreciated Hofman's genuine piety of heart, his skill as an administrator, and his gifts as a church statesman. "As I look about the church world," he said, "I don't see many men of his caliber. His heart throbs for the church."

In that same article, Ed Golder, then the religion editor of *The Grand Rapids Press*, called Hofman "the consummate churchman."

"Len believes wholeheartedly in the work of the Christian Reformed Church," Golder said. "He has devoted his whole life to it. And he has served the church with dignity."

In retirement, Hofman took on other tasks, such as helping to lead the National Association of Evangelicals, an association of almost 50 member denominations. He also served as the secretary for the CRCNA's Interchurch Relations Committee for many years.

He received the Outstanding Service Award from the Calvin College Alumni Association in 1978 and the Distinguished Alumni Award from Calvin Theological Seminary in 2007.

In an interview in 2021 with Chris Meehan of CRC Communications, Hofman was asked for an overall assessment of his work in ministry. "If I could do it all over again," Hofman replied, "I'd do it all over again because that is what the Lord called me to do."

Hofman enjoyed woodworking, playing golf, and traveling with his wife, Elaine. In his later years he enjoyed spending time with friends and playing Scrabble. He always loved seeing his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Predeceased in 2005 by Elaine, his wife of 56 years, Hofman is survived by four children and their spouses; 11 grandchildren; and 23 great-grandchildren.



Leonard Hofman at Calvin University for Synod 2019.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Kelloggsville CRC Marks 150 Years

Photo by Google Streetview



Kelloggsville Christian Reformed Church in Kentwood, Mich., is marking its 150th anniversary this year with the theme "Footprints of Faith."

The church hosted an anniversary worship service in February that featured communion, a mosaic project, ringing of the church bell, and a video depicting its history.

Kelloggsville CRC began in 1875 with 13 families who had been attending First CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. At the time, the community was agricultural, and the 13-mile trip to Grand Rapids could take up to two hours.

The Kelloggsville congregation had its share of challenges early on. Its first building burned down and was replaced by a second building dedicated in 1920. In 1954, responding to a growing community that was becoming more suburban, the growing congregation dismantled that second structure to construct the current church building at 52nd Street and Eastern Avenue SE.

Along the way, Kelloggsville seeded other CRC congregations, including Princeton CRC in Kentwood, Mich., and First Cutlerville (Mich.) CRC.

A ministry launched in the early 1990s for enthusiasts of hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities is now a separate nonprofit called Sportspersons Ministries.

Kelloggsville's 150th anniversary celebration will continue in September, both celebrating the past and present and looking toward God's purpose for the congregation in the future.

"We will have stories of how God is at work in the lives of our people today," pastor Martin Benckhuysen said. "We are celebrating the 150th ministry kickoff because God is still at work through those who walk by faith."

—Greg Chandler

Noteworthy



Photo by Dordt University

Dordt University's women's basketball team won its second consecutive national championship with the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics in March. Dordt's Defenders defeated the Indiana Wesleyan Wildcats in the final game, capping a 35-2 season for Dordt. Head coach Bill Harmsen is a member of Rock Rapids (Iowa) CRC.

Janny DeVlieger, a member of First Christian Reformed Church in Taber, Alta., received a King Charles III Coronation Medal in March for her volunteer contributions to Taber Communities in Bloom, Taber Pro-Life, and Days for Girls. Nominated by provincial member of the legislative assembly Grant Hunter, DeVlieger received the medal at a surprise luncheon in her honor. Her husband, Henk, joined her for the celebration.



In May the Evangelical Press Association and the Associated Church Press, two professional organizations for Christian publishing, presented awards for work produced in 2024. ***TheBanner.org* received an Award of Merit in the Denominational (Digital) category,** and ***The Banner* was also recognized with a second-place award, two third-place awards, two fourth-place awards, and two fifth-place awards for articles in the Series, Biblical Exposition, Humorous, Editorial, Student Writer of the Year, Critical Review, and Devotional categories of the EPA awards.**

The ACP honored *The Banner* with an Award of Merit for Visual Communications in the category of Publication Website and an Award of Excellence in Convention/Meeting Coverage (Magazine) for coverage of Synod 2024. News editor Alissa Vernon received an **Award of Merit for "Synod 2024 in Our View: Resounding Words" (July/August 2024).** The synod reporting team included photographer Steven Herppich and writers Kristen Parker, Greg Chandler, and Grace Bueler.



Council of Delegates Accepts Personal Reservations Procedure, Other Acts

When the Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church in North America met May 7-9 in Grand Rapids, Mich., delegates toured the new ministry support center at 300 East Beltline Ave. NE, approved an altered personal reservation procedure, thanked six retiring delegates for their service, accepted several things to pass on to Synod 2025, and had several conversations about budget implications.

The Council is a 50-plus member ecclesiastical board for the denomination with one delegate from each of the CRCNA's 49 classes and some at-large delegates. It acts as the interim committee for synod, the annual general assembly of the CRC.

Meeting at Cascade Fellowship CRC, the Council **accepted a revised "personal reservations procedure" to replace the exceptions policy previously in force for the Council of Delegates.** A first revision presented at the Council's February meeting was sent back to the executive committee "for further proposed amendments that would align the policy with the work of Synod 2024." Some delegates were concerned that the reservations procedure still doesn't fully fit with synod's guidelines. Lloyd Hemstreet, Classis Zeeland, said that while he sees it "has significant changes that the February policy didn't, Synod 2024 said three things" about confessional subscription and serving the church: "You can't come onto a board if you already have an issue (with a confessional teaching of the church); you can't have an issue and just never resolve it; and a third item ... that this policy doesn't address," which is that "you cannot be delegated to broader assemblies while you have a (confessional) difficulty in process."

Hemstreet said the Council as the interim body of synod is akin to an assembly, and therefore the portion of the personal reservations procedure permitting a Council of Delegates member who

develops a personal reservation about a matter of doctrine to continue to serve their term is out of step with synod guidelines. The majority voted to adopt the procedure, with 31 voting yes, 14 no, and one abstention. Hemstreet and three other delegates registered their negative votes.

Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry, Global Vision

The Council of Delegates voted to **create an advisory committee for diaspora and ethnic ministry to advise "about the effectiveness of the CRCNA's efforts to enfold ethnic minority members and leaders into our denomination's ecclesiastical governance—synod, classis, council, and Council of Delegates."** The committee, made up of six existing Council members and up to six invited guests "from among the preceding year's synodical delegates who represent the diversity of the CRCNA from the United States and Canada," will **meet twice during the 2025-26 ministry year, concluding with an evaluation and a proposal to continue or discontinue the committee the following year.** It's a development from earlier listening circles to review how the denomination supports the growing number of congregations and ministries from diverse backgrounds "and network that work together," said general secretary Zachary King. He noted this "represents more than 25% of our denomination now."

The Council of Delegates heard that **the director of partnership administration, a new position that will replace that of chief administrative officer Shirley DeVries when she retires in January, will have a role in supporting that networking group.** The Council approved the job description, which will be posted from June until mid-August with hopes to have a candidate to present to the Council in October.

The Council also **moved forward on the Global Vision Implementation Team, a group proposed in a Council report to synod in 2024.** Its membership includes General Secretary King; one other staff adviser; and seven pastors, retired missionaries, and church planters from varying backgrounds. The team's first priority is to inventory resources for CRCNA churches and classes considering affiliations from churches outside the United States and Canada. A formal report of the team's progress will be presented at the Council's October 2025 meeting.

'Change Is Necessary': The Reality of Diminishing Ministry Shares

Sharing a series of charts and graphics, chief administrative officer Shirley DeVries showed giving trends, what CRC agencies are able to spend on missions based on the giving from churches, how agencies are experiencing the drop in ministry shares, and, despite the picture of valued mission, how long before all ministry shares will be consumed by governance.

A downward-trending red line depicted straight dollars (with no adjustment for inflation) of ministry shares—the undesignated giving from the denomination's member churches pledged to support shared ministry and denominational costs. A blue line trending upward indicated the expected costs (which are increasing because of inflation) for things like the Office of the General Secretary, synod, and the Council of Delegates. **If the trends seen since 2018 continue, governance costs would consume all of the ministry share giving by mid-2033.**

DeVries told delegates, "I've taken you through all these charts to really make one point: Change is necessary!"



Retiring Council of Delegates members (from left) William Koopmans, Jesus Bayona, Michael Koetje, Debbie Karambowich, Greta Luimes, and Arie Vander Zouwen.

The stark picture underscores the importance of the Council task force commissioned in February to consider ways to reduce governance costs, fund synod, and steward time wisely.

The Council used 30 minutes of its plenary time to discuss and evaluate possible scenarios presented by the task force, with table groups asked to consider strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of several possibilities, including holding synod every other year, convening synod virtually or at a venue in a major hub city, classical assessments to cover synod and Council of Delegates costs, and reducing synod delegates from four to three per classis.

The task force's final report will come to the Council of Delegates' October meeting.

ReFrame Ministries director Kurt Selles, who plans to retire in June 2026, described a somber feeling surrounding recent decisions to close programs (see story, p.18), yet he has a "sense that God's

faithfulness will continue." He asked delegates to continue to pray for ReFrame as it thinks about the future with smaller staff, fewer resources, and fewer programs. Nellie Kooistra, ReFrame's director of administration, noted that ministry-share giving is about 8% below plan this fiscal year, but estate gifts have put ReFrame ahead in revenue overall. The ministry's 2025-26 budget expects \$848,000 in ministry shares, a drop from the \$1,205,000 slated in the 2024-25 fiscal year. The approved ministry budget has revenue of \$5,276,000 and expenses of \$6,817,000, using reserves of \$1,275,000 to lower the deficit to \$266,000.

Resonate Global Mission director Kevin DeRaaf reported the agency has completed a Council-mandated spend-down of financial reserves and cut \$4 million from next year's budget to come in line with expected giving. "We are thankful for God's provision and for our churches who continue to give generously," DeRaaf's report said. "Despite what's going on in the denomination, financial giving directly to Resonate clearly shows that the CRCNA still places a high priority on mission."

Like ReFrame, Resonate is "seeing a small drop in general giving and missionary support" this fiscal year, but estate gifts have brought year-to-date revenues slightly above the year-to-date budget. Changes to next year's budget include "attrition of several workers who will leave through retirement and other personal factors," cutting about \$2 million of the international budget through "reduction in staffing, program reduction, and reduced regional grant funding," reductions to regional team staffing in Resonate's six North American regions, and a "shift away from grant funding for church plants toward personalized, contextualized support for church planters."

The written report from Thrive director Lesli van Milligen noted recent loss

of staff, including the resignations of resource development team lead, Amanda Benckhuysen and worship consultant Katie Roelofs. "I remain optimistic that we will be able to find more flexible ways to continue to engage all the areas of congregational ministry," van Milligen wrote. Thrive, a newer agency within the CRC is more dependent on ministry share giving to do its work. "The majority of time we are working in the background, helping congregations through difficult times, supporting them during a pastor search process or convening listening groups to discern the future of the church," van Milligen wrote. "Ministry shares continue to be an important way that all of the churches can support each other when congregations find themselves in need of Crossroads discernment for their future or resources supporting leadership development that reflect CRC policy and practice."

Synod 2025

The Council adopted three communications to add to the supplement to the *Agenda for Synod 2025*. Denominational ministries and agencies are permitted to comment on material already in the agenda.

Delegates **adopted a comment from Resonate director DeRaaf regarding church planting** (Overture 29); **comments regarding a proposed synodical advisory committee to interview candidates for denominational boards** (Overture 7); and **comments from *The Banner's* advisory committee related to requests to change *The Banner's* mandate** (Ovs. 5 and 6).

—Alissa Vernon,
News Editor

Program Closures, Suspension at ReFrame Ministries

ReFrame Ministries, the Christian Reformed Church in North America's international media ministry, announced April 14 that it was ending its Church Juice, Family Fire, and Think Christian projects and suspending the agency's Russian-language ministry.

"As with any ministry, it is important for ReFrame to occasionally evaluate its programs and make decisions about strategic directions for the future," said ReFrame executive director Kurt Selles. "This is especially important when there are changes in financial giving and society at large."

Over the past several years, ReFrame has seen a steady decline in revenue from denominational ministry shares—contributions that member churches of the CRCNA pledge toward joint ministry. "With fewer ministry share dollars coming in, ReFrame wants to set up our future programming to be sustainable based on the financial support we anticipate receiving," the closure announcement said.

Just over \$1.2 million, or 7.4% of ministry share dollars, were allocated to ReFrame in the 2024-25 fiscal year. That's about \$1.7 million less than what the ministry received in the 2017-2018 fiscal year, at that time 12.9% of the ministry shares.

In written responses to questions from *The Banner*, Selles and Justin Sterenberg, ReFrame's English language ministry director, explained more about the cuts.

"For the Russian ministry," they said, "this was obviously a decision based on budgetary considerations, but we also factored in alignment with present strategy, ministry infrastructure, and viability. At this time, the Russian ministry is fragile and vulnerable, largely because of the war." They said there is "hope that once the war in Ukraine has ended, we may be able to re-establish it (the ministry) on a stronger foundation in a setting where Russian is spoken." ReFrame is not suspending its current partnership with a ministry in Ukraine to provide Christian media content for women facing the challenges and pressures of the ongoing war.

The Russian language ministry was headed by Sergei Sosodkin, ordained in the CRC in 2002.

"For the English ministry," Selles and Sterenberg noted, the changes mark "a necessary strategic pullback." Since Synod 1950, the ministry has included teaching and preaching, devotional follow-up, and personal follow-up. "Those have always been part of the core," Selles and Sterenberg wrote. "Because of our financial reality, we're scaling back to focus solely on these long-standing discipleship programs."

Think Christian was led by Josh Larsen and has been part of ReFrame since 2008. The pop culture-focused project, begun in the early 2000s by The Gospel Communications Network, contended, "There's no such thing as secular." It included reviews of games, film, music, and culture at large with a breadth that sometimes elicited criticism. "There is implicit encouragement to watch material that a Christian should not be watching," said Council of Delegates member Mark VanDyke, Classis Central California, at a May 2024 meeting of the Council. Selles acknowledged at the time that Think Christian did receive some pushback, but he also noted, "We often receive encouragement about this program," particularly for its reviews of video games, which reached a sometimes neglected demographic in Christian media—men between 25 and 35.

Bryan Haley has led Church Juice since 2017, providing resources and encouragement toward improved church communications. "I am proud of the work we were able to accomplish, and incredibly humbled to know that this ministry played even a tiny part in helping others share the gospel and connect people to the local church," Haley said.

Family Fire, started by husband-and-wife team Steven and Deb Koster, both ordained ministers in the CRC, became part of ReFrame in 2010. "We are of course devastated at the abrupt termination of a 20-year ministry and the end of our missionary work that reached hundreds of thousands beyond the CRC," the Kosters said. "It has been a pleasure to come alongside hurting families and guide them to find hope through the gospel."

ReFrame said resources from the three discontinued English programs will remain online as an archive.

—Alissa Vernon,
News Editor

B.C. Churches Work Together for Accessibility and Belonging



Photo by Google Street View

In Burnaby, B.C., Nelson Avenue Community Church's participation in the accessibility and belonging cohort helps the congregation go beyond accessible parking.

Three Christian Reformed churches in British Columbia just wrapped up a one-year learning cohort focused on accessibility and belonging in their congregations.

Nelson Avenue Community Church in Burnaby, Cornerstone CRC in Chilliwack, and Telkwa Community Church began meeting monthly to learn and share together last May. The initiative began after Johannes Schouten, a pastor at Nelson Avenue, connected with Thrive disability consultant Lindsay Wieland Capel, who had led a similar cohort in Iowa.

The cohorts are a way to encourage learning and connection between churches, pastors, and leaders, said Schouten, who has a daughter with Down syndrome. "I'm not an expert. I'm just realizing how big this is and how much the church can do."

Representatives from the three CRC churches gathered on Zoom each month for a one-hour meeting led by Wieland Capel. The sessions included church updates, discussion, and education. Each church also met with cohort coach Caroline Short, a former regional disability advocate, to pursue specific goals related to disability inclusion. The coaching helps the partners stay accountable, seek support, and grow in ministry.

The team at Nelson Avenue surveyed the congregation and hosted follow-up

gatherings. Schouten said those meetings were a highlight. He said they were surprised by how many people came and how many had a personal connection to someone with a disability.

Nelson Avenue's disability ministry includes Schouten; his wife, Phyllis, a school inclusion director; and church member Sandra Pronteau, who last year was honored with the DisAbleD Women's Network (DAWN) Canada's National Hummingbird Award recognizing her contributions to disability and Indigenous rights advocacy.

Schouten said more churches should lean into this work, noting, "Little things are big things. They send a strong message when we intentionally remember people." He recognizes that it can be overwhelming for churches to know where to start, but wants to "encourage our church and other churches to just do the next thing, do what you can, and see what happens after that."

"I think a lot of it is being sensitive and empathetic and just really thinking about others," Schouten added. "It can take a lot of effort because it's not always our default way of being, but it's so important. I'm thankful the denomination is willing to put effort into this."

—Kristen Parker

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Jerald D. Lion

1950-2025

Jerry Lion lived out his call to ministry quietly, reflecting a caring and nonjudgmental gentleness whether praying, visiting, encouraging, teaching, or simply chatting with people. He often said, "We are pilgrims here on earth to share the gospel of Jesus until he calls us home." A fall in January resulted in a traumatic head injury, and Jerry, 74, died April 1 from complications.

After graduating from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, Jerry was ordained in 1981, then pastored Redeeming Love Christian Reformed Church, East Grand Forks, Minn.; Vogel Center CRC, McBain, Mich.; Family of Faith CRC, Kennewick, Wash.; and Avery Street CRC, South Windsor, Conn. After retiring in 2016, Jerry and his wife moved to The Villages, a Florida retirement community, where he served for a time as visitation pastor at North Lake Presbyterian Church.

Jerry served on prayer committees and taught classes on prayer. He volunteered with Love In the Name of Christ and was an Alpha trainer and leader. He participated in a mission trip to Uganda and supported missionaries in various countries.

Jerry loved spending time with his children and grandchildren and enjoyed reading, writing, gardening, and having coffee with friends.

He is survived by Donna, his wife of 46 years; three children and their spouses; and nine grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Synod 2025: What to Watch

The annual general assembly of the Christian Reformed Church will gather in Ontario in June. Important agenda items include task force reports on virtual churches, medically assisted suicide, and the binding nature of synodical decisions; the ecumenical relationship with the Reformed Church in America; Calvin University's commitment to confessional subscription; and several other matters communicated by churches, classes, and individuals in the CRC.

The task force appointed "to make a definitive and comprehensive report on the practice of assisted suicide in all its forms" (*Acts of Synod 2023*) encourages "compassionate palliative care and support of suffering, disabled, and/or dying people and their families instead of acting to cause death." Its report recommends that synod "remind CRC members to give generously of their time, treasure, and talents to work that supports people who are vulnerable and suffering" and "recommit to engagement with public policy makers in advocating for hospice and palliative care that is readily available for every person in their jurisdiction."

A report created to "give thought to and a theological framework for the possibilities and parameters of a virtual church" (*Acts of Synod 2023*) cautions that "it is critical that virtual churches be very intentional in explaining how they will administer sacraments in good order and how they will engage church discipline, given the challenges" inherent in gathering online. The report recommends that while it's preferable for churches to "gather in person for worship, fellowship, and mission, there should be room for intentional and ongoing experimentation within the CRCNA for digital ministry, including the planting of virtual churches." The report also recommends that synod "encourage virtual-church plants, along with their parent church(es), to provide a



Photo by Redeemer University

Synod 2025 is meeting on the campus of Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ont., June 13 to 19.

clear ministry plan to their classis, including especially how they plan to fulfill the marks of the true church in their context" (*Agenda for Synod 2025*, p. 321).

A team asked to "clarify the nature and extent to which synodical pronouncements are settled and binding with regard to members, officebearers, and churches" proposes three broad categories for synodical decisions: doctrinal affirmations, adjudicatory decisions, and doctrinal applications. Matters deemed "settled and binding," the report says, are "those which have been discussed, debated, and adopted by synod and therefore obligate the churches to live up to the decisions the churches have made together. Local churches and classes 'abide by' these decisions—that is, they act in conformity with them and use them as guides for their ministry. Officebearers covenant to teach, preach, and act in alignment with synodical pronouncements, even if they are only obligated to agree with the doctrines taught in the creeds and confessions. Individual members agree to accept the spiritual guidance of the church as part of their commitment to respect their leaders and join with them in carrying out the ministry of the church, and they agree to 'acquiesce' in those decisions which they cannot actively support."

Synod's Candidacy Committee is proposing changes to the process sometimes called "bridge ordination," when commissioned pastors are approved to a term call "contingent upon accountable progress toward completion of the requirements for ordination as a minister of the Word" (Church Order Art. 14-b). The Candidacy Committee wants to make clear that this process is for "persons already ordained as commissioned pastors" and proposes changes to both the Church Order Supplements and the Commissioned Pastor Handbook to "create a more accountable, healthy process for individuals seeking ordination through this route." The results of a survey of the CRC's 300 commissioned pastors that received 79 responses also are included in the Candidacy report.

Synod's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee was asked by Synod 2024 to provide a recommendation regarding the CRC's ecumenical relationship with the Reformed Church in America. It's proposing an addition to the supplement to Article 8-D of the Church Order: "RCA officebearers serving in the CRC should be prepared to sign the Covenant for Officebearers on the occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations." If that is adopted, the committee also recommends that

synod “affirm the current status of the CRCNA’s relationship with the RCA to be that of a church in communion.”

Also in response to a request from Synod 2024, revised confessional subscription frameworks from Calvin University are included in the *Agenda for Synod 2025*. While “honoring the callings of trustees and faculty, as well as the practical dimensions of their service,” the frameworks aim to “enhance alignment, transparency, and accountability” with the denomination.

For faculty, the framework includes initial affirmation of only the ecumenical creeds with a three-year period of mentoring and development in the Reformed tradition’s Three Forms of Unity, annual reaffirmation of confessional commitments, opportunity for two- to three-year periods of discernment and mentoring for confessional difficulties, and “permitting some indefinite exceptions only after at least six years of service—the typical timeline to tenure—and a period of discernment and mentoring that would feature serious theological study and prayerful consideration, after which ongoing service at the university would still require alignment of personal and professional conduct.”

Overtures and Communications

Thirty overtures (formal requests) and eight communications are coming to Synod 2025. Communications require no response but relate important things churches want the assembly to know and consider. Included this year are dispatches noting the impact of the discipline-related and gravamen-related decisions of Synod 2024, the circumstances of a mishandled confessional revision gravamen, the possibility of forming a new Grand Rapids City Classis, and a theological essay adding to the denominational conversation about faith and sexuality. In the overtures, synod will consider requests to:

- » assign a study committee to evaluate CRC polity “with the goal of clarifying

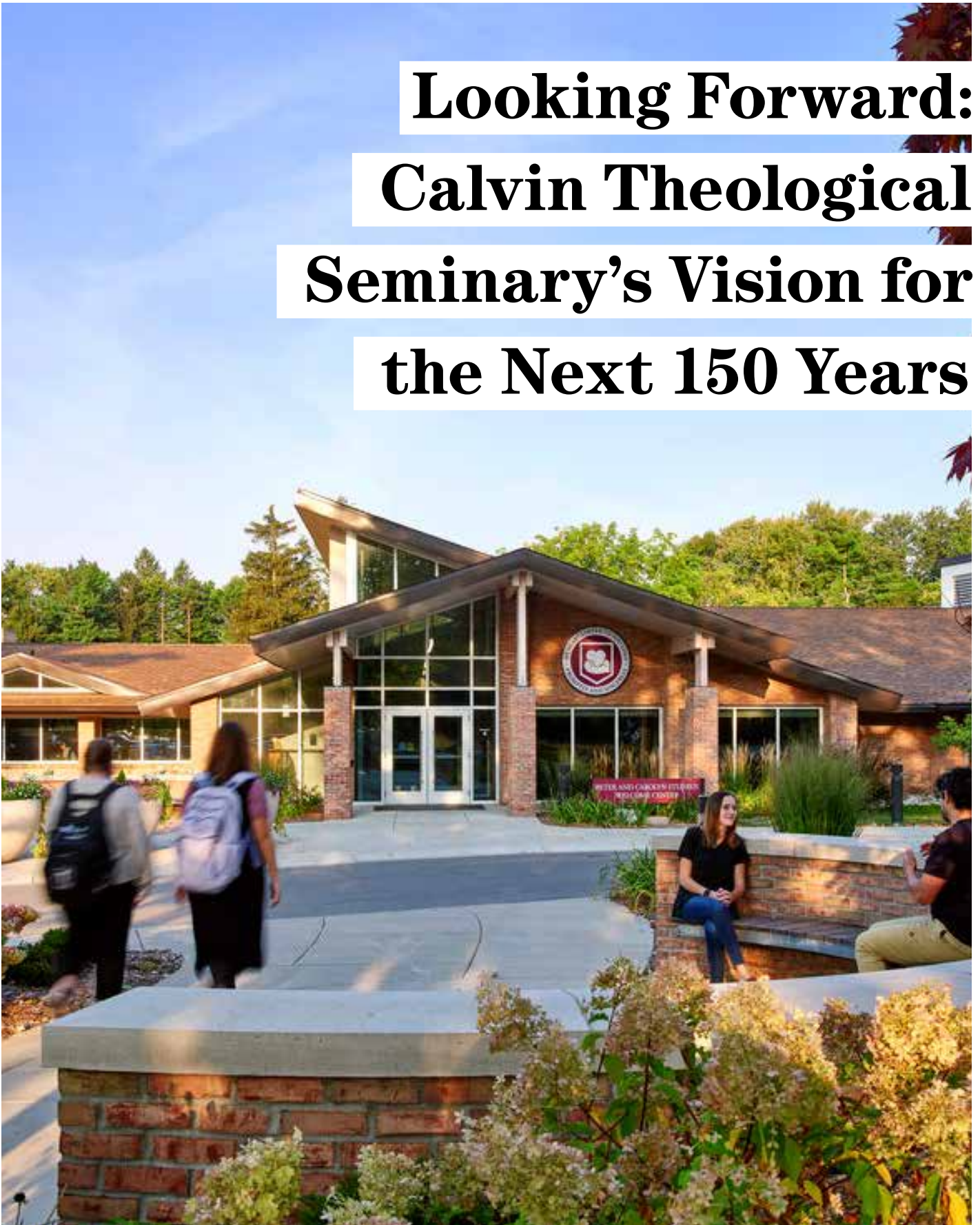
the relationship between the council, classis, and synod” (Ov. 75, deferred)

- » approve moving a congregation from one classis to another (Ovs. 1 and 2)
- » “amend the Church Order to prohibit concealed handguns at all ecclesiastical assemblies, regardless of local civil laws” (Ov. 3)
- » encourage “each of the churches to support the spiritual health of pastoral spouses” (Ov. 4)
- » review and rewrite *The Banner* mandate (Ovs. 5 and 6)
- » create a new synodical advisory committee to interview and make recommendations for denominational board positions (Ov. 7)
- » celebrate the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed (Ov. 8) and the repentance of previously suspended congregations (Ov. 22)
- » update the Covenant for Officebearers to include the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony for the Christian Reformed Church (Ov. 9)
- » reaffirm that the authority of granting baptism is held with the local consistory (Ov. 10)
- » reverse or repeal the requirement to re-sign the Covenant for Officebearers (Ovs. 11 and 13)
- » remove the word “fully” from the phrase “fully agree with the Word of God” in the Covenant for Officebearers (Ov. 12)
- » “seat delegates from classes that have not implemented the annual re-signing of the Covenant for Officebearers” (Ov. 15)
- » revise supplement to Article 5-a of the Church Order to remedy “internal inconsistencies” (Ov. 14)
- » give discretion to local councils to “set their own timelines for the resolution of gravamina” (Ov. 16).

- » create a confessional-submission gravamen or a “Formal Act of Confessional Submission” (Ovs. 17 and 19)
- » alter the time frame for discipleship of elders and deacons who may have a confessional difficulty to “not exceed two term limits” instead of “not exceed three years” (Ov. 18)
- » retract the decision that council members who have submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen are not eligible to serve in classical or denominational roles and functions (Ov. 20)
- » address congregations and classes “in a state of defiance” of synod’s rulings, using discipline “to bring them back into fellowship with the CRCNA” (Ov. 21)
- » end the “in communion” relationship with Reformed Church in America (Ov. 23)
- » review the CRCNA’s membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches (Ov. 24)
- » direct Thrive, the CRC’s equipping ministry for congregations, to “focus on officebearer training in the coming year” (Ov. 25)
- » encourage churches to identify, train, and maintain one individual with a license to exhort for each church (Ov. 26)
- » require a discipleship/educational component for all offices, including those of elder and deacon (Ov. 27)
- » envision and make the changes necessary to reorganize the CRCNA as two distinct Christian Reformed Churches, one in Canada and one in the United States (Ov. 28)
- » reprioritize church planting within the denominational budget (Ov. 29).

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

Looking Forward: Calvin Theological Seminary's Vision for the Next 150 Years



By Leah Jolly, Calvin Theological Seminary

During the 2025-26 school year, Calvin Theological Seminary will celebrate its 150th anniversary—a remarkable milestone in its longstanding commitment to preparing ministry leaders who are biblically faithful and contextually effective.

“As we look back with gratitude to God on these 150 years, we also look ahead with purpose,” said CTS president Jul Medenblik.

CTS’s strategic plan centers on four key themes to guide the seminary into the future: a compelling invitation, holistic learning journeys, organizational excellence, and cultivating abundance.

“These focus areas will guide staff and students as we respond to the evolving needs of the church and world—offering theological education that is thoughtful, practical, and deeply rooted in the Reformed tradition,” Medenblik said.

A Compelling Invitation

At Calvin Seminary, Reformed identity not only is central to what the school is, but shapes everything it does. From faculty scholarship and student formation to publishing and outreach, CTS is committed to clearly and confidently sharing the distinctiveness of its theological vision.

“Our invitation to the global church and the curious believer alike is to come learn, grow, and serve with us,” Medenblik explained.

Past and present CTS faculty are leading voices in their disciplines. Some of their recent work has explored Puritan history, the Beatitudes, intertextual connections between Isaiah and the Old Testament, and John Calvin’s use and understanding of the Old Testament. These academic contributions are not reserved for fellow scholars, but are woven into the classroom and shape how students learn to preach, teach, and lead. They also are reaching beyond the classroom, being featured in publications such as *The Wall Street Journal* and *Christianity Today*.

CTS’s degree programs emphasize faithful biblical exposition, theological depth, and contextual literacy. Whether in a local church, nonprofit organization, or cross-cultural setting, graduates are equipped to serve with integrity and clarity.

The seminary recently launched The Forum, a digital platform featuring articles, podcasts, events, teaching series, and other resources designed to equip people for life and

Calvin Theological Seminary is celebrating 150 years of ministry this year.



Heritage Hall: Founded in 1876 as part of Calvin College and Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich., CTS originally held classes on Spring Street. In 1892 it moved to Madison Avenue and Franklin Street. In 1917 it moved to the Franklin Street location (pictured), and in 1960, it began classes on the Knollcrest Campus, its current location.

ministry in their unique contexts. Through The Forum, the work of CTS faculty—including some of their in-class content—is available to everyone for encouragement and training. Rooted in Scripture and prompted by real-life questions, The Forum invites people to engage deeply with questions of mercy, justice, faith, and formation wherever they are.

Holistic Learning Journeys

CTS student experiences aren’t confined to the classroom either. “Calvin Theological Seminary is committed to walking with students every step of the way—from application to graduation and beyond,” Medenblik said. “Our strategic goals place a renewed emphasis on mentoring, flexible learning formats, and lifelong learning.”

Mentorship is a hallmark of the Calvin Seminary experience. Through in-context learning in churches and nonprofits, spiritual direction from trained practitioners, and meaningful relationships with faculty and staff, students are supported academically, spiritually, and vocationally.

CTS also recognizes that instruction must be offered in many formats. Hybrid programs such as the Master of Divinity program blend online coursework with two intensive in-person weeks each year, allowing students to remain in their home contexts while pursuing seminary training. CTS also offers stackable certificates in areas such as Christian leadership and training for commissioned pastors



CTS's goal is to prepare ministry leaders who are biblically faithful and contextually effective.

in the CRCNA, enabling students to engage theological education at a pace and depth that meet their needs.

"Learning doesn't end at graduation," Medenblik said. "Through the Lifelong Learning program and The Forum, pastors, ministry leaders, and laypersons alike can continue growing in wisdom, resilience, and theological depth. Whether through workshops, learning cohorts, or ongoing digital content, Calvin Seminary is committed to supporting leaders for a lifetime."


Organizational Excellence and Cultivating Abundance

As Calvin Seminary looks forward to the next 150 years, it does so with a focus on creating living spaces for in-person students and celebrating God's blessings over the past 150 years.

A new apartment building directly across from Calvin Seminary's campus on Burton Street SE in Grand Rapids, Mich., is expected to open in late 2025. This building will feature 46 apartments of different sizes and will include communal gathering spaces, a playground for children, and other features meant to promote community building for in-person students. CTS also anticipates celebrating its 150th anniversary with alumni and friends around the world during a yearlong celebration. To receive more information on these celebrations, visit calvin.edu/150 or follow Calvin Seminary on social media.

A Shared Calling

As Calvin Theological Seminary looks ahead to the next 150 years, its strategic plan reflects more than institutional priorities. It embodies a renewed calling to serve the church with theological depth, spiritual formation, and faithful leadership. Grounded in Reformed identity and guided by four strategic themes, faculty are preparing leaders for a world in need of clarity, conviction, and hope.

"Whether you're a prospective student, longtime supporter, church leader, or someone just discovering us, there's a place for you in this journey," Medenblik said. "Together, we are nurturing a community where the gospel is lived, taught, and proclaimed in every context and corner of the world." 



Mentorship is a hallmark of the Calvin Seminary experience.

Sparking Intergenerational Mentoring

ON A SATURDAY in February, nine Christian Reformed churches from Huron County, Ont., convened a ministry workshop focused on youth engagement and intergenerational mentorship. This collaborative event, organized by Michelle Kaptein of Clinton CRC and facilitated by Thrive's youth and emerging adult ministry consultant, Ron deVries, drew 34 participants from congregations in Clinton, Vanastra, Exeter, Blyth, Goderich, Stratford, Listowel, Drayton, and Wingham.

The workshop emerged from a series of conversations initiated in the summer of 2024, when Kaptein was seeking guidance on questions related to youth and emerging adult ministry. Recognizing the shared interest among neighboring churches to engage younger members, the idea of holding a collective training event took root. For the past three years, churches in Huron County have gathered for similar joint training sessions to address other common needs across their congregations. They decided to focus on youth ministry in 2025.

DeVries, who has more than three decades of experience in youth ministry and a passion for fostering intergenerational connections, led the evening's discussions. He emphasized the critical importance of relational connections within congregations and highlighted initiatives such as Generation Spark, a joint program of the CRC and the Reformed Church in America designed to bridge generational gaps by pairing young adults ages 16-24 with mentors aged 45 and above. This strategy addresses the exodus of young Christians from worshiping communities but also integrates them into the church's fabric, encouraging their active participation beyond high school.

DeVries also discussed ThereforeGo Ministries, formerly known as Youth



Thirty-four people from nine Christian Reformed congregations gathered to discuss youth ministry. They were led by Rev. Ron deVries.

Unlimited, which offers service opportunities to young people with the aim of deepening their faith and fostering community. By engaging in service projects, youth can experience firsthand the transformative power of faith in action and reinforce their commitment to their faith.

A large portion of the workshop centered on adopting intergenerational postures within congregations. DeVries underscored that mentorship should not be offered only by pastors or spiritual directors; it is a collective responsibility. By intentionally investing in the next generation, whether by attending their events or engaging in meaningful conversations, church members can cultivate authentic relationships that transcend age barriers.

The discussion provided a platform for attendees to share their experiences, challenges, and successes in youth ministry. This open dialogue fostered a sense of unity and collective purpose, reinforcing that while individual churches might face unique challenges, they are not alone in their endeavors.

The following evening, Clinton CRC hosted a youth service where DeVries

delivered a compelling message. The service saw a large turnout of parents, students, and congregants, reflecting the community's commitment to nurturing its youth and the congregation's intention to implement the discussed strategies and cultivate a more inclusive environment.

As the challenges of the modern world continue to evolve, the church's approach to youth ministry must also adapt. The insights and strategies shared through the work of Generation Spark and ThereforeGo ministries offer options for congregations aiming to bridge generational divides and cultivate lasting relationships.

For churches seeking to revitalize their youth ministries and strengthen intergenerational bonds, consider getting involved with mentoring through Generation Spark, listening to the *Spark Dialogue* podcast, or using Thrive's youth ministry resources, such as *The Spiritual Characteristics of Children, Teens, and Young Adults*.

—Kristyn DeNooyer,
Thrive

The View From Here

Generations

MY PATERNAL GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

was born in 1899. She lived through two world wars, the advent of powered flight, men on the moon, and the arrival of the personal computer. My grandparents were part of what Tom Brokaw called “The Greatest Generation” and lived through the Great Depression and WWII.

My parents are baby boomers, formed during the cultural and political turmoil of the 1960s, including the Vietnam War. I belong to Generation X and can remember the Challenger space shuttle explosion, 9/11, the Great Recession, and Donkey Kong. My kids are Gen Z, and they have never lived without the internet.

If you have immigrated to the U.S. or Canada from another country, perhaps these generational differences also include expressions of your immigration experience. Some might remember learning a new language and transitioning from worshipping solely in one's mother tongue to worshipping only in English. Others might no longer speak their parents' and grandparents' language at all.

Pop culture tells us our generations are defined by characteristics that might include frugality, hard work, social boundary breaking, struggling to buy a first house, and social media use.

I'm a little cynical about these stereotypes. In my experience, the events that shape us are often more specific: the death of a sibling or parent, an unexpected move during high school, or being born with a disability, for example.

Scripture tells us about a measure for all generations: God's faithfulness. In Deuteronomy 7:9, Moses tells Israel: “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments”

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(Deut. 7:9). Psalm 100:5 proclaims, “For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.” Luke 3:23-38 lists 77 generations between Adam and the birth of Jesus to remind us of God's great faithfulness throughout the ages in bringing the promised Messiah into the world.


It hasn't always (or ever) been easy to live the life of faith. We have had our faith sorely tested and tried at one time or another. Maybe some of us have stepped away from God for a season. But God's great promises, sealed in our baptisms, have stood the test of time. In a moment where many families, churches, and other Christian institutions are struggling, it can be easy to forget this deep reservoir of spiritual nourishment. From generation to generation, the Lord our God has been and continues to be utterly and completely faithful.

Beginning in the second half of 2025 and into 2026, the Christian Reformed Church in North America will celebrate the 150th anniversary of our two denominational institutions of higher education: Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary. These two institutions have been such a blessing to CRC folks, including me, who have been shaped and formed for lives, careers, and ministries.

I am so thankful for the generations of faithful Christian Reformed churches and families that have

given sacrificially of their talent, time, and treasure so that these schools continue to flourish. I am equally grateful to wise and passionate faculty and staff members who bless generations of CRC students by sharing their love for God's church and world.

In July 2025, the Christian Reformed Church of the Dominican Republic will celebrate its 50th anniversary. The denomination began when Haitian immigrant sugar cane cutters began listening to *La Hora de la Reforma*, the Spanish-language radio program of what is now Reframe Ministries. Through the Spirit's blessing, the hard work of local leaders, and the support of our CRCNA denominational agencies (ReFrame Ministries, Resonate Global Mission, and World Renew), today the denomination includes more than 200 congregations and 12,000 members, most of whom are of Haitian descent.

Admittedly, some of us are a little nostalgic for our old Ataris or Apple IIs, poofy bangs, and Air Jordans. What we depend on, however, is God's faithfulness to God's promises. In the words of the beautiful hymn “We Will Extol You, God and King,” “One generation will call to the next, ‘Our God is good, and his hand is strong!’ All the world sings his marvelous acts, and our voices will join with theirs in the song.” 



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

Spanish and Korean translations of this editorial are

available at TheBanner.org.

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Calvin University Expands Access for Adult Learners: ‘It’s in Our DNA’

FOR MILLIONS OF AMERICANS, the road to higher education is anything but straightforward. Life happens—financial strain, family responsibilities, career shifts—and college dreams are often put on hold. Today, more than 43 million adults in the U.S. have some college credit but no degree.

At Calvin University, these learners aren’t an afterthought. They’re central to the university’s vision for the future.

“Communities with higher adult educational attainment see economic growth, healthier populations, greater civic engagement, and social stability,” said Abbie Lipsker, Calvin’s director of continuing studies. “But beyond the benefits to society, adult learners bring an incredible depth of experience and motivation to the classroom.”

Recognizing the need for accessible pathways back to higher education, Calvin has launched new degree completion programs in applied leadership and human services. These programs, designed specifically for adults who started college but never finished, remove traditional barriers by offering flexible schedules, online coursework, and personalized support.

Calvin’s commitment to adult learners isn’t new. It’s a return to its roots. “We started as an adult-serving institution, so it’s in our DNA,” Lipsker explained. “Expanding degree completion isn’t just about growing enrollment. It’s about living out our mission: welcoming learners of all ages to think deeply, act justly, and live wholeheartedly.”

Unlike traditional students, adult learners come ready to apply their education immediately. “They have hooks on the wall to hang their learning on,” Lipsker said. “They bring lived experience into the classroom and take new knowledge directly into their workplaces, families, and communities.”



Calvin University is expanding its range of study programs to include more opportunities for adult and continuing education.

Calvin’s expansion into adult education builds on a decade of investment in nontraditional learning. The university’s Calvin Prison Initiative has provided accredited degree programs to incarcerated students since 2015. More recently, Calvin began offering several professional microcredentials to adult learners in the community. One of the offerings equips employers to hire and retain formerly incarcerated individuals. These efforts reflect the university’s belief that education should be accessible, transformative, and lifelong.

For adult learners who thought their chance at a degree had passed, Calvin is proving otherwise. “Education is something no one can ever take away

from you,” Lipsker said, “and these programs create pathways for individuals to realize their potential and fulfill their calling.”

With these new degree completion programs, Calvin University is not just breaking down barriers; it’s opening doors, restoring opportunities, and reaffirming that learning is for everyone.

—Calvin University

God at Work in the CRCNA

FROM APRIL 2024 through April 2025, 10 events took place across North America that brought Christian Reformed church leaders and members together to talk about ministry. Almost 600 people attended these Gather events to delve into Scripture, share stories from their own churches, and recognize where God is at work in Christian Reformed congregations. A full report of the findings from Gather will be shared later in 2025.

While participants at each event shared their own stories with each other, a series of videos was also created to highlight the types of ministry happening in CRC churches. All of the videos are available at crcna.org/Gather. Here are some examples of congregational ministries:

- » In 2015, the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America collaborated to plant **Hesed Community Church** in a disinvested neighborhood in Detroit, Mich.
- » Following God's lead, pastor Marcelo Viana started **Amber Church** in Winnipeg, Man., and invited recent Brazilian immigrants into his home for worship. As the church grew, he and his wife soon recognized they would need a larger facility. God led them to **Covenant CRC** in Winnipeg, and through a partnership of faith they were able to rent a chapel from a Christian school.
- » **Christian Reformed churches in British Columbia** have long modeled the warm welcome of Jesus for the newest members of their communities. Through collaboration and the co-funding of a chaplain and refugee support mobilizer, they are effectively responding to the deepest needs of refugees and other newcomers.
- » Williams Lake is a remote community about 525 kilometers (326 miles)



north of Vancouver, B.C. In this town of fewer than 11,000 people, **Cariboo Community Church** has become a beacon of welcome, light, and support to nearby residents.

- » **The Loving Church** in Tucson, Ariz., is a Korean- and English-speaking church with about 40 members. The church offers food, clothing, showers, haircuts, and Christ-centered fellowship to dozens of unhoused people each week.
- » Twenty-five years ago, **Fairlawn CRC** in Whitinsville, Mass., started a daytime Bible study for women to gather, share their lives, and deepen their faith in Christ. Today, that Bible study continues to thrive and has proven to be a blessing to the church and the community.
- » **CRCNA church planters in Florida** gathered recently for a backyard barbeque in Port St. Lucie to share food along with ideas and encouragement. From Orlando to Miami, CRC church planters are reaching out to Creole- and Spanish-speaking communities and finding a warm reception in multicultural communities throughout the state.
- » For decades, Lawndale CRC has been a steadfast beacon of love and light on Chicago's West Side. Recently, Eric Crawford joined Jim Wolff to co-shepherd the community now known as **Lawndale Lighthouse CRC**.
- » Four CRC churches in Ontario's **Classis Quinte** wanted programming for their high school youth but felt that they couldn't provide it as individual congregations. They joined together to start Clarington Youth.
- » In 2015, the Sebastia family left Venezuela for the United States, leaving behind a comfortable and successful life in the music industry. They clung to their faith and leaned on the gifts God has given them to plant a CRC outreach called **Carismah Church**. Music still is a key part of Carismah's ministry.
- » Begun in 1967 as a handful of students sharing worship, occasional meals, and Bible study, **Geneva Campus Church** in Madison, Wis., has grown into an intergenerational congregation serving the campus, the city, and the world.
- » Founded by Dutch-speaking immigrants to Canada 65 years ago, **Hebron CRC** in Whitby, Ont., is drawing on its immigrant experience as it ministers to Mandarin-speaking newcomers to Canada. With two worship services (one in Mandarin and one in English), combined children's ministry, and mutual fellowship, the congregation is learning what it means to be part of God's diverse and unified family.
- » Since 2014, some **pastors in Tucson, Ariz.**, have been meeting for breakfast once a week to talk about their shared commitment to church planting and community outreach. God is using them to build his kingdom across Tucson.

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

Ripple Effects in Mission

PASTORS AND MISSIONARIES aren't allowed on university campuses in Mexico. That's why Resonate Global Mission missionary James Lee works with COMPA Campus Ministry to equip students to share the gospel at their schools—and that work is having ripple effects.

David* first connected with Lee after seeing a flyer with a Christian fish symbol in the halls of his university. David, who had been raised Roman Catholic, was immediately intrigued. He hadn't met any other Christians at his university of more than 10,000 students, but he had been looking for them. Within a week, David was meeting Lee and a small group of other students at an off-campus coffee shop to study the Bible.

"Connecting with other people who are also followers of Christ makes me feel very good," David said. "It makes me feel like I belong to something. ... I have a family I didn't even know was my family."

Now David is working on providing that same connection to a faith community that he found through Lee and COMPA. As a member of the school's student council, David posts regularly in a WhatsApp group about opportunities for students, such as free doughnuts during exam week. One day he posted about the weekly Bible study he started on campus. He was nervous to message so many people about it, but he wanted to take that step.

"Sharing my faith with other students is important to me because (God's Word) has provided me with a clear sense of purpose in life. I believe that other students may also experience the joy and peace of God in their lives through the weekly Bible study," David said.



From right: James Lee meets at a coffee shop with David, Victoria, and other students. Lee holds Bible studies for students off campus because he isn't allowed to host them at the university.

When Victoria read the message David had sent about the Bible study, her "heart leaped." Like David, she had also been raised in a Christian family, but she was struggling with uncertainty.

"My heart and soul were restless and weary from searching for the meaning of life," she said. "While I had knowledge of who Jesus was and what he accomplished, I had never developed a personal relationship with him. ... I thought that participating in the Bible study would be a meaningful way to come to know God and my existence in life."

That Thursday, Victoria hung around after one of her classes and headed over to a small group gathered on the lawn outside one of the university's departments. There, sitting in the grass with David and five other students, Victoria took a bold step in her walk with Jesus.

Week after week, Victoria looked forward to the Bible study. As she read Scripture and prayed with this small faith community, she was able to voice her doubts and ask questions. It wasn't

long before Jesus was no longer an idea she was uncertain about, but her Lord and Savior.

All around the world, Resonate is equipping believers like David to live out their faith and share the gospel. While Lee isn't allowed to lead a Bible study on the local university campus, he is discipling and equipping students like David to take that step.

"This story has encouraged me by demonstrating how the Holy Spirit works marvelously in each student's life, bringing about transformation through the gospel and the COMPA community," Lee said. "I appreciate David for his passion for sharing the gospel and his willingness to take a risk."

Victoria now says she has a new purpose in life: "I am convinced that (God) created me to live a life that glorifies his name."

**Last names have been withheld for privacy.*

—Cassie Marcionetti,
Resonate Global Mission

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DENOMINATION Denominational Survey Opens

The annual survey for the CRCNA is now open. One survey respondent shares his experience.

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WORSHIP A Catch of Fish

During the Calvin Symposium on Worship, John August Swanson spoke of how Luke 5's miraculous catch has inspired his art and helped him through some hard times.

[Read Story](#)



INSPIRE 2019 Windsor Welcomes You to Inspire

Ambassador Community CRC in Windsor, Ont., invites you to attend Inspire 2019 in their city. Registration is now open!

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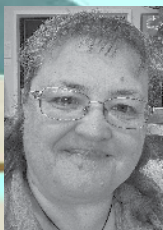


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Quirky Quacks



Cindy Verbeek lives in Houston, B.C., where she works for A Rocha Canada. She has been working on creation care issues since 1993 and is a member of Telkwa Community Church.

QUACK, QUACK, QUACK. My friend emerged from the bushes, binoculars in hand. “Do you hear it? The quacking?” he asked. He was determined to find the ducks that were quacking in the middle of the forest.

I did hear it—tiny voices in the distance making a chaotic “kvaak kvaak,” as if a thousand mallards were roaming around the woods. I joined my friend, and we began searching for the voices, only to have them stop whenever we got close. We decided to sit and wait to see if they might return in the quiet. Slowly they started again. First one, then another, then hundreds of tiny voices emerged—but nothing to be seen. A small movement caught our attention, and we watched a tiny tan creature with a black mask hop past. We looked at each other and burst out laughing. The sound wasn’t ducks; it was frogs—wood frogs, to be exact.

These masked creatures roam most of the forests of Canada and the north-eastern United States and can be found as far north as the Arctic Circle. Their call, as we discovered, sounds a lot like quacking ducks. They can be heard in the early spring wherever shallow temporary ponds can be found.

Their biggest claim to fame is being able to survive temperatures as low as -14 degrees Celsius (5 degrees Fahrenheit). The water in their bodies freezes, and they appear to be dead, with no heartbeat, breathing, blood circulation, or detectable brain activity. Normally when water freezes, ice crystals form. In most creatures this would burst cells and kill tissue. But God created the wood frog to have a kind of antifreeze in their blood that prevents this from happening, allowing them to thaw in warmer weather and hop away unscathed.

After their winter ordeal, wood frogs migrate to temporary ponds where

the males sing their quacky chorus to attract females. A female will lay between 200 and 1,000 eggs in a large, jelly-like mass on plants under the water, and within a week mating is done for another year and the forests are quiet again.

Inside the eggs, tiny tadpoles are forming. How quickly they develop depends on how warm the water is. Once the tadpoles hatch, they wriggle about the pond, eating plants, algae, and even other tadpoles! As a tadpole grows, tiny legs begin to appear, first in the back and then in the front, and its tail shrinks until it is completely gone.

Adult frogs (as well as toads and salamanders) breathe through their skin, so they are very sensitive to pollution in the water. If you are ever privileged enough to catch a frog, make sure your hands are wet and free from insect repellent, hand cream, or sunscreen. These chemicals could be absorbed into their skin or clog up their pores, causing them to get sick or die.

Most frogs these days are not doing well. Water pollution, less protection from the sun’s ultraviolet rays, and human development around their homes is a huge problem.

You can help these beautiful, quirky parts of God’s wonderful creation in many ways:

- » Leave (or create) temporary ponds on your property.
- » Keep chemicals out of waterways.
- » Observe, record and report frog populations on your property using the iNaturalist (iNaturalist.ca or iNaturalist.org) and/or Frogwatch (naturewatch.ca) citizen science sites.
- » If you see frogs, don’t touch them. Just enjoy looking at them! **B**



A Pastor, Disconnected

By Andy Littleton

A woman in distress lies sprawled on the asphalt in front of the church in the eerie glow of a faint LED streetlight that is about to flicker out. Above her towers a basketball hoop with a toothy, grinning, pink-faced clown painted on the backboard. A diverse cast of characters surrounds the woman. A nervous young man paces, sometimes praying, sometimes biting his fingernails. A newly hired school psychologist is on her knees, bending over the woman and seeking to understand her plight. A recently ordained minister anxiously tugs at the strap of his crossbody bag, wanting to go home so badly but not before he can rest assured that everyone is safe. A young bodybuilder stands nervously by the chain-link fence trying to decide what to do with his physical strength, which overshadows his insecurity about his role in this place. Another man stands with arms crossed, expressionless despite being dressed like a court jester, down to his curly-toed shoes and a floppy, red, four-peaked hat with bells hanging on it like little Christmas tree

ornaments. The woman's mother is careening down the road in a large SUV to meet her sister, who is jumping up and down in panic next to the curb. I am standing under the basketball hoop assessing the situation. Under a nearby minivan there is an open penknife, barely visible until it glints in the approaching SUV's headlights.

This is not the scene we expected to encounter upon exiting the side door of the church to go home for the evening.

I am the pastor of the little flock called Mission Church in Tucson, Ariz. The people in the parking lot were mostly from my church, people I know and love. This was a very rough day for them, for reasons I still don't fully know. They needed guidance from someone who cared. There I was.

But here's the thing. I am not who you think I am.

Emotionally Disconnected

Let me tell you a story:

I'm at McKale Memorial Center, the copper-clad oval arena that's home to the Arizona Wildcats basketball team.

Cats games are the premier sports experience in Tucson. We don't have any professional sports franchises, but as the video scoreboard reminds people at every game, we feed the National Basketball Association with talent. This is the place where we fans yell "SUCKS!" after the announcer names each of the opposing starters. This is where we boo the refs incessantly. This is where we openly ridicule young men for failing to sink a shot from 23 feet away. "AIRBALL!"

I am at the arena because a friend from church invited me. We are sitting at the upper edge of the lower level, enjoying the entertainment and fanfare. We join the crowd in expressing emotions and sentiments that would normally be considered extreme and unacceptable.

It's halftime, and to keep the crowd engaged, the local pool and spa company has set up a game for audience members to participate in. A spa is placed under one of the basketball hoops, and several spectators are chosen to line up at the free throw line on the other side of the court. To win the spa, all someone has to do is

throw the basketball down court and get it to bounce into the spa. This is much easier than making a half-court shot. The first young man heaves the ball down court and just misses. The crowd groans with disappointment. The moderator instructs him to run after the ball because he'll get to try again. The next contestant, a portly woman, approaches the free throw line. She gives the ball the heave of her life, but it barely makes it to half-court before slowing to a meandering roll. Not even close. The audience lets out a collective chuckle at her inability. She begins to run after the ball for her second attempt. I am caught up in the moment and the encouragements of the crowd.

As the woman jogs after her ball, she stumbles. At first she is able to right herself, scuffling slightly to the left but staying upright. But she overcorrects, and her shoe catches on the glossy court. Her legs fly out from under her, and her arms spread outward. She begins to fall into a full belly flop. Time slows down, and she hangs midair for what seems like a minute until—WHAP—she face-plants onto the logo at center court. Everyone in the stadium, all the mockers and the critics, gasp and fall dead silent—all except for one. One young man erupts in ear-splintering laughter at her misfortune. The laughter lasts only for a second, because everyone turns to look at him with utter disdain. How could anyone be so heartless?

That young man was me.

I am emotionally disconnected.

A Life History

I grew up in churches that believed—I mean *really* believed—in the spiritual realm. Behind every new world leader, body rash, and lightning strike there was a sinister being messing with us, God's will, and the nation of Israel. We

I can tell when
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but I'm like a
broken
electrical circuit.

saw evil everywhere except in places we didn't think to look.

My parents were and are sweet people. I grew up knowing that I was unconditionally loved. Even when I failed profoundly, I never once considered that the love of my mother and father was in jeopardy. In my mind I have layered this experience onto the face of God. The idea that, to quote Jack Miller, "we are more loved and accepted than we'd ever dare hope" resonates deeply with me. I believe it. I have tasted of that fountain, and it refreshes the soul.

My father learned to love from the book *Little Britches*, in which Ralph Moody tells stories of his childhood relationship with his father. He learned it there because my father's father was deeply disappointed in him and let him know about it. Today we would call it emotional abuse; back then they called it "tough love." His dad hurled insults at him, especially after his dad had been drinking. He called my dad stupid and slow. My dad learned to keep his mouth shut and disappear. He spent most of his time walking in the great outdoors. When home, he obsessed over learning the guitar using his Chet Atkins songbook and watched his devoted Lutheran

mother paint desert scenes in the back room.

My mother, Betty, grew up with three sisters. She and Bonnie were twins. Their father, a cowboy, escaped the Dust Bowl by moving westward and settling in Colorado. They were poor, but they could reinvent themselves. When she was in college, my mom stumbled into a vibrant spiritual community, a Pentecostal campus ministry. As her family members reinvented themselves in light of an unraveling dream, she found people who saw visions and dreamed new dreams. She and her sisters found themselves moving onward and upward in their education and their faith. My mom became a teacher, then opened a bookstore on the main street of a small town in Oregon.

My dad, Leroy, moved to Oregon after his draft duty during the Vietnam War ended, and he frequented the bookstore on the main street of his small town because he was looking for an out-of-print Ralph Moody book called *Shaking the Nickel Bush*. My mom's business partner was sure he was actually trying to get to know Betty, so she talked my mom into asking him out. Later my dad would tell me that he actually wasn't there for Betty, but he was glad she approached him. They married soon after, as they were getting "up in age." The quiet man who had learned to escape scrutiny married the vibrant Pentecostal convert who was used to going toe-to-toe with her twin sister. And then they had me.

I am the only child of Leroy and Betty Littleton. Like my mom, I have big ideas and the risk tolerance to go for them. Like my dad, I like having space to unpack how I feel, and I have a profound fear of being subject to destabilized people. Unlike my mom and



dad, I grew up with my mom and dad as parents.

My mom had profound emotional needs and experiences, so I looked for validation and guidance from my dad. But he was so reserved, and I found myself frustrated with the lack of verbal communication. My mom was easier to talk to, but I slowly began to resent that she was using me as an emotional sounding board and not treating me as a kid. I installed a slide lock on the inside of my bedroom door to keep her out. It wasn't until years later in therapy that I realized this wasn't normal. The evil wasn't just in that crooked politician or the war in the Middle East. Satan was at work in our house, entering through the simple longings of our hearts and the strategies we came up with to fill them.

I remember the day I felt the demonic powers. My Aunt Maria, my mom's youngest, most vibrant sister, had just died. She was my favorite relative, someone who brought out the best in me. One of my favorite photos is one of me wearing a pillow on my head as a hat and she and I busting up in laughter. I think that was the same visit where she took me to a museum to learn more about baseball. Then and now, museums and baseball are two of my favorite things. She understood

me. And then she died. She died first among the sisters, and way too young. The family was devastated. Like my dad, I needed to unpack what I was feeling. My mom needed someone to express her emotions to, and my dad didn't know how to meet her there, so she pursued me and my ability to connect with her. My feeling that this wasn't my role (though I couldn't name it at the time) rose up, and I became a stone, cold and impenetrable. I said words I'll always regret. I looked her in the eye as she was telling me how much she missed Maria and said, "I don't even care that she's dead." It was a lie from the pit of hell.

Ever since that day I have been emotionally disconnected. I can tell when something should elicit an emotion, but I'm like a broken electrical circuit. When the switch flips, and the current should flow, I feel nothing. I'm disconnected.

I have been working out my story and seeking God's help with this issue for about 16 years. I've written volumes about what I've learned and seen and could write more. And it's helping. I am grateful to say that when my dad died of cancer, the circuit worked flawlessly. I sat with him on the hospital bed and openly shared my feelings, and as mercifully warm tears flowed down

my cheeks, I knew I was fully human. But sometimes the circuit doesn't work. The connection is sporadic. There are times when I'm unsure or under duress, and I feel nothing.


The Gift of Composure

So there I am in that parking lot. I am scared. I am worried about the woman on the ground. I am nervous about the man dressed as a jester. He creeps me out. The careening SUV introduces unwanted chaos to the situation. And my emotional circuit is broken.

But nobody could tell.

At some point, as I often do, I gave some directives. "You, get the knife and lock it away!" "Give her space." "We need to clear the parking lot. It's time for everyone to go home." "OK, let's help you into the car." Then I got in my truck, closed the door, laid my head against the headrest and acknowledged the feelings of fear, anger, and inadequacy. It was time to go home to my family.

My brokenness is my gift. My emotional switch doesn't always work on the first try, so I am able to stay composed for much longer than many others. But the switch can and does work. I am increasingly able to feel love, fear, and concern, even if it takes a little while.

God redeems what the enemy seeks to destroy. 



Andy Littleton is a pastor at Mission Church, a local mission leader in Resonate's Western U.S. region, and co-founder of Infuse, a missional consulting group. He lives with his wife and daughter in Tucson, Ariz.

Maddi's Bracelet

I do everything
wearing this
bracelet, including
all of my official
acts of ministry.

AS I WRITE THIS ARTICLE, I'm wearing the handmade friendship bracelet Maddi gave me. She made it herself. She even tied it on my wrist for me. It's been with me ever since.

In my sermon a few Sundays ago, I made a reference to the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelets that some Christians wore back in the 1990s. After the service, Maddi asked me what my favorite colors were. I told her they were orange and blue. The next Sunday she gifted me with a handmade WWJD friendship bracelet with orange lettering on a blue background.

Maddi is a teenage girl in my congregation. Last year she and her sister, Anna, both made profession of faith. They weren't born into this church family; they and their parents joined years ago through a series of unlikely and God-ordained circumstances. Now Maddi and her family come faithfully even though their home is a 40-minute drive away.

I do everything wearing this bracelet, including all of my official acts of ministry. I've preached, raised my hands in benediction, and baptized wearing this bracelet. I've served communion and officiated at a funeral wearing this bracelet. Whenever I see it I'm reminded of a few things.

First, I'm reminded that people are actually listening to my sermons. Incredibly, people show up week after week to hear what I have to say about the Bible. This is an awesome opportunity as well as an awesome responsibility. I need to make sure that my sermons are on message and accurately reflect what the Scripture passage for the week is saying to God's people today.

Second, I'm reminded that people of all ages and stages of spiritual development are part of this congregation. My ministry isn't just for the officebearers

or older members who have been coming to church for decades. It's also for children, teens, and new believers. Ministering to a diverse group can be tough—as much as I want to encourage and challenge the more mature members, I also want to make sure that I don't lose members like Maddi.

Third, when I see the bracelet I'm reminded that I have a responsibility to be an example of what a Christ-follower looks like. Younger members are watching and listening to those of us who are older and especially to those of us who are leaders. They want to know if we really practice what we preach. They want to see how we react when life gets hard. Do we lose our cool, make a mess, or fail morally? Or do we respond with Christ-like perseverance, humility, and a willingness to make sacrifices so that others can benefit? I want to be like Jesus regardless of who is watching or listening, but the fact that young people like Maddi are watching and listening makes me especially motivated to be as Christlike as possible. I don't want to do anything that would cause young ones to stumble.

Finally, the bracelet reminds me that I am not alone in my spiritual journey. Maddi, though much younger than I, is my sister in Christ. And the fact that she cared enough to make me a friendship bracelet tells me that she considers me—a bald, middle-aged pastor—to be her friend. That is truly amazing. I'm so glad that I have friends along the way on my spiritual journey. I can encourage them, and they can encourage me. **B**



Andrew de Gelder is the lead pastor at Aylmer (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church.

1. Do you or did you wear a WWJD bracelet or something else to remind you of a spiritual insight? What is that spiritual insight?

READ MORE **ONLINE**

Through All Generations

Suddenly the
entire biblical
account
seemed even
more personal.

ABOUT 40 YEARS AGO my dad's oldest sibling, Aunt Clara, showed me a picture I had never seen before. It was the lone surviving photo of my long-deceased great-grandpa Einfeld, taken sometime around 1900 in the Netherlands. Aunt Clara seemed eager to reveal a closely held family secret. My great-grandpa, she said, had been a "German Jewish seaman." Jewish?! I was flabbergasted. How could that be true? My dad was a Christian Reformed minister. His Dutch immigrant parents were devout lifelong members of the Christian Reformed Church. But my aunt sure sounded convincing.

When online genealogical databases later emerged, I began checking out her story. I discovered that my great-grandpa had been born in the North Sea coastal town of Norden, Germany, and was baptized as an infant in a Lutheran church. In fact, he was the sixth consecutive generation of Einfeld sons who had all been baptized as German Lutherans. However, the three earliest generations of those sons, who lived during the 17th and 18th centuries, all shared a hereditary name that revealed something more. That name was Juede—the German word for Jew. It was the handy ID tag often used back then to underscore the alien minority social status of those of Jewish ethnic descent. Aunt Clara had been right about my great-grandfather's ethnic origins!

The implications jolted my sense of identity. My lifelong Christian identity meant patriarchal Abraham had been my spiritual father. But now I realized I also had a genetic connection to him. I had inherited his DNA. Suddenly the entire biblical account seemed even more personal. All those familiar Bible stories I had grown up hearing and reading? My own flesh-and-blood ancestors had experienced them

firsthand. Egyptian bondage. Mount Sinai. The desert wanderings. Crossing the Jordan. Babylonian conquest. Herod's psychopathic tyranny. The ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And speaking of Jesus, perhaps my own ancestors had seen and heard him in person. If so, how had they responded? What stories might they have been able to tell?

Additional questions begged for answers. How did it happen that a descendant of those first-century Palestinian Jewish contemporaries of Jesus turned up in the far-flung North Sea coastal region of 17th-century Germany as my earliest documentable paternal ancestor? The more I unearthed about the contours of these ancestors' long migratory journey—from Palestine to Italy, from Italy across the Alps into and across German territory—the more astounded I was that I had even come to exist.

How, for example, had they survived the violent bloodshed that wiped out more than 200,000 of their fellow Palestinian Jews during the period from Herod the Great to Rome's annihilating conquest in A.D. 70? How had they survived the 1096 massacre of 12,000 Rhineland-area Jews—about half of the Jewish population there? A ragtag crusading mob of French and German peasants, seething with anti-Muslim venom, had sewn crosses on their clothes and set off to rescue the Holy Land from its desecrating Islamic occupiers. While passing through Rhineland Jewish communities along the way, however, their righteous anger was momentarily diverted. Here, they thought, were the very people whose guilt for murdering Jesus had been left unpunished. Surely they were as deserving of God's justice as were the Holy Land's Muslim invaders. The Jewish people were thus given a choice: be baptized or die.



Doug Einfeld is a retired Christian Reformed pastor and a current member of Covenant Life CRC in Grand Haven, Mich. He is writing a book retracing the story of his Jewish ancestors from biblical times to their 17th-century arrival in northern Germany. His website is dougiefeld.com.

And how had my ancestors avoided the systematic execution of more than half of the German Jewish population via the horrendous “Jewish bonfires” of the mid-1300s? The dreadful Black Death pandemic had spawned wild-eyed conspiracy theories, and one outrageous false rumor that spread like wildfire suggested the Jews had poisoned Europe’s water supplies in an attempt to kill off the Christians. Vengeful, lawless, terrorizing “Christian” mobs consequently took matters into their own hands.

QAnon-like anti-Jewish conspiracy theories ran rampant among medieval Germany’s gentile population. They imagined that the blood spilled during Passover by their Jewish neighbors must really be that of Christian children, that the Jews were bent on extinguishing Christianity, that Jews hated Jesus so much they were still trying to murder him by stealing consecrated Catholic church communion wafers, believed to be the literally transformed physical body of Jesus, cursing them, and stabbing them until they bled.

Such a conspiracy theory led to the execution of 38 Jews in the eastern German territory known as the Mark Brandenburg in 1510. Following trumped-up charges of stealing and mutilating communion wafers and then torture-induced “confessions,” they appeared in a Berlin court wearing humiliating pointed yellow hats to hear the verdict: guilty of heresy and sorcery. Their sentence: death by fire. They were led in fetters through the streets of Berlin to a public square and fastened to a large scaffold, underlain with flammable kindling and tar, specially built for the occasion. The rabbi recited aloud the Jewish last will and testament. The condemned repeated the prayer and recited psalms to the very end as they were

burned alive. (Their innocence, incidentally, was proven in 1539 with the help of Martin Luther’s cohort, Phillip Melancthon.)


Anti-Jewish sentiment among Brandenburg-area residents now reached a fever pitch. The prince had no choice but to expel the few hundred Jewish men, women, and children residing in his territory. Escorted to the border and banished from the realm, they dispersed in various unknown directions. A handful, however, appear to have found their way to the far northern German territory of Ostfriesland seeking safe harbor. Evidence suggests a strong likelihood that my earliest Ostfriesland Jewish ancestor had been among these beleaguered immigrant refugees.

I try to visualize the 150 or so generations of my paternal ancestors who have come and gone since the days of Abraham. I see them stretched out across the centuries, spanning all the places they temporarily called home during their long migratory journey: Palestine, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada, the U.S. And as I take in this scene, I begin to notice something else. I see the hand of Abraham’s sovereign God, Yahweh, the great I AM, emerging into full view. I am awestruck.

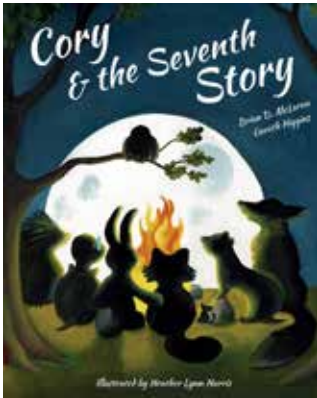
The words of Psalm 100:5 come to mind: Yahweh’s “faithfulness continues through all generations.” That’s no mere trite-sounding theological concept. It’s an observable reality playing out in human history. Generations have come and generations have gone. But God’s faithfulness has outlasted them all. It cannot and will not be thwarted.

It continued unabated during the generations of Old Testament Israel despite all their faithlessness. It

persisted during the time of Jesus and the first-century church, even when the Jewish community largely wrote Jesus off as an imposter messiah. It endured during the first 15 centuries A.D. as my own Jewish ancestors clung to their long-held Jewish faith and hope in Yahweh. It was evident in the 17th century when they were enfolded into the German Lutheran church community. It’s been corroborated by my own family’s 400-year-long, generation-to-generation Christian heritage and by the Christian professions of my own children and grandchildren.

But what about the future? Western Christianity appears to be in rapid decline. We’ve watched as 40 million American Christians have dropped out of church during the past 25 years. We’ve seen church infrastructures unraveling, budgets shrinking, ministries closing, pastors quitting. Christianity’s influence seems stifled, its voice drowned out, its witness poisoned by a clamoring, fear-driven, angry Christian nationalist spirit that disfigures the true image of Christ. If there were ever a time when we need reminding that God is faithful to his redemptive purposes, and that his faithfulness will endure unimpeded through all future generations, that time is now. 

Splash Into Summer Reading



Cory and the Seventh Story

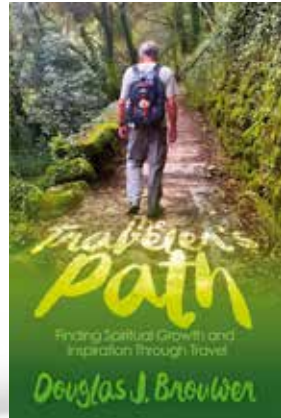
By Brian McLaren and Gareth Higgins

Reviewed by Mary Li Ma

When conflicts happen in communities, what can be done to restore peace? This children's book tells how Cory the raccoon and his best friends try to restore peace to their village by using the power of storytelling.

It all starts when Badger steals Fox's bike and Fox responds by mobilizing a group of animals to threaten Badger. Even though the bike is later returned, animals become hostile toward each other.

Cory and his best friend, Owl, realize their village is in deep trouble. They meet a traveling horse who is also a wise poet with well-chosen words. "Maybe you are the ones to change the story of your village," the horse says. They then create a story that does not turn neighbors against each other—a story of compassion, peace, and love. (Convergent)



The Traveler's Path

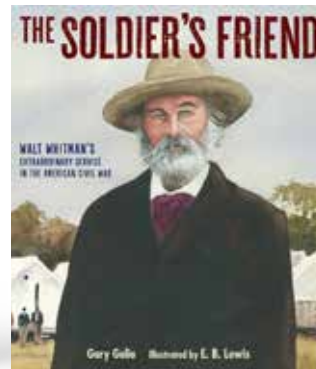
By Douglas Brouwer

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

Douglas Brouwer caught the travel bug early. For Brouwer, though, travel was much more than simply checking off locations on a bucket list. He understands that travel can broaden one's experiences and help people reflect on their lives.

Part memoir, part travel diary, and part reflection on faith and the impact of journey on our lives, *The Traveler's Path* invites us to join Brouwer, a Presbyterian pastor, on many of his journeys, including touring the Holy Land, walking the Camino de Santiago, pastoring in Switzerland and again in his ancestral home of the Netherlands, and eventually settling back home in Michigan.

Rich in anecdotes and honest reflection, *The Traveler's Path* is an enjoyable book that may encourage you to think more deeply the next time you head out the door. (Reformed Journal Books)



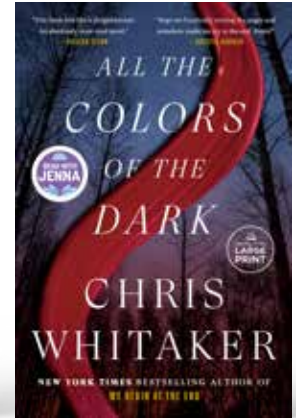
The Soldier's Friend: Walt Whitman's Extraordinary Service in the American Civil War

By Gary Golio, illustrated by E.B. Lewis

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In December 1862, Walt Whitman left his home in Brooklyn, N.Y., in search of his injured brother, a Union soldier fighting in the South in the Civil War. Nothing could have prepared Whitman for the devastation of human life and property he witnessed by the time he found his brother in a hospital camp in Virginia.

Exquisitely illustrated by renowned artist E.B. Lewis, *The Soldier's Friend* is a testimony to the impact that sacrificial love and compassion can have during tumultuous times. Though recommended for children ages 7 to 10, the book is better suited to ages 10 and older because of its depiction of the destruction caused by war. (Calkins Creek)



All the Colors of the Dark

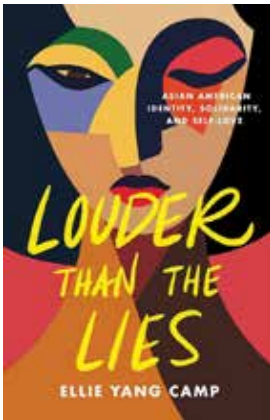
By Chris Whitaker

Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

Whitaker's first paragraph whisks us into the point of view of a kid named Patch, who believes, as he overlooks the St. Francois Mountains in Missouri, that there's a brighter world awaiting. How nice. But Patch is also dying, we quickly learn.

Then we read the backstory, which grows out of a loving and true alliance of Saint and Patch, two outcasts. Saint won't quit Patch, and Patch won't quit Grace, the girl who takes care of him after a catastrophe.

I read Whitaker slowly because his wordsmithing is fine and intense. *All the Colors of the Dark* spans 588 pages held together through the decades with a bit of transcendence often showing. (Crown Publishing)



Louder Than the Lies: Asian American Identity, Solidarity, and Self-Love

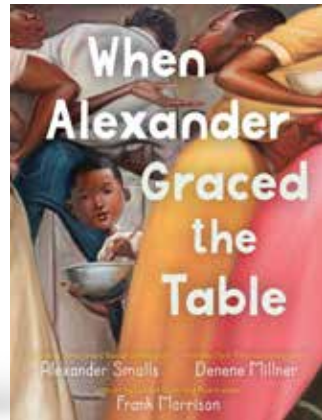
By Ellie Yang Camp

Reviewed by Daniel Jung

Ellie Yang Camp's book helps Asian Americans continue to define and redefine their identity as they see fit.

Born to Taiwanese immigrant parents in Northern California's Bay Area, Camp weaves personal narratives with historical commentary. She invites Asian American readers into an imaginative space to reflect on the status of their identity.

Louder Than the Lies adds nuance and insight to the identity conversation, in part by thinking about the term "Asian American" itself. She writes, "We needed something to bind us together in order to advocate for our common political needs as a racial group. Thus the term Asian American was born. To have the boldness to define and advocate for ourselves, rather than to be labeled by those in power, was and is still a radical act of liberation." (Heyday Books)



When Alexander Graced the Table

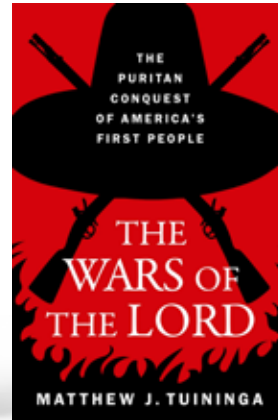
By Alexander Smalls and Denene Millner, illustrated by Frank Morrison

Reviewed by Amie Spriensma

Alexander Smalls is a successful cookbook author, chef, and restaurant owner. This children's book is based on a true story from Smalls' boyhood and reminds readers that successful older people often begin honing their skills and talents as inexperienced young people.

Multigenerational family togetherness features prominently as Smalls and Millner use word pictures to describe why Sunday dinners were Smalls' favorite events as a child. The book touches on important family dynamics, including the guidance and encouragement of a mother and the helpfulness of a grandfather.

The illustrations are beautifully rendered and invite the reader right into the story. The book can stir meaningful conversations between children and adults as they discuss favorite foods, family events, hobbies, gifts, and blessing others. (Simon & Schuster)



The Wars of the Lord: The Puritan Conquest of America's First People

By Matthew J. Tuininga

Reviewed by Aaron Vriesman

History is a complicated mess of noble intentions and self-ish ambition. In *The Wars of the Lord*, Calvin Seminary professor Matthew Tuininga outlines what happened between 1620 and 1676 as Puritans settled in New England and interacted with various Native American peoples. The book is a vast historical landscape of people and events where intentions of following the Bible mix with terrible flaws and catastrophic results.

Tuininga offers minimal commentary. The book is divided into three sections: the Puritans arriving in New England and settling, the missionary efforts by the Puritans to convert Native American people to Christianity, and the all-out war between the settlers and the Indigenous groups who already lived in New England.

This book is essential reading for fans and students of history. (Oxford University Press)



Between the Sound and Sea

By Amanda Cox

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

When Joey learns of a short-term employment opportunity to restore a decommissioned lighthouse on fictional Bleakpoint Island off the North Carolina coast, she decides to apply. When she wins the contract and begins work on the lighthouse, she learns about the legends and ghost tales surrounding the island's history.

The notes Joey finds hidden in the lighthouse's walls reveal stories of a lighthouse keeper and his daughter who lived on the island during World War II, when German U-boats torpedoed hundreds of Allied freighters along the Eastern Seaboard.

Author Amanda Cox explores themes of living with regrets, choosing to forgive others and oneself, and discovering the hope of God's redeeming work in people's lives. (Revell)



When We Flew Away: A Novel of Anne Frank Before the Diary

By Alice Hoffman

Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

Author Alice Hoffman employs historical research and the imaginative language of fairy tales and myths to explore Anne Frank's life from the time the Nazis invaded Holland until she and her family were forced into hiding.

Published in cooperation with the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, this novel for children ages 11 and older presents an age-appropriate window into the evils and terrors of war. *When We Flew Away* laments all that Frank and millions of others lost and explores the role of hope, bravery, and love in extremely dire circumstances. This novel is an excellent contribution to the vast number of books written about World War II and leaves readers with the challenge to remember Frank and the millions of others who lost their lives in the Nazi death camps. (Scholastic Press)



Hunting Magic Eels: Recovering an Enchanted Faith in a Skeptical Age

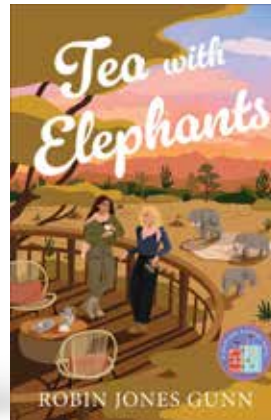
By Richard Beck

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

Five hundred years ago, Richard Beck argues, the world was enchanted. Before the Protestant Reformation and the beginning of the Enlightenment, "God existed, and the devil was real. The world teemed with angels and demons." Slowly, in the centuries since, the world has become secular, skeptical, and scientific.

The good news is that many of us are becoming skeptical of our skepticism and doubtful of our doubts. This is the first step toward discovering a renewed sense of wonder as we perceive God's holiness shimmering through the created order.

Always aware that "enchantment" sometimes takes the shape of New Age spirituality or an individualized spiritual smorgasbord, Beck reminds us that "God's love is our North Star. The cross is always our compass." (Broadleaf Books)



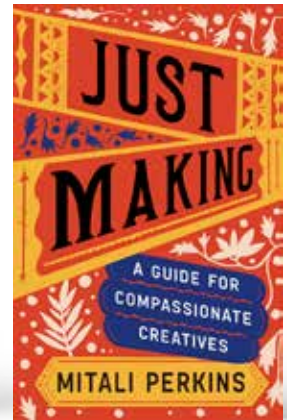
Tea with Elephants *By Robin Jones Gunn*

Reviewed by Ann Byle

Robin Jones Gunn's *Tea with Elephants* is the first in her Suitcase Sisters series and features longtime best friends Fern and Lily.

The friends are taking advantage of a free trip to Kenya, where they go on safari, experience a new culture, and spend lots of time thinking through where they've been and where they want to go. The vistas and mysteries of Kenya are on full display thanks to Gunn's beautiful descriptions, and the animals the travelers meet are almost like characters in the book.

Lily and Fern, who love God and each other first, listen to each other second, and advise each other third, help each other process their lives and see what the future could hold. This is a beautiful novel of friendship as well as a lovely homage to Kenya. (Revell)



Just Making: A Guide for Compassionate Creatives

By Mitali Perkins

Reviewed by Ann Byle

Mitali Perkins asks an age-old question: How can we take time to create art when there is so much injustice in the world?

Perkins weaves her own story and the stories of other creatives throughout the book for a personal and life-giving tool to help think about our own creative process.

She then notes what often stops us from making our art—a brutal market and our internal voices—before offering ten practices to help creatives stay on the making journey.

Creatives will find much to consider as they work toward justice with their making while also finding concrete and useful tools to incorporate into their creative work and lives. While the book isn't overtly faith-based, creators of faith will see the divine Creator in all of the messages here. Justice and shalom come straight from God. (Broadleaf)

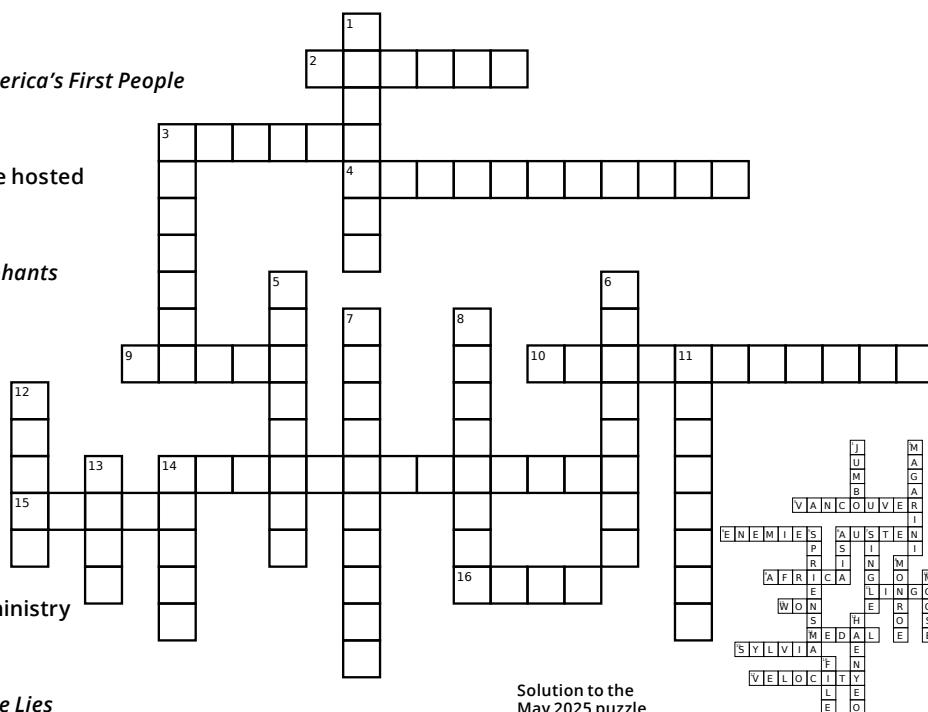
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle throughout this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions in the next print issue. (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

Down

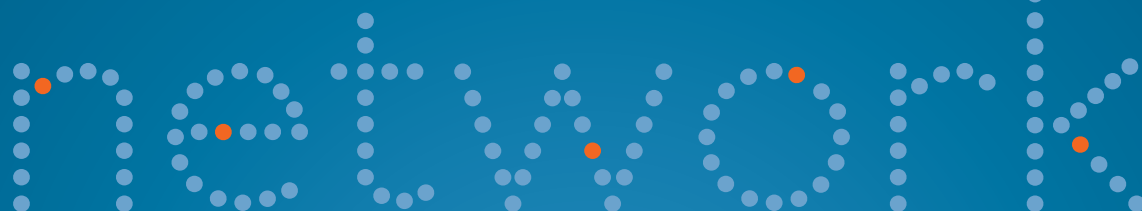
1. She organized a workshop on intergenerational mentorship
3. A late famous Christian sociologist
5. Maddi made this for her pastor
6. *The Wars of the Lord: The Puritan _____ of America's First People*
7. Read _____, not verses in the Bible
8. Mary S. Hulst collects these sets
11. _____ University, where Synod 2025 will be hosted
12. Three Forms of _____
13. This animal can make a quacking sound
14. Country explored in the novel *Tea With Elephants*

Across

2. Seminary celebrating its 150th anniversary
3. A group of churches encouraging each other in disability ministry
4. Author Andy Littleton says he's disconnected in this way
9. Resonate missionary James Lee works here
10. There have been at least 150 of these since Abraham
14. Church that recently reached 150 years of ministry
15. Number of task force reports included in *Agenda for Synod 2025*
16. Ellie _____ Camp, author of *Louder Than the Lies*



Solution to the
May 2025 puzzle



The Network exists to support people involved in their congregations. We invite YOU to join the conversation! Visit crcna.org/Network to:

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- Ask your questions and share your insights

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Christian
Reformed
Church

DEADLINES: Ads for the July/August issue are due June 13, 2025; September: July 25, 2025. Subject to availability. Details online at thebanner.org/classifieds, or for display ads see thebanner.org/ads. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

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

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

Church Positions Available

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@ggcr.org.

WORSHIP COORDINATOR Zion Church in Oshawa is hiring a Worship Coordinator! For a job description or to apply, please visit www.zioncrc.ca/careers.

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS

BROUWER, NORMAN AND JO (WEENINK) celebrate their 70th anniversary on July 27. Their 5 children and extended family thank God for countless blessings. Address: #146 1525 Mackay Crescent, Agassiz, BC V0M 1A3

Birthday

BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS



HOGAN, ANNIE (LAUTENBACH) celebrated 100 years on January 24, 2025. Celebrating with her are her 5 children, 15 grandchildren, and 21 great-grandchildren. Annie is thankful for God's many blessings in her

long life. Birthday greetings can be sent to her c/o Artesia Christian Home, 11614 E. 183rd St., Artesia, CA 90701

BIRTHDAY 80 YEARS



WANDERS, JOHN is 80 in June! Celebrate Pastor John, who served churches in Washington, California, Montana, Nevada and Indiana, plus short stints in many more. He would love to hear from you! 4733 Pizarro Court,

Cedar Falls, IA 50613

Obituaries

COOPER EDWARD, age 92, of Clifton, New Jersey and more recently of Grand Rapids, Michigan, was welcomed into the loving arms of Jesus on Easter Monday, April 21, 2025. He

was born September 19, 1932. He graduated from Eastern Academy and then served as a U.S. Marine in Korea. A master carpenter by vocation, he was a person of genuine Christian faith, good humor, and extraordinary generosity. Ed is survived by his wife Berdella (Brink) and his children: Samuel (Leanne) Cooper, Douglas (Joanne) Cooper, Gregory (Amy) Cooper, Pamela Van Eck, and Lisa (Jeffrey) Donat; 23 grandchildren; 24 great-grandchildren, and many nieces, nephews, other relatives, and friends. Ed was predeceased by his infant son, Jonathon.

DYKSTRA, MARILYN (Knoll), 92, of Denver, Colorado, passed away on February 22, 2025. She was predeceased by her husband, Arthur. Marilyn is survived by her four daughters, Patricia, Nancy, Mary, and Jill, along with their spouses, ten grandchildren, and twelve great-grandchildren. She will be deeply missed by her family, friends, and church community.

HOFMAN, REV. LEONARD J. 97, was lifted to glory on April 11, 2025. He was predeceased by his parents, siblings, and his loving wife of 56 years, Elaine Ryskamp Hofman. He is survived by four children: Laurie and Jack Harkema, Jan and Dave Musch, Kathy and Doug Smith, Joel and Nancy Hofman; 11 grandchildren; and 23 great grandchildren. He loved the Lord, his family, and the church, serving as pastor, stated clerk, general secretary, and other ecumenical roles. His life goal was to "seek to do most nearly what God loves so dearly."

SPRONK, ARTHUR age 97, of Edgerton, MN, passed away April 8, 2025. He is survived by his wife of 74 years, Mayme (DeGroot) and his children, Wanda and Duane DeBerg, daughter-in-law Diane Spronk, Cal and Mary Ann Spronk, Ivan and Lorilynn Spronk, Wayne and Suzanne Spronk, 17 grandchildren, 31 great-grandchildren. Psalm 121

VAN KAMPEN, JAMES age 90, of Lombard went to be with his LORD on March 31st, 2025. 2250 S Grace St, Apt 307, Lombard, IL, 60148. Beloved husband of Margaret Van Kampen, nee Pruim; loving father of Steve (Pam) Van Kampen, David (Cindy) Van Kampen, Linda (the late Brent) Van Dyk; devoted grandfather of Kelly & Jon, Erik & Laura, Kristin & Ryan, Bryan & Kristen, Adam & Hamish, Erin, Brandon & Meg, Corey & Chelsea, Bonnie & Logan; great-grandfather of 13; fond brother of George (the late Rose) Van Kampen and Grace (the late Jim) Tillema; uncle of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Timothy Christian Schools or Bethshan are appreciated.



VAN WYCK, MARVIN L. Marv, age 81, passed away unexpectedly on April 19, 2025. Beloved husband for 46 years to Helen, nee Hoekema. Marv is also survived by brother Robert (Ann) Van Wyck and sister Ruth (late George)

Heeringa, in-laws, nieces and nephews. Our comfort is that he has been welcomed home on Easter weekend in Resurrection hope.

VANDER KLOK, ROY, 92. Bradenton, FL. At home with the Lord April 5, 2025. He is survived by his wife of 72 years, Marjorie; Children: Alan (Sheryl) Vander Klok, Mary McNair, Steven (Ann) Vander Klok; 11 grandchildren, 22 great-grandchildren. He leaves a spiritual legacy.



WIERENGA, RUTH E (80) of Grand Rapids MI passed away on 2-12-25. She lived with acute myelofibrosis for 3.5 years, causing severe nosebleeds. Ruth was a med tech in hospitals in MI, Rehoboth NM & CO. She is survived by her sister Gladys Wierenga, 2 nieces & 2 nephews. Her parents John & Theresa B Wierenga and brother Dr Art Wierenga predeceased her. Cards may be sent to 1919 Boston St SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

ZYLSTRA, JAMES PETER, 92, passed away peacefully on April 22, 2025, at Morton Plant Hospital in Clearwater, Florida. He was in the company of his wife and his family members. Jim Zylstra was born May 1, 1932, in Blodgett Hospital, Grand Rapids Michigan. In addition to a career as a teacher of mathematics in Grand Rapids, Harbor Springs, and Detroit, Michigan, Jim spent 4 years with Christian Reformed World Missions in the Philippines, and 4 years with Mennonite Central Committee Teachers Abroad Program in Nigeria. Jim was active in coin collecting, known as numismatics, and wrote articles for Numismatic Society publications. He is also the author of Primitive Money of Africa, Tales and Details. Jim is survived by his wife, Marilyn Zylstra, and by his sons Todd, Trevor, and Brandon, their wives Lia, Jackie, and Rose, grandchildren Sylvan, Ian, Simon, Liliana, Gabriel, Caleb, and Asher.

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On Kittens and Love

In a way I did not foresee, it has been a healing experience for my kids to have an up-close view of a mama cat taking gentle care of her very tiny, highly vulnerable babies.

As I Was Saying is a forum for a variety of perspectives to foster faith-related conversations among our readers with the goal of mutual learning, even in disagreement. Apart from articles written by editorial staff, these perspectives do not necessarily reflect the views of The Banner. This article was first published on TheBanner.org on May 2.

FOR YEARS, one of our younger sons begged us to add a second cat to the family—specifically, a black and white tuxedo cat. Recently, his dream came true.

I'd been a little resistant to the idea, but at the very end of winter, Princess Athena Fluffy Whiskers arrived, all cuddles and sweetness. Even our aged, curmudgeonly, very-happy-to-be-a-bachelor cat, Shadow, slowly began to be won over by Athena's gentle spirit.

Little did we fathom, however, that our new bundle of feline joy came bearing surprises. Several tiny, fluffy surprises, in fact. Three weeks after she arrived, we began seeing signs of these surprises; a veterinarian confirmed kittens were imminent.

I was not thrilled. We already had so much on our busy family's plate; an unplanned cat pregnancy was too much. I'd have to summon the time and energy to add several

more creatures to our lives for a few months and then find them loving homes when they were ready to leave their mama.

I especially dreaded walking my kids through the pain of saying goodbye to the kittens when the time came. In a family like mine, where all the kids came to us through older child and youth adoption, I feared this goodbye would mirror the agony of the unimaginable loss they experienced when removed from the care of their birth families.

By any metric, I was not a fan of the impending kittens—until four days later, when in the dark of night, a quintuplet of impossibly tiny, utterly adorable kittens was born.

Immediately, my resentment faded, and I fell completely in love. I began taking a million photos and videos and sending them to all our family and friends as if it was I myself who had birthed these glorious babies. I even told our kids that one of the kittens could stay in our family and become the third Hoff cat.

We've spent a lot of time walking our kids through this situation with discussions of how the kittens will eventually be adopted into families that love and cherish them, just like they were adopted into our home where we love and cherish them. They mean everything to us. Surprisingly, this approach seems to be resonating with them.

In fact, in a way I did not foresee, it has been a healing experience for my kids to have an up-close view of a mama cat taking gentle care of her very tiny, highly vulnerable babies.



Jenna C. Hoff is a freelance writer and editor in Edmonton, Alta. She is a member of Fellowship Church of Edmonton.




This is a big thing in a family like mine. Often (but certainly not always), children who come to adoptive homes at older ages did not experience the safest or gentlest care in their babyhoods and early years. This can significantly harm their ability to attach, trust, and form bonds and relationships, including in their adoptive family.

Our kids are all in various states of healing, and to witness the gentle, devoted love of a mother towards her tiny kitten babies from the moment of birth onward has given them the most beautiful experience and visualization of parental love in the newborn days.

While this has turned out to be an incredibly moving and beautiful situation for my family, it makes me reflect how much more so is the incredible adoptive love Christ extends to us, as described in Ephesians 1:5: “God decided in advance to adopt us into his

own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ” (NLT).

And God takes it even further, beyond even the miracle of an adoptive welcoming, and endows us with the gift of his Holy Spirit. Romans 8:15 explains, “So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, ‘Abba, Father’” (NLT).

It’s a true welcoming not just into God’s family as his beloved children but a pouring out of his Spirit within us as he works in and through us to live out his calling of love and mercy in a world that hurts. 

Is Western Culture More Christian Than Other Cultures?

We can learn
so much from
believers from
other places,
especially
about suffering,
perseverance,
spiritual life,
obedience,
or theology.



Mary Hulst is university pastor for Calvin University and teaches at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich.

ONE OF MY DELIGHTS each year is to unpack and display my large collection of Nativity sets. I have gathered them from around the world, and part of the fun is to see how this story is interpreted through each culture.

A painted screen from Haiti pictures one of the Magi bringing an enormous bunch of bananas. A clay set from Peru displays a woman coming with fresh bread. One from the Zuni people of New Mexico tucks the Holy Family into the lower level of a terraced adobe home. Each representation reminds me that while the story of Christmas took place within a particular cultural context, people in every country where the story is told uses their own touches to make it their own.

This is a true gift to me, a person reared within Western Christianity. Most Christmas songs or holiday displays reflect my own Christmas experience (by referencing snow, for example), but my Nativity sets remind me that the experience of the gospel is global. The story of Jesus first spread through the Middle East and Europe, so these regions had a head start on Christian worship, theology, and practice. But in the centuries since, the entire world has contributed to our shared understanding of who Jesus is, how to worship him, and how to live as his followers in our own contexts and cultures.

At Calvin University, where I am privileged to serve as chaplain, there are Christian students, staff, and faculty members from all over the world who come and teach us their songs, their ways of praying, and their theological perspectives. In our chapel services we worship in different languages, styles, and traditions. The result is that all of us are stretched to try new things and reminded that our own way of following Jesus isn't the only way.

This is such a crucial part of following Jesus. Christianity isn't American or Ghanaian or Chinese. Christianity is a global religion in which the core truths of the gospel are learned and then celebrated in many different ways. For those of us who can experience the luxury of international travel, worshiping with Christians around the world is a reminder that we don't know everything about faith, church, or discipleship. We can learn so much from believers from other places, especially about suffering, perseverance, spiritual life, obedience, and theology.

I had a great conversation with a student who grew up in a Pentecostal tradition in a country in West Africa. She was taught that to be a Christian required speaking in tongues, and she was concerned because that hadn't yet been part of her faith experience. When I gently told her that a majority of global Christians (Catholic and Protestant) don't actually believe that speaking in tongues is a requirement of faith, she laughed out loud in delighted surprise. She then told me that in her context, there was no debate about women as preachers or leaders because they believed so strongly in the gifts of the Spirit—if God had given someone a gift, you celebrated the gift. It was my turn to laugh with delight.

When our gospel worldview is narrowed down to our experience, or when we believe that our own experience of the gospel, church, Scripture, or theology is superior, we miss out on the richness of the global kingdom of God. We miss out on commentaries written in Kenya or hymns from South Africa or art from Chile. The kingdom of God is expansive—and growing richer and more beautiful every day. Thanks be to God. **B**

My View From the Asphalt

Without a word,
she knelt by my
side and held my
hand as I cried
in terror and joy
and euphoria at
being alive.



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

IN THE MIDDLE of a sunny summer morning, as I biked in the bike lane on a busy city street, I saw a car come to a complete stop in the exit from the library parking lot that I was just about to pass. Assuming the driver had seen me, I rode in front of the exit just as she drove onto the road, right into my path.

"You're going to hit me! You're going to hit me!" I screamed.

In that millisecond of the terrifying realization of what was going to happen and my utter powerlessness to stop it, time slowed, then rushed forward as I found myself on the asphalt, my damaged bike lying by the car's tire. I scrambled to the side of the road on my hands and knees, exclaiming a gasping, grateful hallelujah: "Thank you, Jesus! I'm alive! I'm alive!" Again and again: "I'm alive!"

In my view from the asphalt, I saw that chaos and confusion ensued. "Don't touch anything!" a man yelled as he called 911. Cars stopped. Curious onlookers gawked. The driver got out of her car, devastated that she had hit me, crying in shock and incomprehension.

No one approached me. I felt alone.

Until a woman came and changed everything for me.


Without a word, she knelt by my side and held my hand as I cried in terror and joy and euphoria at being alive. Did she say amen? Did she pray out loud with me? I think she did, but I can't be sure because of the panic confusing my thoughts and jolting my emotions. But I felt then, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Jesus was holding my hand through hers, and the stranger and I were in the presence of the Lord of life.

Then I heard sirens. Fire trucks. Police. Ambulance. Help was on the way.

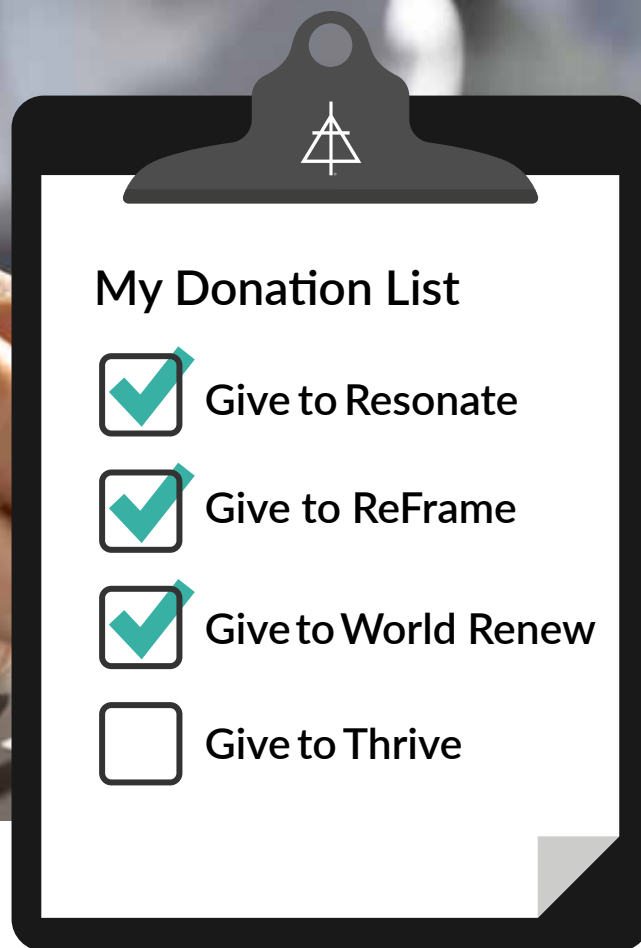
The woman left without my noticing as first responders attended to me.

I've passed that parking lot exit many times in the more than eight years since the crash that miraculously left me with only a superficially bruised knee and a deeper sense of my frailty and the thin space between earth and heaven. Each time I recall it, I thank God for sparing my life.

I often think about the woman who met me in my vulnerability. Entering in, treading lightly, risking involvement, leaving without fanfare. She was a hand-holder; a runner to hardship, not a runner from adversity; a cross-bearer, not a cross-avoider.

Onlookers at the scene might have assumed that help arrived when the first responders came. But my view from the asphalt told a different story. Human help, guided by our sovereign God, had already arrived in the hand-holding, running-to-hardship cross-bearer. Small, shaken, and shocked that day, I was yet in a sacred space, sheltered and saved from death with a servant of the Lord by my side. 

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