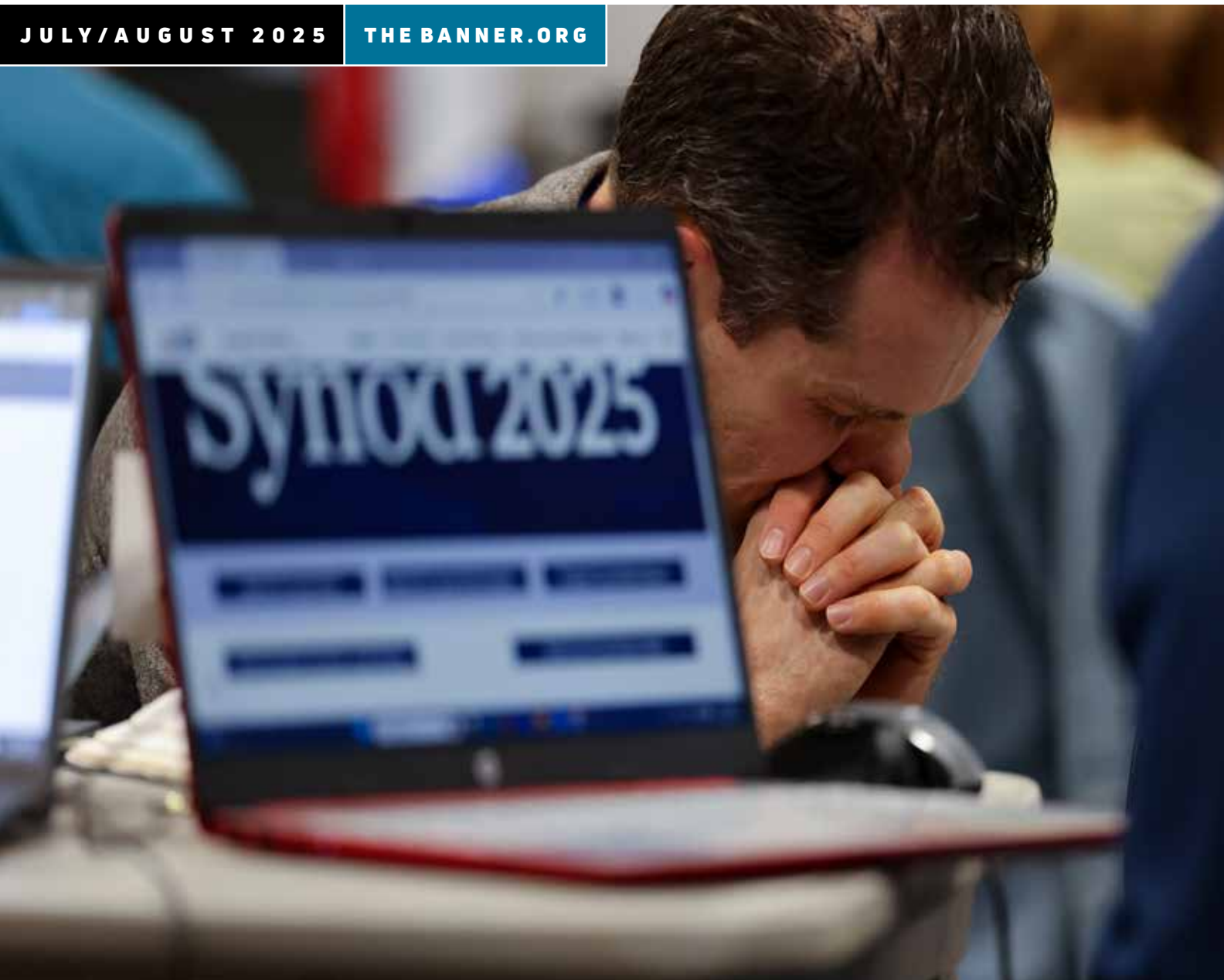


# BANNER

JULY/AUGUST 2025

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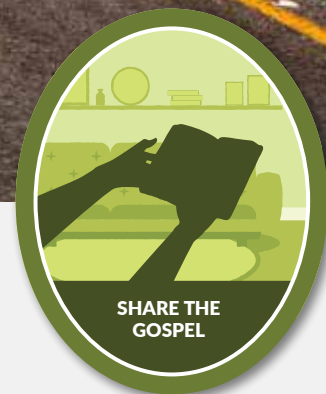
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# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

The annual denomination survey asks respondents to select from 28 phrases in response to the prompt "To me, the term 'Christian Reformed' means ...". In 2025, 13 phrases were selected by at least 30% of respondents. Here are those top terms, with the ones chosen by the highest percentage of respondents most prominent. Christ-centered **75.9%** (80.5% of 2024 respondents selected this term); Scripture-centered **72.4%** (76.7% in 2024); Conservative **56.3%** (56.8% in 2024); Faith formation for all ages **54.2%** (56% in 2024); "Every square inch" belongs to Christ **50.3%** (48.5% in 2024).

### Christian Reformed means...

Worship-Filled  
Welcoming Conservative  
**Christ-Centered** Intellectual  
Inviting **Scripture-Centered**  
Faith Formation for All Ages  
Intentional Traditional  
"Every Square Inch" Belongs to Christ  
Spirit-Centered  
Community-Oriented

Surveys conducted by DataWise Consulting LLC with 1,067 respondents (1,397 in 2024).



**Cover:** Deliberations at Synod 2025 led us to ponder: Are we ready to trust? Read all the synod coverage starting on page 16.

## WHAT'S ONLINE

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

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- » Book: *Eleanore of Avignon*
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*The Banner* is the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church.  
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# Farewell

“I have resigned in protest of Synod’s decision to change *The Banner’s* mandate.”



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

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

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

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

**DEAR READERS**, this is, sadly, my last editorial. I have resigned in protest of Synod’s decision to change *The Banner’s* mandate (see p. 35).

Although in protest, I am not bitter or angry. I am disappointed, of course, but I have gone through a discerning process. Through prayer, separate conversations first with my wife and then with five other wise people, including my pastor, I discerned my decision a few days after synod ended.

This decision is not a reflection of the wonderful support and work of the *Banner* staff, staff and leaders of the Christian Reformed Church, and the many volunteers serving at various levels of governance.

I resigned for three main reasons. First, I discerned that God is releasing me from serving the CRCNA as editor. God gave me a clear vision of my editorial posture and leadership as peace seeking by standing in the middle of multiple polarizing voices. Synod 2025’s decision, with an overwhelming majority, made it abundantly clear that that posture and leadership is no longer wanted or required. Since I do not sense God asking me to change my ministry posture, I can only surmise that God is releasing me from this call and calling me to serve elsewhere. I do not know where at this time, but I trust in God’s providence.

Second, I resigned in protest of the decision. I read synod’s decision as disallowing diverse positions from being shared, a decision I do not believe will help the denomination’s collective spiritual health in the long run. When and why did we become so spiritually insecure? I believe in the power of God’s Word and truth to accomplish God’s purposes (Isa. 55:11). I trust in the work of the Holy Spirit. I do not need to either shield or prop up God’s truth by silencing different positions. Doing so


suggests insecurity rather than confidence in God’s truth.

I believe this decision also curtails editorial freedom, even if it does not remove it entirely. Out of my personal sense of integrity, I feel I must resign in protest. This view is mine alone. I fully respect the decision of our award-winning *Banner* staff to stay. They are still committed to providing the same quality journalism under the new mandate. For that, they will need your support and grace.

Finally, though certainly not least, I resigned for my wife’s and my daughters’ long-term spiritual health. I no longer think it is good for them if I stay in this role under these conditions. Before God called me to be an editor, God called me to be a husband and a father.

My regret is that this comes at a challenging time for *The Banner* and for staff, who have to pick up the pieces from this decision. The excellent team has given dedicated quality service to the denomination. They deserve your appreciation, support, and prayers—now more than ever. I ask that you give them the support and encouragement you gave me these past nine years. I pray that the Council of Delegates would repeal its decision to defund *The Banner*.

Thanks to all our readers for their faithful support and prayers. May God bless the CRCNA for God’s kingdom. I am grateful for the honor of having served in this role.

To all, including those who have opposed my work: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace” (Num. 6:24-26). Amen. 



# So You've Been Asked to Teach

By Jessie Schut

**I**t's education hour at Sonshine Community Church. In one room, preschoolers gather in a circle, singing with gusto; in another, teens work to create posters about being a good neighbor; in yet another, an elderly woman tells stories and shows artifacts from her days as a missionary in Asia.

What's going on here? Sonshine Community Church believes in offering education programs for all ages to nurture spiritual growth. The congregation's snappy motto proclaims its vision for the congregation: Love, Learn, Go! The education program supports this vision.

If you've been asked to teach in your church's education program, you might wonder what it takes to be a good teacher.

## A Teacher's Basic Toolkit

The most basic tool is to be teachable yourself. The Christian faith journey is an ever-changing one. Be prepared to share what you've learned thus far, but also be prepared to learn and grow yourself. You do not have to know it all, and that's a relief. To teach is to learn twice.

A wise person once said you only need three loves and two skills to be a good teacher.

The three loves:

- » **Love God.** Be reassured that whether you love God a lot or love God a little but want to love God more, you have what it takes.
- » **Love others.** If you are willing to be used by God to spread God's love to others, you have what it takes.
- » **Love the subject matter.** God's love for the world as revealed through the Bible is the message you bring to every topic you teach.

These loves start in your heart and in your relationship with God. Your willingness to be used by God to reach others will be blessed as the Holy Spirit equips you for your task.

A good teacher has two skills in particular:

- » **Communication skills:** Listening, asking good questions, storytelling, lesson planning, discipline, praying, and more are things you can be taught. Books, role models, workshops, mentors, and prayer partners are ways to become more skillful in communicating with the people you teach.
- » **Community building:** We learn better if we feel connected to others in our group. Seating arrangements, adherence to safety policies, sharing stories, and setting boundaries are

ways we can ensure that learners feel safe, respected, and accepted. This is especially important if some of your learners are persons with disabilities or come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Experiencing hurt and rejection in a church setting can create long-lasting scars. Skills for creating community can be learned by attending workshops, reading teacher guides, and finding role models and mentors.

## Specialized Tools

- » **The Bible:** Church education is based on biblical truth. As you prepare to teach, be sure to start with the seed of God's Word and meditate on it. What does it mean to you?
- » **Curriculum:** A teacher's guide can be a gold mine for inexperienced teachers. It's like having a master teacher by your side, guiding you step by step. But a curriculum is not a dictator. It is a tool. Be sure to personalize it for your own teaching style and context.
- » **Accessories:** Pictures, posters, craft supplies, music, video recordings and sound clips, cartoons, and guest storytellers or presenters can all enrich your teaching as you engage your students' senses of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.



» **Guidance:** Thrive is the arm of the Christian Reformed Church that equips churches and ministry leaders with the encouragement and tools they need to flourish. You are not on your own! Read about all the ways Thrive can help you at [crcna.org/thrive/about](http://crcna.org/thrive/about). Refer to the chart about spiritual characteristics of children, youth, and young adults to understand more about your students, and check out the resources about being a good leader of adults.

### Teaching Children

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them” (Mark 10:14). These tender seedlings in God’s garden need a lot of loving and gentle care, especially in a church setting.

In the 168 hours of a week, children and youth are exposed to a multitude of competing messages from TV and other media. They live in an increasingly busy, flashy, and noisy world. You might wonder how you can compete with that in your allotted 45 minutes.

During this precious time, you are God’s representative, and you are inviting children to come and meet their loving Creator. What an honor! If the only message the children come away with is “God created you, God loves you, and God wants a relationship with you,” you have completed a supremely important task. Young children need safety and a secure attachment with loving adults as they explore the world around them and begin to discover who they are within God’s family.

### Teaching Youth

As youth reach adolescence, they enter a whole new world. They are asking themselves three important questions:

Be prepared to  
share what you’ve  
learned thus far,  
but also be  
prepared to learn  
and grow yourself.

» Who am I?

» Where do I fit and belong?

» What difference do I make?

They are spending an enormous amount of time online—some statistics say up to nine hours per day! This increases the possibility of exposure to harm, social isolation, depression, anxiety, and cyberbullying. The opinions of their peers become very important too. As their world expands, they learn about varying viewpoints, and they have a lot of questions.

As a teacher, you can listen, encourage, and be a role model. You can say, “I don’t know all the answers, but we can explore together.” You are God’s conduit, and you can tell them, “You are God’s child, part of God’s family, and you can make a difference in this world. You are important to us.” Help them use their gifts in church life in whatever way you can.

### Teaching Adults

Consider these aspects of working with adults:


» **Safety:** Learners need to know that your class is a safe place to ask questions and to express feelings, both good and bad. Work together to set up guidelines for group participation, issues of confidentiality, and

respect for others. This is the beginning of building community.

» **Value:** Your learners are taking precious time away from their schedules for a reason: they want to grow and learn. Ask them what they hope to get out of the class, and then make sure that your program includes these goals. Pray that you and your group will hear the Holy Spirit and learn to love and serve God and your neighbors better.

» **Curiosity:** We live in a global community where we are exposed to many perspectives about life and belief. Questions about this are bound to arise. This is a good thing! “Be not afraid,” Jesus tells us over and over again in the gospels. Respect different perspectives and learn together.

» **Mystery:** St. Augustine famously said that if you think you understand God, then it’s not God you understand. Jesus often taught in parables, leaving his followers to puzzle out meanings on their own. Be OK with not having or knowing all the “right” answers. Allow for wonder.

So you’ve been asked to teach. Say yes! You will be blessed. 



Jessie Schut is a retired teacher, writer, and artist. Previously, she was a church education consultant and writer for CRC Publications in Alberta. She is a member of Comox Valley Presbyterian Church in British Columbia.

## Four Decades of Living the Quad Life

It hasn't been easy, but God has always provided.



Joel Vander Molen is a member of Cornerstone Church in Pella, Iowa. He is a web developer, speaker, and substitute preacher. You can learn more about him at [joelvnm.com](http://joelvnm.com) or in his book, *The Quad Life*.

**THROUGH GOD'S WORD**, God shows that he has a plan for each person's life. Some people's lives include extra opportunities to showcase God's care for God's people.

In 1985, I was a typical 3-year-old boy living in Iowa. I played with toy trucks and tractors and didn't like the word "nap."

On Feb. 20, my parents and I were on a normal trip from our home in Pella to the state capital of Des Moines, 40 miles away. It was rainy, and just as we entered a four-lane road, an oncoming semi passed us. The wind from the large truck caused our car to cross into the opposite lane, where we were hit by an oncoming semi. My lap belt caught me, but the jolt propelled my upper body forward and bruised my spinal cord between the second and third vertebrae in my neck.

Instantly, I was unable to feel or control anything below my shoulders or even to breathe on my own. God's plan for my life was already on display as another driver with emergency medical training came on the scene and provided me air until paramedics arrived.

At that time, it was presumed that a child with quadriplegia would live in a care facility and not be in a regular classroom. There was concern I would get sick around other kids and always be in and out of the hospital. However, my parents believed God had a different plan for my life, and they worked to make it possible for me to return home with them. Because I used a ventilator to breathe, I would require 24-hour care. Thankfully, the health insurance my dad had through his employer covered nursing care.

Almost seven months after our accident, all three of us went home to start a new life. It has now been 40 years since life changed that day.

It hasn't been easy, but God has always provided.

I attended Pella Christian Schools from kindergarten through my high school graduation in 2000. The doctors' predictions of constant illness did not come true, and I was able to stay with my class throughout school. With much prayer, planning, and work, I also went to college. I lived in my own dorm room and earned an associate's degree in information technology.

After numerous interviews and two temporary jobs, I returned to live full time with my parents eight months after college graduation. I started my own business in web development.

Early the next year, in 2004, I spoke to my first class of second-graders about how God uses different abilities for his kingdom. Twenty years later, I still talk at grade schools—and colleges too. Teaching young people about God's world led to becoming active in evangelism and getting a license to exhort, or substitute preach, in 2017. I teach that being unable to move or breathe independently doesn't mean you can't be busy.

The first sermon I preached answered a common question that even Christians have: How can there be a loving God with situations like mine? Through no fault of my own, I have lived with a significant disability that makes a "normal" life impossible.

In Genesis 1:31, God looked at all creation and declared it to be very good. We see some remnants of this beauty today, but much more that isn't good. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This act of rebellion brought the curse of sin into all creation. This is why we now experience disease, dandruff, disability, and death.





**Joel Vander Molen in 1985 (left) and in 2023.**

Everyone has inherited the sin nature (Rom. 5:12).


If we take an honest look at the Ten Commandments and judge our own lives, we should agree with Jesus in Mark 10:18 that no one is good except God alone. Because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), no good person has ever received a disability or bad diagnosis. Thankfully, we have not been left as orphans and can receive God's free gift of salvation. No matter what abilities we have been given, all who truly repent of sin and trust in Christ alone for salvation will be saved.

Sometimes it can take a life-altering event or hearing a different perspective to realize the blessings we have. I sometimes take my vision and hearing for granted, but I remember to give thanks when meeting someone with impairments in either. Every four seconds, my diaphragm receives an electrical stimulation that makes me breathe—a good reminder to give thanks for air.

In 1985, my parents were told I likely would not live past 10 years old. Over the decades, I have seen the life expectancy for people with quadriplegia increase, but I have always already

outlived them. Living 40 years as a vent-dependent quadriplegic is rare, and several of my friends have died within fewer years than I've been given. God has blessed me with a relatively long life, but each year reminds me of Psalm 90:12: "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Over time, nursing care has become harder to find and challenges of age increase. Just when my parents and I wonder how long I can stay at home, God provides the help we need. This became especially clear as I looked back on my life and wrote my autobiography, *The Quad Life*, in 2023.

No matter where God has placed you, look for God's blessings in any form. As Christianity and church attendance are decreasing in many places, we must use our blessings to share the good news of salvation with all. Let us do this with this assurance from Jesus: "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). 

# Reclaiming Sabbath in a Burnout Culture

The rhythm of work and rest reflects God's design for human flourishing.



Charlene Trino is a writer and speaker based in Toronto, Ont. With a background in theology and a passion for vocational discipleship, she explores how faith intersects with everyday life. She is a member of Grace Community Church.

**"REMEMBER THE SABBATH** day by keeping it holy" (Ex. 20:8).

Of all the Ten Commandments, this might be the one that contemporary Christians most consistently ignore. We've found creative ways to honor God, avoid murder, and respect our parents. But Sabbath? That command seems almost quaint in our perpetually connected, productivity-obsessed culture.

Recently, while counseling a young professional struggling with burnout, I asked about her rhythm of rest. She laughed nervously. "Rest is what happens when I pass out at night after checking my work emails," she admitted. When I gently suggested she consider implementing a Sabbath practice, her expression revealed genuine confusion. "Is that really practical today? I mean, doesn't God understand how busy we are?"

Her question reflects a common misconception: that Sabbath is a luxury we can no longer afford in modern society. Yet Scripture presents Sabbath not as an optional spiritual practice, but as a command woven into creation itself. After six days of creative work, God rested—not from exhaustion, but to establish a pattern for humanity (Gen. 2:1-3). The rhythm of work and rest reflects God's design for human flourishing.

The Reformed tradition historically has emphasized this understanding. John Calvin viewed Sabbath as having three purposes: providing spiritual rest for worship, offering physical rest from labor, and prefiguring our eternal rest in Christ. For Calvin, Sabbath wasn't merely about attending church, but about cultivating practices that orient one's whole life toward God.

Yet somewhere along the way, many Christians—especially in North America—began treating Sabbath

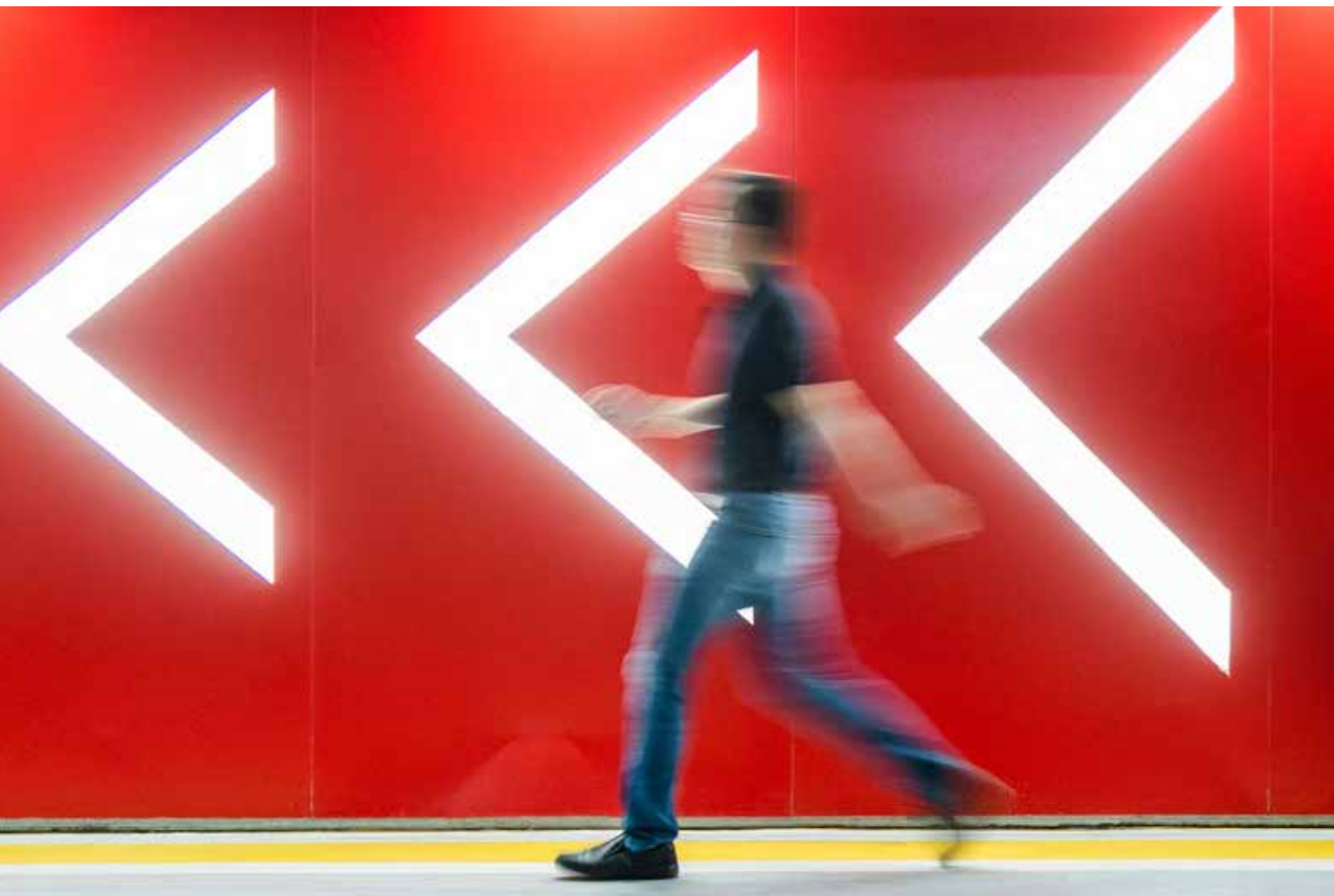
as either legalistic rulekeeping or an outdated concept. In Canada and the United States, "blue laws" that once preserved Sunday as a common day of rest have largely disappeared, replaced by 24/7 commerce and constant digital connectivity.

We find ourselves in a paradoxical situation: we're simultaneously working more hours while feeling less productive, more connected via technology while experiencing more isolation, and more "efficient" while reporting record levels of burnout and mental health challenges.

Perhaps we need to see Sabbath not as an antiquated religious obligation, but as a life-giving countercultural practice—a resistance against the false gods of productivity, consumption, and hurry.

What might this look like practically?





For some families I know in Michigan, Sabbath means a 24-hour period without screens or scheduled activities. They play board games, take unhurried walks, and read together.

A couple in Vancouver practices “Sabbath economics” by abstaining from all consumer purchases one day each week, reminding themselves that their security comes from God, not consumption.

A single professional in Chicago dedicates four hours every Sunday afternoon to what she calls “useless beauty”—activities with no productive purpose, such as playing piano, writing poetry, or simply sitting in silence.

A family in Toronto sets aside Saturday as their Sabbath, beginning with a special meal Friday evening and concluding with another on Saturday

night, incorporating elements from Jewish Sabbath traditions that connect them to Jesus’ own practices.

None of these examples represents a perfect model for everyone. Sabbath looks different across cultures, life stages, and individual circumstances. Health care workers, pastors, farmers with animals to tend, and parents of young children need flexibility in their approach to Sabbath rest.

The point isn’t rigid rule-following, but cultivating a countercultural rhythm that acknowledges our limitations and our dependence on God. Sabbath reminds us we are more than what we produce, that God’s world continues functioning when we step away, and that our ultimate identity rests in being loved by God rather than in what we accomplish.

In a culture constantly pushing us toward more productivity, faster responses, and greater efficiency, perhaps the most radical act of faith is to stop—regularly and intentionally—and remember whose we are. **B**

1. What negative and/or positive stereotypes about Sabbath-keeping have you heard or experienced?
2. When was the last time you fully rested and unplugged for a day? How was your experience? How did you feel? If you have never done so, why?
3. Do you agree with the author that our culture makes idols of “productivity, consumption, and hurry”? Why or why not?

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# Synod 2025: Are We Ready to Trust?

Synod 2025 danced between extending trust and firming up guidelines.

## SYNOD 2025 NEWS

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This was my fourth synod as news editor and my sixth as a reporter. Titles of my “In Our View” reflections have been “In Person, but Not Together” (2022), “Incomplete and Broken” (2023), and “Resounding Words” (2024). As I witnessed discussions, deliberations, and decisions of the Christian Reformed Church synod this year, I began to wonder: Are we ready to trust?

Some delegates felt it imprudent to trust our closest ecumenical partner, the Reformed Church in America, with the continued *church in communion* designation—at least not without being specific about where we’re headed in five years if our review of the RCA’s confessional interpretations and shifting governance doesn’t show a clear enough alignment with the CRC’s views. But members of the advisory committee evaluating the relationship—at first split on what to recommend—ended up presenting a unified report. They said there was too much good happening with local church cooperation, and they didn’t want that to grind to a halt with “sand in the gears” from a synodical relationship change. They were realistic about a timeline, realizing the RCA only convenes its general synod every three years. Five years will be necessary—and that’s what synod gave (p. 18).

The virtual church discussion went similarly. Some voices were very sure that the marks of the true church (Belgic Confession Art. 29) can’t be displayed in a disembodied gathering. But synod wasn’t ready to speak with one voice on that—there are too many places and people blessed by online ministry to shut it down too soon, it decided. Synod’s message to congregations is: Walk carefully, but keep experimenting (p. 24).

This synod tried to be careful with words. A few discussions raised debate about whether to “encourage” or “instruct” on different matters, and synod revisited

both “without reservation” and “fully agree” from clauses in the Covenant for Officebearers. Synod heard churches struggling to find a full slate of elders and deacons able to say with integrity that they have no reservations about anything in the church’s Three Forms of Unity. Synod didn’t remove the words “fully agree” from the covenant, so elders, pastors, and deacons will still affirm that the doctrines in three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—“fully agree with the Word of God” (p. 26). But it gave a little room in redefining what Synod 2024 said about “without reservation” (p. 27). Synod 2025 said that when officebearers are asked to affirm “without reservation all the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions of the church,” “without reservation” means not having, to the best of an officebearer’s knowledge, “either a persistent serious doubt or settled conviction contrary to any of the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions.” Synod also said it does not mean that an affirming officebearer has an “exhaustive knowledge of confessional Reformed theology,” nor does it mean the person “does not struggle emotionally with some doctrine” or “fully understands some doctrine.”

And synod wants the reaffirming of this covenant to feel joyful, not compelled. Instead of Synod 2024’s required annual re-signing of the covenant at classis, classes now are asked to reaffirm the covenant at every classis meeting, but in any way the classis wants to do it (p. 26).

Do the Canadian and U.S. arms of the CRCNA trust one another as partners from two nations in one church? Meeting in Canada on the campus of Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ont., for the first time since 2012, Synod said yes (p. 20), but the road ahead may still have a few bumps (p. 21).



**Darrin Compagner, Classis Grand Rapids East, reporter for the advisory committee considering the RCA relationship: We met with the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee and we found that we trust what they're doing.**



**Phil Apoll, Classis Ontario Southwest, for the committee considering the request to envision two CRCs: While synod recognizes the important matters presented by Meadowlands Fellowship CRC and understands that these issues need to be considered as the CRCNA moves forward, it is our opinion that dividing the denomination is not the answer.**

As for how we work together as assemblies, synod wants the task force already studying the relationships between councils, classes, and synod in regard to



**Richard Grift, Classis Toronto, presenting recommendations from the Virtual Church Task Force report: It is premature for synod to declare strictly digital or virtual online ministries to be churches, yet also premature to categorically declare virtual churches to be theologically impermissible.**



**Ren Tubergen, Classis Thornapple Valley: I don't see this (reaffirming the Covenant for Officebearers) as a trust issue; I see this as a worship issue. This is an opportunity to join in worship with those others at the meeting to proclaim our common faith.**

discipline to report to Synod 2026 before taking any further action (p. 28). And synod affirmed a definitive report on the varying pronouncements of synods and how they should be used in the life of the church: There's a hierarchy, and the

categories of "confessional interpretations" and "doctrinal affirmations" carry the most weight (p. 23).

Synod gave some correction to Classis Toronto for failing to implement the decisions of Synod 2024 in good order. It sustained an appeal from five Classis Toronto churches, but it didn't go so far as to declare those meetings of classis improperly constituted or to unseat Classis Toronto delegates. Synod seemed to dance between discipline and trust (p. 28).

But synod decided it couldn't trust *The Banner* with its 2015 mandate. That needed a change, and it happened immediately, with no time for review or even a weigh-in for the Council of Delegates-appointed *Banner* advisory committee. Delegates were sure, 131 to 36, that showing diverse positions from within the church isn't what's needed in the official denominational publication. Instead, *The Banner* needs to be clear about the positions held by the church and "represent the denomination publicly to the broader Christian church and to the world at large by speaking from a distinctly Reformed perspective in line with our confessions and synodical decisions" (p. 34).

I came into the CRC in 2008, attracted by the commitment to Christian education, covenant theology, and the warm embrace of my local church. *The Banner* was part of what I loved about the CRC. I want it to be that for all of us. I want it to continue to build up ministry, to connect people in one part of the denomination with good ideas from another part, and be part of the denomination's efforts toward renewal by addressing "relevant problems, needs, and concerns even though some persons, congregations, or agencies may prefer that such information not be disseminated" (unchanged in our mandate). Are we ready to trust?

—Alissa Vernon,  
News Editor

## CRC and RCA to Remain in Communion for Now

Synod 2025 decided to maintain its close ecumenical relationship with the Reformed Church in America, but the *church in communion* status will be reevaluated over the next five years.

For more than a decade, the two denominations have tried to “act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel (them) to act separately,” a 2014 joint agreement known as the Pella Accord.

Over the past several years, however, the way the two denominations apply their shared confessions, especially on matters of human sexuality, has brought the relationship under strain. Both denominations hold the same traditional position on marriage (one man, one woman), but some RCA classes allow people living in same-sex relationships to serve as officebearers, something the CRC does not allow.

RCA general secretary Eddy Alemán told Synod 2025, “We have not moved away from our historical stance, but we decided together to live in the tension, the messy middle.”

For some CRC delegates, a concern. Brittany Clark, Classis Grand Rapids North, said, “While they (the RCA) live in the tension, we are not able to do so.”

Several delegates told stories of how blessed they have been by working with RCA churches. Rod Hugen, Classis Arizona, mentioned Orangewood Community Church in Phoenix, where gifted RCA church planters are carrying out ministry in a formerly vacant CRC building.



**Brittany Clark, Classis Grand Rapids North: While the RCA can live in the tension, we can't.**

There are many such local ministry partnerships, including union churches that belong to both denominations. The CRC and RCA also cooperate in disaster response and disability ministry and grant permission for their ministers to serve in congregations of either denomination.

The CRC's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee is responsible for the review.

Philip Bergman, Classis North Cascades, spoke in favor of the five-year timeline. “The RCA is undergoing a shift in polity, combining two layers of governance and holding its synod only every three years. We need to see how that settles.”

The situation at the local level might also change in many places, as more conservative churches have left the RCA, and CRC ministers unable to remain in the CRC after its settled confessional position on human sexuality move their ordinations to RCA classes open to affirming same-sex relationships.



**Rev. Eddy Alemán, Reformed Church in America: We have not moved away from our historical stance, but we decided together to live in the tension.**

Synod urged caution in forming new union churches during the review period and stipulated that RCA ministers serving in the CRC must sign the Covenant for Officebearers affirming their agreement with the CRC's confessional commitments.

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee told synod it is also seeking *church in communion* status with the Alliance of Reformed Churches, a network of formerly RCA churches formed in 2022.

“The Alliance is a denominational body,” CRC general secretary Zachary King said, “but it functions very differently from us. It has networks and annual gatherings, not classes and synod.”

There are currently several Christian Reformed pastors serving in Alliance churches. Synod 2025 agreed that those pastors can continue to serve in those positions even though the congregations are no longer part of the RCA.

The ecumenical relationship won't be confirmed until the Alliance formally accepts the invitation.

“They are a young, new denomination,” EIRC chair Shirley Roels said. “We have to be patient.”

—Gayla R. Postma



## Dutch Reformed Churches: 'Take a Higher Road'



**Peter Sinia, Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken: I hope the dark pages of our history encourage you to take a higher road.**

Peter Sinia, chairman of the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK), told Synod 2025 that the Reformed Church in the Netherlands bridged differences and did the tough work of reconciliation between two formerly separated churches.

Almost 60 years after a painful separation, the Netherlands Reformed Churches (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken) and the Reformed Churches Liberated (Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt) have merged. With about 320 congregations and 130,000 members, the NGK is now the second-largest Protestant denomination in the Netherlands.

Sinia said the reconciliation process "was very tough. After years of two separate denominations, the merger in 2023 is a gospel story of hard work of reconciliation by God's grace." As he spoke of the wrongs the churches had to humbly confess, he said to Synod 2025 delegates, "I hope the dark pages of our history encourage you to take a higher road."

The Christian Reformed Church had an ecumenical relationship with only one of the two Dutch churches. The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee has the matter of an ecumenical relationship with the newly merged NGK on the agenda of its fall 2025 meeting.

Sinia said when the newly constituted church hosted its first synod in 2023, a major issue facing delegates was how to remain a confessional denomination. "With a lot of disagreement on the form of subscription, it can be considered a blessing that the topic was dealt with in harmony," he said.

Another major issue for that synod was the position of gay and lesbian members within the churches. A synodical study committee that had started its work long before the merger published one report with minority and majority views. Sinia said synod's first response to the report was to humble itself and express remorse over any injustice that people with same-sex attraction had experienced within their churches.

Sinia said the church has, for now, accepted that different views will exist within the denomination. "Leaving the matter in the freedom of local churches means that there is room for churches who choose to open the offices for those living in same-sex marriages and for churches who wish to celebrate same-sex weddings within a church setting." He said that despite the great differences in views, the deliberations on these matters were harmonious. "That does not mean that the decisions have found unanimous support within the churches," he said. "Time will learn whether the next synod will be overtured to revise these decisions."

Other ecumenical guests to Synod 2025 included the Reformed Church in America's Eddy Alemán; Gerben Meijer from the Reformed Church in South Africa; Moses Jawara of the Christian Reformed Church of Sierra Leone; David Guretzki of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada; and Natasha Klukach of the Global Christian Forum.

—Gayla R. Postma

## CRC To Evaluate World Council Membership

Synod 2025 has instructed the Christian Reformed Church's Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee to review the CRC's membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches, a body the CRC helped to start.

The review comes in response to concern about some of the doctrinal and social statements made by WCRC's general secretary speaking on behalf of the communion.

The CRC was one of the founding denominations of the WCRC, which formed in 2010 as a merger of the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Its next world assembly is scheduled for October in Chiang Mai, Thailand. CRC general secretary Zachary King and EIRC member Elly Boersma Sarkany will attend on behalf of the CRCNA.

—Gayla R. Postma

# 23

The CRCNA maintains relationships with 23 churches in communion and 21 churches in cooperation

# CRCNA to Stay United as a Binational Denomination

Synod 2025 voted to not accede to a request from the council of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ont., that wanted synod to “envision two distinct Christian Reformed Churches.”

With 171 in favor, three against, and one abstaining, delegates overwhelmingly voted to remain a united binational denomination.

Phil Apoll, Classis Ontario Southwest, presented the report on behalf of the committee reviewing Meadowlands’ request instead of the committee’s regular reporter. “We felt it was important to have a Canadian reporter” to respond to this overture, he said.

Apoll noted that Classis Quinte, a group of Ontario congregations, is “organizing a meeting of Canadian delegates and Canadian classes to think about Canadian ministries and Canadian context” for later this year. Several delegates indicated that this gathering, allowable under Church Order Article 44, already gives the Canadian churches an opportunity to work together ecclesiastically.

“We can do everything that this overture suggested through Article 44 and still be uniquely Canadian,” said Martin Spoelstra of Classis Quinte. Article 44 allows neighboring classes to “take counsel or joint action ... in matters of mutual concern,” and with approval of synod they “may organize themselves into an ecclesiastical assembly that will function on the level of classis, with freedom to determine the delegation from the constituent classes and the frequency of meetings.” Gary van Leeuwen, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, said, “I am very happy with the work of Classis Quinte in calling us together.”

Caleb Bosveld, a young adult representative, spoke with great appreciation for the binational CRC and hoped that synod would vote to keep a united denomination. (Young adult representatives are



**Caleb Bosveld, young adult representative: There are differences in our cultural contexts, but these are not defined by the border.**

appointed to serve synod on advisory committees and may speak to matters in plenary session, but may not vote.) “During Pentecost,” Bosveld said, “the Spirit was poured out on people from all nations. Through the Spirit they were able to understand each other and unite in Christ. This overture supports the opposite: to divide because of our differences. ... There are differences in our cultural contexts, but these are not defined by the border,” noting that even churches in the same country also have different cultural contexts.

Greg Sinclair, Classis Toronto, hoped synod would approve Meadowlands’ overture, saying, “I love my American brothers and sisters, (and) I love my Canadian brothers and sisters, but this overture is an opportunity to push context a little bit because context is important. ... I just want to really encourage people to think about how we can help the Canadian church really blossom.”

Many delegates spoke about living in both Canada and America and how being binational was a part of their identity. Rob Toornstra, Classis Columbia, was born in Canada but now pastors Sunnyslope CRC in Salem, Ore. “We do so much better as a binational



**Marilyn Rodriguez-Bowman, Classis Red Mesa: We have to have the ability to persevere together.**

denomination,” he said. “We are so much better for having our Canadian brothers and sisters as a part of our denomination working together for the kingdom of God.” Scott Elgersma, Classis California South, is Canadian-born but pastors The River CRC in Redlands, Calif. He said, “I am not who I am unless we have a binational church.”

Samuel Van Huizen said his classis, Lake Superior, is the only binational classis, and he wanted to “remind folks that Canadian and American churches in the classis really depend upon each other for support.” He said his classis is an “example at a small-body level where we’re working together.”

Marilyn Rodriguez-Bowman, Classis Red Mesa, said, “We cannot tear apart the family of God. There’s no border between here and there. In order to stay strong together we need each other. We have to have the ability to persevere together.”

Aaron Thompson, Classis Eastern Canada, appreciated Meadowlands’ concerns but favored staying together. “As a Canadian,” he said, “there are certainly times when binational ministry certainly feels challenging, (but) separation, I believe, is fundamentally flawed.”

—Kristen Parker

## Canadian Justice: 'Happy to Talk More'

A report at Synod 2025 noting the work of several different teams included appreciation for the work of the Office of General Secretary, the work of the Bible Translation Committee, and the work of the Dignity Team, but only acknowledged the work of the Canadian Justice Ministries—the Centre for Public Dialogue, Indigenous Ministry, and Intercultural Ministry.

Jay Crossen, Classis Huron, proposed a friendly amendment requesting that synod “note with appreciation” the work of the Canadian Justice Ministries along with the other ministries that received appreciation.

But Richard Grift, Classis Toronto, reporter for the advisory committee that drafted the document, said that while many Canadian Christian Reformed Church members and some members of the advisory committee “do appreciate the work of the Canadian Justice Ministries,” there was “enough concern and/or ignorance by members of our committee that we feel we don’t believe we could use the word ‘appreciation.’” Grift referenced one member’s concern about the lack of communication about the ministries’ work on abortion or end-of-life issues and mentioned some difficulties with portions of the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, a teaching tool about reconciliation with Indigenous people.

“I deeply lament ... what you call ‘ignorance or lack of understanding,’” Crossen said.

Al Postma, executive director-Canada for the CRCNA, is directly responsible for overseeing the Canadian Justice Ministries. He invited people to come to him with questions. “I’m happy to talk more to you about it, learn a bit more, particularly if you have concerns,” Postma said.

—Kristen Parker



**Al Postma, CRCNA executive director-Canada: I’m happy to talk more about Canadian Justice Ministries.**

## The Right to Bear Arms, Even at Church?

Synod 2025 decided not make a declaration prohibiting concealed handguns at all ecclesiastical assemblies of the Christian Reformed Church regardless of local civil laws.

“The right to have or not to have concealed weapons is determined by the laws of the jurisdiction in which the church assembly is gathering,” synod said. “If this is a concern at the local level, then the local (church) council or classis can speak into it.”

Ben Wimmers, Classis B.C. South-East, believed gun control should be something synod could speak to. “The sanctity of life is central to who we are as Christians,” Wimmers said.

“The presence of concealed handguns—a piece of equipment designed to take life—violates our commitment to the sanctity of life. ... I must protest the presence of weapons in an assembly of peace.” He noted that early Christians laid their lives down without a fight in the face of persecution.

Philip Bergman, Classis North Cascades, agreed. “This is very much an ethical consideration.”

Christopher Samuels, Classis Arizona, spoke in favor of synod staying silent on the matter. “Even the concept that this (a gun) is a tool merely for killing is not the correct way to look at this,” he said. “This is a means by which we can express love for our congregation” by protecting them.

The request to ban concealed handguns came from Meadowlands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster, Ont.

—Isabelle Brown



**Chris Samuels, Classis Arizona: The concept that this is a tool merely for killing is not the correct way to look at this.**



# Synod 2025 'Deplores' Assisted Suicide, Affirms God's Gift of Life

Synod 2025 unanimously voted to approve the recommendations of the Assisted Suicide Task Force mandated by Synod 2023 and to commend its report. Another unanimous vote approved "that synod deplore the legalization and practice of medically assisted suicide as well as the efforts to expand it to include minors, and those suffering solely from psychological disabilities."

Synod affirmed "the value of human life as a gift from God, intrinsic and enduring, recognizing that, as Christians, we are to honor and care for all lives—our own and others—especially in suffering and despair" and called for pastoral care and compassionate palliative care as a response to suffering, disability, and dying.

Synod instructed all members of the Christian Reformed Church to "make every effort to ensure that meeting spaces and programming are accessible so that our churches are prophetic witnesses that disability, disease, and deformity do not diminish the value and dignity of every human," and it reminded members to "give generously of their time, treasure, and talents to work that supports people who are vulnerable and suffering, and to support the work of civil government to provide compassionate care so that those who are suffering and vulnerable do not feel pressured to end their lives."

Phil Apoll, Classis Ontario Southwest, expressed appreciation for the report, saying it was "filled with grace and truth" and dealt with the biblical and theological components of life and death well.



**Hannah den Bak, a young adult representative: I'm extremely appreciative of the compassionate sentiment that I've heard.**

Martin Spoelstra, Classis Quinte, said, "I just feel the heaviness of the Spirit of God in this moment, and I just want all of you to recognize that we have a moment here to stand before the Lord and make a decision in our churches and our denomination to be clear in this area."

Hannah den Bak, a young adult representative, said, "I'm extremely appreciative of the compassionate sentiment that I've heard" in the discussion. "Mental health is something that as a church we need to take very seriously, and we have the ability to have an incredible impact."

Stephen Vander Klippe, a physician who chaired synod's Assisted Suicide Task Force, said, "I don't believe our response to suffering should be to authorize the health care system to facilitate death. Unfortunately, that's how our society is responding to suffering. I think we need to be involved in compassionate care."

David Guretzki, president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and an ecumenical guest at Synod 2025, said the recent election of a new parliament in Canada creates an opportunity to revisit this issue even as legislation is in process to expand the use of what in Canada is called Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID). He urged Canadians to contact



**Brian Dijkema, Assisted Suicide Task Force: Remember the Lord is gracious and compassionate.**

their members of parliament to ask them to prevent the use of MAID in cases of mental illness.

Curtis Smit, Classis Yellowstone, encouraged personal action as well as political. "I challenge the body to take it to the next step," he said. "Think of a person in your community that is in this situation and what steps can we personally take to walk alongside that person."

Some delegates expressed their concern for families facing serious illnesses and end-of-life decisions.

"For those who have had members of their family go through it," task force member Brian Dijkema said, "you have to throw yourself at the mercy of Christ. Remember the Lord is gracious and compassionate."

Synod 2025 president Stephen Terpstra said it was rare for synod to speak so strongly about an issue.

"We have spoken in the strongest possible language about the care and the value of human life and the pastoral ways we can live with each other," he said, and in this world of very real suffering, "we long for Jesus' return."

—Kristen Parker

## How Binding Are Synodical Decisions?



**Nate Van Denend, Classis Ontario Southwest:** There are no rules on how to use these tools.



**Paul Vander Klay, Classis Central California:** Church assemblies decide when to pick up these rules.

Synodical decisions are binding for Christian Reformed congregations, but there have been questions about the degree to which specific pronouncements, reports, positions, and advice need to be followed. Synod 2024 appointed a team to address the matter, and based on the team's report, Synod 2025 defined four different categories of synodical decisions: confessional interpretations, doctrinal affirmations, adjudicatory decisions, and doctrinal applications.

Any decision by a synod that clarifies which doctrines are contained in the creeds and confessions of the church are "confessional interpretations" that require officebearers to agree that the doctrine fully agrees with the Word of God.

"Doctrinal affirmations" is synod's new term for declarations made by synod that deal with matters of doctrine, ethics, church polity, or other important issues. Formerly referred to as pronouncements, positions, decisions, or deliverances, they are considered to be authoritative and are meant to guide the beliefs and practices of the church community.

"Adjudicatory decisions" made in a particular dispute can be declared to have a universal and binding application.

And "doctrinal applications" include what synod has previously categorized as

guidelines for further study, contemporary testimonies, or pastoral advice. They are decisions that apply Scripture and the confessions to contemporary contexts, but they are not considered additions to the confessions. They are binding but allow for discernment in the way they are applied in local contexts.

K.C. Vande Streek, who brought the proposal to delegates, said the new categories are meant to be tools, and "it's up to future synods how to use them."

Nate Van Denend, Classis Ontario Southwest, expressed concern that there are no rules for how to use those tools.

Paul Vander Klay, Classis Central California, noted that the church has been through recent trauma and that one of the reactions to trauma is to create rules. "We create these things when we have these traumas. (Church) assemblies decide when to pick up those rules."

Cedric Parsels, Classis Illiana, said the new categories are not a change to church polity but a clarification in response to a recent controversy that created confusion. "When we face situations in the future, we know what the rules are," he said. "In this case, clarity is pastoral."

—Gayla R. Postma

# 80

The number of first-time delegates to Synod 2025



## Synod Gives 'Virtual' Churches More Time to Experiment

Synod 2025 voted 91-67, with two abstentions, to accept six recommendations for the operation of digital ministries and virtual churches within the Christian Reformed Church in North America. That concluded the work of the Virtual Church Task Force, established by Synod 2023 to respond to a request to "declare that a virtual church is not a church."

Richard Griff, Classis Toronto, reporter for the committee that presented the recommendations, said, "We're not ready to declare one way or another" if synod is for or against virtual churches.

Synod acknowledged that while it's preferable for churches to gather in person, "there should be room for intentional and ongoing experimentation within the CRCNA for digital ministry." It encouraged continued "study about the legitimacy of virtual churches including especially how they might fulfill the marks of the true church in their context."

Within that experimentation and study, synod encouraged digital ministries to network with each other and, when applicable, "to move those they are serving toward gathering as a hybrid or in-person church." Synod also instructed those experimenting with virtual church plants, along with their parent church(es), "to provide a clear ministry plan to their classis, including especially how they plan to fulfill the marks of the true church in their context and how they plan to address the importance of embodiment and in-person gatherings."



**Tim Sheridan, Virtual Church Task Force:** There seems to be a lot of wisdom to keep space open for experimentation, innovation, and learning.



**Michael Nanninga, Classis Quinte:** While not preferable, we're not in a position to say not possible.

Tim Sheridan, church planting leader with Resonate Global Mission and a member of the Virtual Church Task Force, said, "We are living in a time of accelerated technological innovation and disruption. ... In times like this, historical memory and lessons would tell us we are tempted in two directions: one to catastrophize and get to dystopian thinking," and the



**Grace Burns, young adult representative:** The option to explore faith without having to enter a physical space has been a blessing for many.



**Jordan Nickell, Classis Grandville:** We can't be present in soul only; we have to be present in both body and soul.

other to be "tempted by utopian thinking." Without tipping to either extreme, Sheridan said, "there seems to be a lot of wisdom to keep space open for experimentation, innovation, and learning."

Paul Vander Klay, Classis Central California, supported the recommendations, saying he's been surprised by his own online experimentation over the past eight years. "Five hundred to 1,000 people online listen to the rough draft for my Sunday sermon that 40 or 50 people will listen to" in person, and 30% of his congregation's budget comes from unsolicited online donations, he said. "Every





**Jeffery Scripps, Classis Georgetown:**  
**We can all appreciate the value of experimenting, ... but I think we can close the door on saying an online-only church can be a real church.**

time I think this really can't happen on the internet, I get surprised."

Jeffery Scripps, Classis Georgetown, said, "We can all appreciate the value of experimenting and doing things in the digital world, but I really think we can close the door on saying an online-only church can be a real church."

Jordan Nickell, Classis Grandville, supports that position. "I see this as a confessional issue," he said. "We confess the communion of the saints. To communicate is to exchange information, (but) to commune is to exchange presence. ... We can't be present in soul only; we have to be present in both body and soul."

Cedric Parsels, Classis Illiana, also spoke against the decision. He said he did not believe a church that meets exclusively online "can meet the marks of a true church," noting the pure administration of the sacraments. The Lord's Supper, he said, "requires there's a physical passing of the bread and the wine to the assembly."

Philip Bergman, Classis North Cascades, said, "I believe we absolutely can do church online, and it's inevitable." He recalled how many congregations lived

through periods of not meeting in person during pandemic lockdowns. "We had to have workarounds. That could work for an online church," Bergman said.

Grace Burns, a young adult representative, said, "Believers must see themselves not as believers who go to church, but people whose primary identity is to be the church." She said there have always been people unable to physically join church, and she believes "the option to explore faith without having to enter a physical space has been a blessing for many who face trepidation" over leaving their homes.

Michael Nanninga, Classis Quinte, noted that the task force was initiated after a request "to claim that it's not possible to have a virtual church" but it came back and said, "While not preferable, we're not in a position to say not possible." He respected that position.

In addition to the other recommendations, Synod 2025 directed the Office of General Secretary to work with denominational agencies to be a resource for classes and congregations considering how best to support virtual-church experiments.

After the vote passed, 22 negative votes were registered.

—Kristen Parker

3

The number of digital ministry practitioners in the CRCNA who shared insights in the Virtual Church Task Force report



## Covenant Must Be Affirmed at Every Classis Meeting



**Aaron Thompson, Classis Eastern Canada: Posture matters. Tone matters. Let's invite classes to affirm the covenant.**

Synod 2025 decided that the Covenant for Officebearers—the form the Christian Reformed Church requires pastors, elders, and deacons to sign to indicate their subscription to the denomination's creeds and confessions—must be reaffirmed by delegates at every classis meeting by any observable means a classis chooses.

The decision came in response to a request that Synod 2025 rescind a decision requiring officebearers to re-sign the covenant at one classis meeting every year, saying that signing once is sufficient and commitment can be reaffirmed subsequently.

Delegates were divided as to whether regular affirmation is a cause for celebration or if it is an instruction that grew out of a context of low trust.

K.C. Vande Streek, Classis Grand Rapids South, said it is a good thing to regularly reaffirm. "The affirmation is a celebration of that which unites us and can be observed as an act of worship," he said.

Rob Toornstra, Classis Columbia, appreciated that the affirmation will become part of the regular rhythm of classis.

Brandon Seaver, Classis Georgetown, supported affirming at every classis meeting because delegates from individual congregations are not always the same at every meeting.

Aaron Thompson, Classis Eastern Canada, wanted to see a regular affirming of the covenant at classis but said that synod was taking the wrong approach by requiring this at every meeting. "In our current moment of lower trust, I could not agree that we need to 'instruct' classis to do this because we say so," he said. "This may be seen by some as a heavy hand. Posture matters. Tone matters. Let's keep the regularity we instructed last year (but) let's invite classes to do it."

First-time delegates to classis will continue to sign the Covenant for Officebearers, as has been typical practice, to provide a written record.

—Gayla R. Postma

## Officebearers Must Still Affirm the Confessions 'Fully Agree' with the Bible



**Jonathan Spronk, Classis Central Plains: There is a historic reason we put that in. That is what we have done as a confessional church.**

Synod 2025 declined to remove the words "fully agree" from the Christian Reformed Church's Covenant for Officebearers, which states that the doctrines contained in the CRC's three historic confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—"fully agree" with Scripture.

The request to remove those words came from Classis Arizona "from quite conservative leaders who are struggling when asked to sign this document due to their desire to be fully honest," delegate Andy Littleton said. "Language matters. In a denomination in which the current climate leaves some people under emphatic threat of being watched for not following the rules closely, it's strange to me that we implicitly say 'Just don't bring it up' when the truth is that we aren't sure that something fully agrees in regard to doctrines we aren't as worried about."

Rick Ebbers, Classis Rocky Mountain, said this issue often comes up on the missional edge of the church when people learn about the confessions for the first time. "'Fully agree' is the most common conversation," he said. "Willing to submit, to agree, to affirm—it is a piece that causes considerable conversation."

Joseph Kamphuis, Classis Red Mesa, said that if the wording puts a stumbling block on the missional edge, "maybe we have to be flexible, get out of the way."

Jonathan Spronk, Classis Central Plains, reminded delegates of the history of revising the Covenant for Officebearers, formerly called the Form of Subscription: "When the study committee that wrote the new version came to synod, 'fully agree' was not in. We kept kicking it back. In 2012, an amendment put (those words) back in. There is a historic reason we put that in. That is what we have done as a confessional church."

Synod agreed and chose to leave the Covenant for Officebearers unchanged.

—Gayla R. Postma

# Synod Defines Parameters of Confessing ‘Without Reservation’

Since Synod 2024, some Christian Reformed congregations have had trouble finding officebearers able to meet what they see as an impossible requirement of having no reservations about the confessions of the church.

Synod heard this concern, but instead of creating a secondary, less rigid type of subscription to the confessions, it clarified what is meant by “without reservation” when officebearers are asked to affirm “without reservation all the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions of the church.”

Synod said it does not mean that an affirming officebearer has an “exhaustive knowledge of confessional Reformed theology,” nor does it mean the person “does not struggle emotionally with some doctrine” or “fully understands some doctrine.”

“Without reservation” is now defined as not having, to the best of an officebearer’s knowledge, “either a persistent serious doubt or settled conviction contrary to any of the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions.”

K.C. Vande Streek, Classis Grand Rapids South, reported for the committee that proposed the changes. “While we deeply respect the concerns expressed in these overtures, we believe the creation of a new category of gravamen is neither necessary nor wise,” Vande Streek said. (A gravamen is an officebearer’s formal declaration of a confessional difficulty, submitted to his or her council.)

Paul Vander Klay, Classis Central California, believed the changes to be “one of the most important things we’re doing at this synod.” He said the committee’s report—which includes words of deep care for the congregations that expressed difficulty finding officebearers—convinced him that “for this synod, this is a good move.” He wanted the report to be made available to classes and churches. (Ordinarily, advisory



**Greg Sinclair, Classis Toronto: I’m so appreciative that you recognize the struggles we’re having in our churches.**

reports written for synod are not included in *Acts of Synod*; only the recommendations that synod votes or acts on are included.)

“I’m so appreciative that you recognize the struggles that we’re having in our churches,” said Greg Sinclair, Classis Toronto. “We need space to struggle with them (the confessions).”

Scott Elgersma, Classis California South, said he believes the changes are pastoral and understanding. “We’re continuing to work this through, and we’re continuing to express this within our communities and within our denomination in a way that is sensitive and thoughtful,” he said.

John Tamming, Classis Huron, requested clarity on what is meant by “persistent serious doubt.” Vande Streek said someone needs to write a confessional difficulty gravamina—which would preclude them from the full duties of an officebearer until it is resolved—when one’s “persistent doubt crystallizes to ... hold(ing) a belief that is contrary.” Including the words “persistent serious doubt,” Vande Steek said, “recognizes there is tension, (but) there’s a good faith trust that we will live out our faith despite our doubts.”

—Kristen Parker

# Request Denied to Add Belhar to Covenant for Officebearers

The Christian Reformed Church has recognized the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony since 2017, but it isn’t listed that way in the Covenant for Officebearers, and that won’t be changing.

Synod 2025 chose not to accede to Classis Hackensack’s request to add a reference to the Belhar Confession, citing that Synod 2017 specifically decided “adherence to the Belhar Confession shall not be included.”

The Belhar Confession was written for and adopted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986 and offered to other churches as a call to unity, justice, and reconciliation. The CRCNA decided not to adopt it as a full confession after a three-year study in 2012 and eventually created the category of “contemporary testimony” to include it there.

Jonathan Spronk, Classis Central Plains, liked the 2017 decision and questioned why synod was addressing this again. “Has something changed?” he asked.

Other delegates said not including the Belhar in the covenant is inconsistent, because Our World Belongs to God, another approved contemporary testimony, is included. Some also noted that Synod 2017 did not offer any grounds for excluding the Belhar.

Jeff Bennett, Classis Pacific Northwest, said, “To me, we are being inconsistent in the way we handle things with something we say we agree with.”

—Kristen Parker



# Classis Toronto: A Dance Between Discipline and Trust

Synod 2025 sustained an appeal from five congregations filed against Classis Toronto, agreeing that the classis knowingly and intentionally violated rulings of Synod 2024 by seating delegates who refused to sign the Covenant for Officebearers or were from churches under limited suspension. The actions of Classis Toronto took place at the classis meetings of October 2024 and February 2025.

After sustaining the appeal, delegates had to decide how to move forward in the most pastoral way.

The appellants asked synod to declare that the two meetings held by the classis were unduly constituted and to keep delegates from Classis Toronto from being seated at synod.

Cedric Parsels, Classis Illiana, also wanted a strong response. “I want to note that it is a big deal that they did this,” he said. “I would argue it is an egregious violation of our covenantal obligation. What trust do we have that (the classis) won’t knowingly violate more?”

Parsels told delegates they should not consider only Classis Toronto. “We are watching one another,” he said. “It seems that making these intentional violations of synodical decisions was simply gasoline on the fire for many churches and classes.”

Peter Jonker, chair of the committee that brought the recommendations to synod, said that in the past some people transgressed covenants because they knew they would never come into compliance. “That’s not what we are dealing with here,” he said. “I don’t agree that this was egregious.” He noted that the classis wants to commit to compliance.

Moses Kang, Classis Hudson, also noted “movement toward following Church Order” in Classis Toronto’s subsequent actions. “I hope we as a body continue to support Classis Toronto as they work toward compliance.”



**Moses Kang, Classis Hudson: I hope we as a body continue to support Classis Toronto as they work toward compliance.**

Without implementing the remedies suggested by the appellants, Synod 2025 instructed Classis Toronto to “ensure full and immediate compliance with synodical decisions.”

There are currently three congregations in Classis Toronto that are in the process of disaffiliating from the Christian Reformed Church following synodical decisions regarding human sexuality that do not allow members in same-sex relationships to serve as elders, deacons, ministers, or commissioned pastors.

One of the churches in the process of disaffiliation is First (Toronto) CRC, which had been at risk of being disaffiliated two decades ago. In 2003, First CRC announced to classis that it would allow persons in same-sex relationships to be ordained as officebearers, which was against the CRC position delineated in a 1973 report. Although the church backed down from implementation, it did not recant its decision. Synod 2005 sent an *in loco* committee authorized to act on behalf of synod. That committee confirmed First CRC was acting outside CRC guidelines and said it must conform or be disaffiliated.

In December 2005, First CRC told classis it “resolves to acknowledge the CRC



**Peter Jonker, Classis Grand Rapids South: I don’t agree that this was egregious. The classis wants to commit to compliance.**

guidelines ... and tailor its ministry accordingly.”

In a related discussion, Synod 2025 declined to act on a request to “provide steps of accountability toward churches and classes in defiance and open rebellion.” Classis Toronto was named in the request, as were classes Alberta North and Grand Rapids East.

Noting the “inflammatory language” in the request—“open and defiant rebellion”—John Tamming, Classis Huron, said people should think about how words affect relationships in the church. “These words will sting, and we will regret saying them,” Tamming said. “You can draft overtures (requests) without inflammatory language.”

Though synod rejected the request, it did encourage all classes to continue to move toward accountability and trust by good interpersonal communication.

—Gayla R. Postma

## Synod 2025 Reaffirms Local Consistory's Role in Baptism

Synod 2025 affirmed that the responsibility for granting baptism rests with the local consistory, as outlined in Church Order. It also voted to remind churches that "baptismal rites are not to be used to affirm that same-sex marriage is ecclesiastically valid."

This affirmation and reminder was a response to a

request from Classis Grand Rapids South, which believed reaffirmation to be necessary because of a potentially confusing statement concerning the baptismal rite in the Acts of Synod 2024.

Some delegates questioned the need to affirm something that hasn't changed.

Brandon Seaver, Classis Georgetown, said the request should not have been initiated because "at the end of the day, what they wanted to reaffirm is already in place overall."

Art Verboon, Classis Alberta North, said, "I don't think we need to remind the local council of the authority for their baptism; that's not rocket science."

Phil Apoll, Classis Ontario Southwest, supported making the reaffirmation statement. "I have never asked a question of anyone who has moved to my church how they are baptized," he said. "I've trusted every single church that they've done it well."

Andy Littleton, Classis Arizona, said, "We also receive baptisms from other churches and denominations which we cannot legislate over."

—Kristen Parker



**Andy Littleton, Classis Arizona: We receive baptisms from other churches and denominations which we cannot legislate over.**

## Still Waiting on Clarification for Assemblies

Classis Zeeland's 2023 request to appoint a study committee to evaluate and clarify the Christian Reformed Church's polity surrounding the relationships among local church councils, classes, and synod has been passed on to Synod 2026. It has now been deferred three times.

Zeeland wants a biblical and theological analysis and then "recommendations for a proper polity that is biblically faithful and historically informed and addresses the issues the church is facing today." Synod 2025 said an existing denominational task force—the Task Force to Develop Church Order Procedures to Discipline Officebearers—is currently addressing some of the matters raised in Zeeland's request, so "it would be premature and potentially counterproductive to create a study committee that would duplicate or overlap with the ongoing work."

The existing task force was assigned by Synod 2024 and is scheduled to report to Synod 2026. Its mandate is narrower than what Zeeland has asked for, but it will be studying the relationships between council, classis, and synod in regard to discipline from the broader assemblies. "Once that report is received," Synod 2025 said, "Synod 2026 will be in a position to determine whether the report is sufficient or whether further study is warranted."

—Alissa Vernon

# 3

The number of times Overture 75 to Synod 2023 has been deferred



## Pastoral Spouses to Receive Support

Synod 2025 voted to encourage churches to support the spiritual health of pastors' spouses, including providing at least \$500 each year for resources for their spiritual care.

The requirement is grounded on the basis that "healthy churches depend on healthy pastors and healthy spouses."

Some lamented that more couldn't be done to support spouses of pastors. Paul Vander Klay, Classis Central California, who chaired the committee that considered the request, said, "This was the best that we could do to offer something to the church."

Ren Tubergen, Classis Thornapple Valley, acknowledged that ministry is hard and support is important, but spoke against the recommendation because "the boundaries proposed are unclear."

Rob Toornstra, Classis Columbia, expressed concern over synod "directing local churches on how to allocate their money." He said he'd prefer a mandate to the classes to create a fund or for the regional pastors to decide about support. "It seems a little too top-down," Toornstra said.

Synod also encouraged classes "to create a fund to help local churches who cannot afford the resources for the care of pastoral spouses." Regional pastors and church visitors (those appointed by classes to visit churches annually and provide counsel to churches and to pastors) are directed to "ask after the health of the pastoral spouse in their contacts with pastors and churches."

—Kristen Parker

## Education Must Accompany Solo Pastoring



**Susan LaClear, director of Candidacy: Everyone in this process is extremely busy. We let them take their time.**

Commissioned pastors called to serve as solo or lead pastors in an established church must now pursue theological education in line with what is required to become a minister of the Word, Synod 2025 decided. That education process is part of a program known as "bridge ordination," governed by Church Order Article 24-b.

Susan LaClear, director of the Candidacy Committee, told delegates that a person serving in a lead pastor role—meant only rarely to be filled by a commissioned pastor—requires more theological training, and that process should involve the local church, the classis, the Candidacy Committee, the seminary, and synodical deputies because ordination as a minister of the Word is a denominational matter. Synodical deputies act on behalf of the denomination.

Gary van Leeuwen, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, worried that adding synodical deputies to the process moves deputies into a role they have never played. "This brings the weight of synod to a matter (the appointment of commissioned pastors) that is classical and local," he said.

But Scott Elgersma, Classis California South, supported the changes. "These are folks who are living into ordination

circumstances (serving as the sole pastor of a church) that would require synodical deputy concurrence (for a minister of the Word)," he said. "It helps us better support folks in this ordination setting."

LaClear said the requirement is fitting because "these people are (going to classis as) minister delegates and are considered ministers in their classis."

Synod 2025 made it clear that the new requirement to pursue bridge ordination applies only to commissioned pastors entering a new call to be a lead or solo pastor.

Exceptions also can be made for those who can't receive the prescribed training in their language or if the process presents significant obstacles to commissioning indigenous leaders.

After some delegates expressed concern that commissioned pastors who are working bivocationally—holding another job while serving as a pastor—might find it difficult to pursue further education at the same time, synod adopted an addition to the rules stating that the calling church and classis should take into account the weight of balancing ministry and study simultaneously and extend grace in its expectations regarding the length of time it might take a commissioned pastor to complete the prescribed theological education for ordination as minister of the Word.

"Everyone in (this) process is extremely busy. We let them take their time," said LaClear. "It's a learning process, not slamming a Master of Divinity degree in two years. We're trying to make it as pastoral as possible while including the learning."

Synod also approved changing Church Order references to "chaplains" to "noncongregational ministers" to include leaders serving in a wider variety of ministerial roles.

—Gayla R. Postma



## Rubrics for How Denominational Boards Select Members Will Be Made Public



**Gary van Leeuwen, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan: We're not trying to add on another level of bureaucracy; we are trying to make things more transparent.**

Seeking more synodical oversight of the confirmation of board and committee members for agencies and institutions of the Christian Reformed Church, synod tasked the denomination's Office of General Secretary with acquiring and providing to future synods lists of what the boards look for when nominating potential members. Synod is asked to vote each year via a lengthy ballot to confirm members appointed to board and committee positions, and some delegates worried that without details the practice amounted to nothing more than a rubber stamp.

Synod 2025 said the rubrics for board and committee member selection should include "relevant education and professional experience; spiritual maturity and moral integrity; and a stated commitment to Jesus Christ and to the confessional standards of the CRCNA."

Synod also asked that the rubrics be made public through CRC websites or published synodical materials.

The changes came in response to a request from Classis Zeeland, which noted "the importance of maintaining theological, ethical, and professional alignment among nominees to synodically appointed boards, committees, and agencies."

Tyler Wagenmaker, Classis Zeeland, wanted the Council of Delegates to have a role in communicating with the boards about the nomination rubrics, not just the Office of General Secretary, but synod opted against that.

Ben Wimmers, Classis B.C. South-East, spoke against adding this work and preferred to trust the system synod has already built.

Gary van Leeuwen, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, said, "We're not trying to add on another level of bureaucracy; we are trying to make things more transparent."

Synod did not give a deadline for acquiring the rubrics.

Boards and committees with synodical appointments include the Council of Delegates, the board of Calvin Theological Seminary, Calvin University's board of trustees, the Candidacy Committee, the Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, the Historical Committee, the Judicial Code Committee, and the Ministers' Pension Plan committee.

—Isabelle Brown

## CRC Classes Asked to Help Identify and Train Exhorters of the Word

Synod 2025 wants to see more well-trained office-bearers and exhorters of the Word in the churches of the Christian Reformed Church. It's encouraging regional groups of churches to help prepare more individuals with a license to exhort over the next two years.

In making the recommendations, synod noted "the critical need to train officebearers" to serve the churches and encouraged churches to use the Thrive ministry resources, including *Thrive Essentials* and *Deacon and Elder Essentials*.

Synod was responding to requests from Classis Heartland to address leadership needs.

Aaron Greydanus, Classis Heartland, appreciated synod's call for each classis to encourage churches to identify, train, and nurture individuals with a license to exhort

in the classis by Synod 2027. "I really think this would be helpful to the broader church, and I like (including) the classis so that the classes can have a long list of people who are licensed (to exhort)," Greydanus said.

Rod Hugen, Classis Arizona, shared how hiring ministry interns who can be discipled and mentored and learn how to do different jobs in the church has been beneficial in his classis. "It has been fabulously successful," Hugen said, encouraging other churches to use their resources in this way.

Drew Sweetman, Classis Muskegon, expressed "some sadness (over) the extreme shortage of people that we have to proclaim the Word. I think it's all of our jobs to encourage people to be in a place to proclaim the Word."



**Rod Hugen, Classis Arizona: Hiring ministry interns has been fabulously successful.**

—Isabelle Brown

# Seminary Thanked for Training Pastors, Asked for More Info on Instructional Personnel

In receiving reports from Calvin Theological Seminary, Synod 2025 recognized several positive milestones, commended the school for training pastors and church leaders who uphold the Word of God and who support and defend the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church, and requested that the school's board of trustees provide information to Synod 2026 about how all instructional personnel, not just permanent faculty, adhere to the CRC's teachings.

"We appreciate the commitment of regularly appointed teaching faculty to teach, preach, counsel, and write within the covenant bounds of the Christian Reformed Church in North America," synod said, referencing the seminary's report in the agenda, "and desire to learn more about how this also extends to the category of those serving in other teaching roles at CTS."

Seminary president Jul Medenblik said the process of writing policies is still ongoing as over the school's 150 years a lot was just "understood" from the beginning. "Our board recently adopted statements related to church membership," he said.



**Jul Medenblik, president of Calvin Theological Seminary**

Aleah Marsden, Classis Central California, said requiring more from the board is "unnecessary work" after it has shown its alignment. "We can extend trust to them," she said.

In addition to this request, synod president Stephen Terpstra said he wanted to be sure to celebrate the seminary's work over the years and the faculty and students who have been flourishing in equipping people to remain faithful to God's Word, including the people from 30 nations in this year's student body.



**Aleah Marsden, Classis Central California: The seminary has shown its alignment. We can extend trust to them.**

Synod noted the school's 150th anniversary will be celebrated next year along with that of Calvin University, and synod thanked God for the faithful service of retiring professor Mary Vanden Berg, who will be conferred emerita status in July.

—Isabelle Brown

## 'Treated as Peers'

Calvin Schouten, Hannah den Bak, Kyle Vannus, Grace Burns, Caleb Bosveld, Alyssa Koetje, and Nathan Stienstra served Synod 2025 as young adult representatives, each attending synod for the first time.

Koetje, from Kalamazoo, Mich., was the only American representative, with the other six coming from Canada. She said she loved getting to hear the stories of other delegates, advisers, and staff, learning how God is at work in the Christian Reformed Church, and participating in corporate worship.

Bosveld, from Hamilton, Ont., said, "I am especially grateful for how our input and presence was received by the other delegates. Our opinions, thoughts, and discernments were deemed valuable, and we were treated as peers."

—Isabelle Brown



# Calvin University Asked to Clarify Its Confessional Exceptions

Synod 2025 asked Calvin University to clarify for next year's synod what it means by "indefinite exceptions to confessional subscription" for its personnel and the reasons such exceptions may be granted.

Perrin Rynders, who begins his term as the chair of Calvin University's board of trustees in October, and Noah Toly, Calvin's provost, explained to synod the process behind the board's proposal for Calvin's confessional subscription requirements for faculty, trustees, and staff.

Rynders outlined four main themes: covenantal relationship, confessional commitment, confessional alignment for trustees, and confessional alignment for faculty. He noted that Calvin University is rooted in the covenant of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and that the board of trustees "is unanimous that the denomination's confessional standards and interpretations are the standards and interpretations of the university."

Rynders also said that Calvin's trustees are no longer allowed to submit a gravamen—a formal expression of a difficulty with a confessional doctrine—and must be aligned with the CRC's confessional interpretations.

"When we work at recruiting, identifying those who are willing to serve the mission of the university, we're very clear on what we expect," he said. "Our job (at Calvin University) is to teach fully in accord with the teachings synod tells us about."

Toly addressed how the university works with faculty, especially as it relates to changes in confessional subscriptions and difficulties, noting a three-year onboarding developmental approach for new faculty who might be unfamiliar with the Reformed tradition. At the end of the three years, Toly said, "We expect those faculty members to sign the covenant for faculty members or leave our employment if they can't." There's a focus on discernment and mentoring for those with confessional difficulties and "permission of some indefinite exceptions only after at least six years of service." That's the part of the report that synod wants clarified.

Some delegates raised concerns about how confessional subscription might affect academic freedom. John Tamming, Classis Huron, felt "the river of intellectual ideas that flows through our denomination from these people and these institutions has been dammed. ... I don't see a defense of academic freedom, and that disappoints me."

Isadore Labrosse, Classis Greater Los Angeles, countered: "They're not free to teach unbiblical documents." And Sky Pike, Classis Muskegon, said, "I appreciate that academic freedom needs to be in the bounds of the Word of God, the confessions, and the creeds."

—Kristen Parker

# New Systematic Theology Professors Appointed to Calvin Seminary



**Jessica Joustra: I'm not afraid of wrestling because I have confidence in what we teach.**



**Jared Michelson: The pulpit is one of few places in our culture where people still listen.**

Synod 2025 appointed Jessica Joustra and Jared Michelson to teach systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, beginning in the summer of 2026.

Joustra told synod delegates she's a lifelong member of the Christian Reformed Church whose faith story is "tied with this church in beautiful ways." Michelson comes to the CRC by way of a Presbyterian church in Scotland.

Joustra earned a joint Ph.D. from Fuller Theological Seminary and Vrije Universiteit and her M.Div. from Calvin Theological Seminary. She's currently the program director and an associate professor of religion and theology at Redeemer University and an associate researcher at the Neo-Calvinist Research Institute of the Theologische Universiteit Kampen.

She's not worried about helping students with theological questions. "I don't think we have to be afraid of wrestling, because I have confidence in what we teach," Joustra told synod delegates.

Michelson teaches at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, where he is the Gifford Fellow in Natural Theology and lectures at Westminster Theological Centre in Cheltenham, England. He describes himself as "an ecclesial theologian, not just an academic," and believes every pastor is in a sense a public theologian who will "face questions deeply theological in nature. You have this public platform where, under the guidance of God, you get to proclaim in a way that is powerful and winsome, in a way that makes people pay attention to the gospel of Jesus Christ."

The appointments fill positions being vacated by retiring professors Ronald Feenstra and Mary Vanden Berg.

—Kristen Parker and Gayla R. Postma



# ‘Gather’ Complete; ‘Discern and Draft a Renewal Strategy’ Next

Photo by Banner staff



**Elaine May, project manager for Gather: Renewal does not happen without prayer.**

Thrive’s Gather initiative—10 events that involved all 49 classes of the Christian Reformed Church between April 2024 and April 2025—represented the “first step in responding to Synod 2023’s overture to address decline in the CRC,” project manager Elaine May told Synod 2025.

Gather’s guide for learning together

was the Emmaus Road story found in Luke 24:13-35, the same Scripture used in worship at synod. “With Luke 24 as our guide,” May said, “we acknowledged our expectations and desires to God. We testified to the redemptive work of Jesus through storytelling. We aligned ourselves with God and his mission, and we were sent out empowered in our witness of God’s renewing work.”

Gather participants responded to prompts at round tables, detailing where churches are experiencing disappointments and unmet expectations as well as where they are seeing God revealed. All of the contributions were compiled in a report shared with synod.

May then reviewed some of the denomination’s short-term and long-term strategies as it moves from the “listen and learn” phase to “discern and draft a renewal strategy” phase. She said these include an immediate “call to prayer for the renewal of our congregations, (because) renewal does not happen without prayer,” hosting regional Gather events to continue prioritizing “testifying to God’s activity and then aligning ourselves with what he’s doing,” convening conversations between congregations where there is an overlap of the struggles seen in one congregation and blessings in another, and connecting churches with denominational resources.

—Alissa Vernon

# The Church Is the ‘Hope of the Dying World’

After hearing passionate speeches about the vital role of church planting in drawing people to Christ, Synod 2025 committed to designing a strategy for its funding and support over the next year.

Synod considered at length a request “to prioritize church planting within the denominational budget.” Though unable to make direct budgetary decisions, the assembly affirmed that church planting is a key strategy for building the health and vitality of the denomination and instructed the Office of General Secretary to coordinate Christian Reformed Church agencies and regional groups of churches to develop a strategy and a financial proposal for church planting for the CRCNA and bring it to Synod 2026.

Resonate Global Mission, the agency through which church planting efforts are supported denominationally, announced earlier this year that it had to cut \$4 million from its 2025-26 budget, affecting every part of its ministry, including direct grants to church planters.

Synod delegates were encouraged to connect with Resonate to share ideas and find out how they can be part of church planting efforts already underway.

Church planter Christian Sebastia,

Classis Rocky Mountain, affirmed that the whole church is responsible for the work of starting and supporting new churches. “We understand that it is a process of churches planting churches and not agencies planting churches,” he said.

Classis Southeast U.S. made the prioritization request. Scott VanderPloeg, a delegate from that classis, said the denomination’s declining membership numbers “have fallen below our projection for 2036 already,” and he urged synod to adopt the action steps it later committed to.

Ruben Aguilar, Classis California South, who came to the Christian Reformed Church through a church plant, said, “Coming to the CRC was such a blessing to my entire family.



**Peter Oh, B.C. North-West: Most of our church members are from nonbelieving backgrounds.**

## The Banner's Responsibilities Curtailed

I feel truly blessed to see Latinos and other ethnic groups are being embraced."

Peter Oh, Classis B.C. North-West, a Korean pastor who spoke with the help of an interpreter, shared the impact of the loss of direct grants: "Most of our church members are from nonbelieving backgrounds. I was lost as to how to communicate this (the loss of new funding) to our brand-new believers." Oh said he wanted delegates to know that lack of funding puts outreach to his community at risk and echoed another delegate's hope that synod's affirmation of church planting not be just "empty words."

Despite the current financial realities, VanderPloeg told delegates, "When it comes to church planting, we don't lack anything. We can do it. We have the gospel, and the Christian Reformed Church has a robust articulation of faith that our secular world needs."

"I'm motivated," VanderPloeg added. "I believe that the church is the hope of the dying world."

Receiving synod's instruction, general secretary Zachary King assured the assembly, "It's my intention to support the renewal and rebuilding of our denomination," but he reminded delegates that "this is a team effort."

—Isabelle Brown

Synod 2025 decided that the content of *The Banner* must "speak from a distinctly Reformed perspective in line with our confessions and synodical decisions, representing the CRCNA as its official publication."

In presenting issues pertinent in the life of the church, *The Banner* will no longer show "diverse" positions but only positions held by the denomination.

Permitting people to voice views that others might find unacceptable is also struck from the previous guidelines established by Synod 2015. Instead, any "biblically prophetic and responsible criticism and evaluation of trends within the church and society" (which *The Banner* was already instructed to provide) must now give "proper acknowledgement and respect for the official positions of the CRCNA and (be) within the confines of our confessional covenant commitments."

*The Banner's* editor, Shiao Chong, told delegates the recommendation was not a minor tweaking, but a fundamental shift in the role and purpose of *The Banner*. The historic vision of *The Banner* is a forum of multiple voices for the denomination, he said. The second vision is that of *The Banner* representing the singular voice of the institution.

Tyler Wagenmaker, Classis Zeeland, favored the mandate change. "*The Banner* was the go-to publication of what are the thoughts of the day, but those are bygone days," he said. "Instead of help, it is a hindrance to our ministry."

Jonathan Spronk, Classis Central Plains, said *The Banner* is a net negative as a forum. "We face plenty of cultural headwinds," he said. "I would prefer a magazine (that says,) 'This is what we believe; this is who we are.'"

Other delegates, many of whom are Canadian, opposed the changes.

"Never would I have thought I would see the day when the word 'diverse' (would be) struck from the mandate of *The Banner*," said John Tamming, Classis Huron. "I get that we need guardrails, but don't reduce the magazine to a promotional brochure."



**Ben Wimmers, Classis B.C. South-East:** This decision will be a black mark on this synod.

Ben Wimmers, Classis B.C. South-East, said this decision will be a black mark on this synod. "I love to use *The Banner* for different points of view, a vision of the denomination as one that discusses, engages," he said. "If we move in this direction that restricts and constricts, we're moving into an intellectual cul-de-sac."

John Brinkman, Classis Hamilton, said he prefers not to live in an echo chamber. "Promote trust and unity," he said, "but let's not conflate that with conformity."

Young adult representative Grace Burns commended *The Banner* for its commitment to exploring a range of ideas. "When a confessional and safe institution provides space for engaging with complex topics, it encourages critical thinking," she said. "This, in turn, fosters a sense of safety and openness, particularly among the youth of the denomination."

The vote passed 131-36 with three abstentions; seven delegates registered negative votes.

Synod 2025 gave no timeline for the implementation of the altered mandate. A May 2024 Council of Delegates decision had already decreased ministry share funding of *The Banner*, down to zero by 2027.

—Gayla R. Postma

# Other Actions of Synod 2025

Some items in the *Agenda for Synod 2025* passed with little to no discussion. Here are those things that synod **did** or **didn't** do.

## Synod 2025:

- » received as information the 2025-26 fiscal year budgets for Christian Reformed agencies, institutions, and ministries
- » adopted the Council of Delegates' four-year schedule for reviewing the implementation of the Our Journey ministry plan milestones in each ministry, agency, and institution
- » authorized the Council of Delegates "to review and approve any amendments the Loan Fund board of directors proposes to its Articles of Incorporation, stated purpose, and place in the CRC denominational structure." The Loan Fund is a separate entity operating exclusively in the U.S. and reporting its activities to synod. Part of what might be considered is expanding lending to CRC-related organizations, including Christian schools.
- » approved updates to the Council of Delegates Governance Handbook, including the charter for the Dignity Team, while asking for a review to address the scope of the team's role as a care provider and the roles of local assemblies in pastoral engagement, applying Matthew 18 principles
- » noted the creation of the Council of Delegates Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Advisory Committee
- » affirmed the work of the Council of Delegates to bring its exceptions policy for delegates' confessional agreement into alignment with the instructions of Synod 2024. Not all Council of Delegate members are officebearers, and the changes to the policies intend to make clear that the "robust confessional alignment is desired for those



**Nate Van Denend, pastor of First CRC in Chatham, Ont., the convening church of Synod 2025, preached "Fix Your Eyes on Jesus" at the synodical service of worship.**

- who serve as part of synod's interim committee"
- » ratified the changes proposed by Synod 2024 to Church Order articles 12-17 pertaining to the ordination and release of Ministers of the Word. One significant change is that ministers who are not eligible for retirement nor worthy of discipline (Article 17) can be released for reasons that are "valid" instead of "weighty."
- » approved changes to Articles 82-84 pertaining to the discipline of officebearers. The updates bring the process for reinstatement of disciplined pastors into harmony with the decisions of Synod 2024 regarding readmission of ministers released via Church Order Article 14.
- » approved updates to Church Order Supplement Article 15 to address the financial support and pension considerations identified by the study of bivocationality and discussions about pension matters.
- » expressed gratitude to Amy Vander Vliet and Dexter Young for their years of service to the denomination on the Judicial Code Committee; to Tony



**Elly Boersma Sarkany, worship pastor at Covenant CRC in St. Catharines, Ont., led worship times at Synod 2025.**

- Maan and Herman De Vries, retiring members of the Historical Committee; and to Matthew Ackerman, Jesus Bayona, Debbie Karambowich, Michael Koetje, William Koopmans, Thea Leunk, Greta Luimes, Jessica Maddox, Amy Nydam, Anthony Selvaggio, and Arie Vander Zouwen for their faithful service on the Council of Delegates.
- » permitted the transfer of Grace Community Chapel of Teaneck, N.J., along with its related emerging congregations, from Classis Hackensack to Classis Hudson.
- » recognized the retirements of 49 ministers of the Word and three commissioned pastors
- » received 19 candidates for ministry of the Word (see "Candidates," p. 40)
- » approved the work of the synodical deputies in actions of classes, including 82 ministers of the Word released to enter ministry outside of the CRCNA and 17 ministers of the Word released from ministry altogether
- » recognized the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicea, which led to the Nicene Creed, and encouraged churches and classes to commemorate and teach the ancient creed



Synod 2025 did not:

- » create a separate legal entity to house the Office of General Secretary, a plan originally recommended by Synod 2022. Synod said that since the recommendation was made, leadership and structural changes have been implemented and there is no longer a need for a separate legal entity.
- » approve the Easy-to-Read Version of the Bible (ERV) for general worship, following the evaluation and recommendation of the Bible Translations Committee
- » sustain an appeal from members of the Christian Reformed Church of St. Joseph, Mich. (in executive session)
- » prescribe any particular kind of feast or celebration as requested by Classis Northcentral Iowa for “the repentance and return of those brothers and sisters who came under discipline as defined by the *Acts of Synod 2024*. Instead synod encouraged all “to celebrate whenever the lost are found, when people repent, and when God’s grace brings people home.”

—Synod 2025 reporting team

22

The number of prayer intercessors on campus for Synod 2025

## ‘You’re Part of a Global Sisterhood of Faithful Women’

In a year when there were fewer women delegates to the Christian Reformed Church synod than each of the past five years, the annual women’s dinner on the first night of the weeklong event was used to encourage those present and advance future women leaders.

“We won’t continue to get women coming if we’re not telling them that this is a worthwhile way to use their leadership,” Thrive director Lesli van Milligen told the room of about 25 people, which included staff and some advisers as well as delegates.

Eighteen women from 11 of the denomination’s 49 classes were delegated to Synod 2025. Van Milligen encouraged them to tell stories of their experiences at synod “even if it was challenging, but include how God used that experience to grow you or to influence the church.”

She also asked the handful of women who had been delegated to synod more than once to share wisdom with first-time delegates.

Sharon Jim, a delegate from Classis Red Mesa who was delegated to synod in 2019 and 2022 and was a women’s adviser in 2001, said, “Prepare and be at your table ahead of time, read the resources, and show you’re here for business.” There can be a temptation to want to reconnect with friends if you’ve traveled back to a familiar place for synod, she said, but “you have a purpose, and that takes priority.”

Van Milligen invited World Renew director Carol Bremer-Bennett to offer more words of encouragement to the gathering. Noting that World Renew walks with women from many places—Senegal, Bangladesh, Uganda—who are rising, “stepping in and transforming their worlds,” Bremer-Bennett reminded those listening: “You are not alone. ... You’re part of a global sisterhood of faithful women.”



**Sharon Jim, Classis Red Mesa, has been to synod four times.**

The CRC’s position statement on women in ecclesiastical office “recognizes that there are two different perspectives and convictions on this issue, both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God.” Classes may operate out of their convictions and are not required to accept women in offices of the church.

The Office of General Secretary keeps a list of classes, available on request, that have declared that women officebearers may not be delegated to classis. There are currently three classes in this category; one other that accepts women elders and deacons but not female ministers of the Word delegated to classis; and another that has a policy of deference—those who believe women should be allowed to serve as delegates are urged to exercise deference by delegating women only when necessary, and councils who believe women should not be allowed to serve as delegates are urged to exercise deference by respectfully serving side by side with women if they should be delegated to a particular session of classis.

—Alissa Vernon

# Grand Rapids East Churches Separate, Continue Discerning



Photo by Adam Rodeheaver-Van Gelder

On May 15, churches that made up Classis Grand Rapids East of the Christian Reformed Church in North America met at Eastern Avenue CRC one last time to worship together as 10 churches disaffiliated and more than 50 active and retired pastors were released from or acknowledged as leaving the CRCNA.

The departures were precipitated by decisions of Synod 2024 that required repentance or disaffiliation from any member congregation not teaching or acting in line with previous synodical decisions that affirmed as confessional the teaching that same-sex sexual relationships are unchaste, and therefore sinful.

"No church in Classis Grand Rapids East desired these congregations to disaffiliate; no church in Classis Grand Rapids East desired all these pastors to be released from ministry," said Mike Abma, pastor of Woodlawn CRC, who wants

people to understand that this has been devastating for the entire classis. "We have always put our identity in Christ above all things," he said.

Synod 2024 placed officebearers from congregations publicly disagreeing with the previous decisions of synod on a limited suspension, which prevented them from being delegated to broader assemblies, and it gave churches a year to demonstrate movement toward repentance or disaffiliation. Woodlawn CRC remains part of Grand Rapids East, although Abma said that the congregation is currently discerning whether it's possible to continue in the denomination.

David Bolt is an elder at Eastern Avenue, which had been Christian Reformed for 147 years before disaffiliating. Bolt said the May 15 worship service was both Spirit-filled and somber. "Worshiping together is a wonderful and joyful act that binds us together in the unity of the church universal, even through a time where we are being forced apart."

Len Vander Zee, serving as a part-time interim pastor at Church of the Servant, another disaffiliated congregation, said the May 15 meeting reflected the sadness many have about the division.

**Participants at the May 15 meeting of Classis Grand Rapids East share communion as part of their worship together.**

"I got the feeling that most of the other churches that are staying are sad about it as well," he said. "A lot of them were quite willing to live with the differences." Vander Zee served five Christian Reformed congregations and was then editor-in-chief for Faith Alive Christian Resources until he retired in 2011.

Synod 2023 rejected suggestions to work together with differences on same-sex relationships, choosing not to accede to requests that synod "declare that a classis of the CRCNA, in response to local needs and circumstances, may ... (allow) officebearers from local congregations who disagree with the decision to continue serving and ministering within their local contexts without being subject to discipline." Quoting *Acts of Synod 1976*, Synod 2023 said "synods have the ability to interpret what the confessions teach. Note: 'No one is free to decide for himself or for the church what is and what is not a doctrine confessed in the standards. In the event that such a question should arise, the decision of the assemblies of the church shall be sought and acquiesced in'" (*Acts of Synod 1976*, p. 69).

Andrea Bult, a pastor at Madison Church-Square Campus, described how the impact of the disaffiliations is magnified by the closeness of the classis. "In Classis Grand Rapids East, almost all of our churches are packed into a three-mile radius. This means our lives overlap in countless ways outside of classis meetings. For me, I think that added to the gravity of the moment. It felt like we were losing a limb."

Bult was grateful for the mutual love, honor, and respect shown in the May 15 meeting, saying it "felt like an embrace within the departure." While Madison is currently one of the churches remaining, its discernment process is ongoing. "There is a lot of listening that has to happen—to the Holy Spirit and to one another," Bult said.

Celebration Fellowship, Living Water, Madison, Plymouth Heights, Seymour, Shawnee Park, Victory Fellowship, and Woodlawn CRCs are the current remaining Grand Rapids East congregations. A communication was sent to Synod 2025 about the possibility of reforming Classis Grand Rapids East into a new Grand Rapids City classis with some congregations from neighboring classes. Synod asked the denomination's general secretary, Zachary King, to engage with the needs of Grand Rapids East and other classes and report back to Synod 2026 with any recommendations to "prioritize ministry effectiveness and classical health."

—Callie Feyen

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Marjorie Beth Kooy*

1949-2025

A chaplain colleague of Marj Kooy described her as having a profound presence rich with compassion. "She brought a sense of peace and comfort not only to our patients and families but also to our hospice team." Marj, 75, died April 17 after several years of living with Alzheimer's disease.

As she raised her family, Marj was deeply involved in Coffee Break, a women's Bible study ministry. She went on to complete an undergraduate degree, Clinical Pastoral Education, and a chaplaincy residency. From 1999 to 2015 she served as a certified chaplain four days a week at Advocate Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn, Ill.

During those years Marj obtained a Master of Divinity degree at Chicago Theological Seminary while working part time as a chaplain for Hospice of the Calumet Area. Ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in 2004, Marj also served as a pastoral counselor at the Chicago Christian Counseling Center and preached at various churches. She retired in 2021.

Marj enjoyed gardening and was an avid quilter. One of her quilts was featured in *Better Homes & Gardens*.

Predeceased by daughter Jill in 2018, Marj is survived by Jim, her loving husband of 56 years; four children; and nine grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Gerald (Jerry) E. DeVries*

1939-2025

Jerry DeVries, a gentle and humble man whose experience with childhood polio informed his preaching and pastoring, died May 30 at age 85.

Jerry believed the text preached at his ordination service, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news" (Isa. 52:7), was divine confirmation of his calling—even with differently sized, polio-affected feet, he could reflect Christ's beauty in his work.

Jerry transferred to Calvin College (now University) after two years of studying engineering at the University of Minnesota. He graduated from Calvin Seminary in 1967 and then pastored Terra Ceia (N.C.) CRC; Alto (Wis.) CRC; Faith CRC, Kalamazoo, Mich.; Woden (Iowa) CRC; and Lafayette (Ind.) CRC. After retiring in 2004, Jerry served interim pastorates in Washington, Montana, and North Carolina.

Jerry also served as chaplain at a psychiatric hospital and for volunteer firefighters, co-led marriage preparation retreats, and served two terms on Dordt University's board of trustees. He enjoyed reupholstering secondhand furniture, tending enormous vegetable gardens, and finding creative solutions for household or auto repairs.

Jerry is survived by Eileen, his wife of 61 years; three sons and their spouses; nine grandchildren; and two great-granddaughters.

—Janet A. Greidanus



## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Nola Oppenwall  
Galluch*

1949-2025

Nola Galluch, said one of her brothers, “had this big bravery to do what others wouldn’t even think of trying, a strong perseverance despite many odds and barriers against her along the way, and a big, nonjudgmental love for people.” Nola, 76, died May 10 from pancreatic cancer.

After graduating from Calvin College (now University) in 1971 with a history degree, Nola was awarded a full-ride scholarship toward a doctorate in cultural anthropology from the University of Chicago. Realizing this was not her true calling, Nola was one of the first women to enroll at Calvin Theological Seminary. She attended part-time while also working as a Bible reference book editor, doing mission work, and teaching internationally.

Nola graduated from Calvin seminary in 1979 with a Master of Divinity, then obtained a Master of Social Work at Western Michigan University. She worked as a counselor for Montcalm County, Mich., and the Christian Counseling Center, Grand Rapids, Mich. She was formally ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in 2003.

Nola was an accomplished pianist and devotee of the works of Leonard Bernstein.

She is survived by Vince, her husband of 37 years; a daughter; a step-daughter; and two grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## Classis Watch: Spring 2025

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, a regional assembly. The following are actions taken by classes, guided by articles of Church Order, since February 2025.

### Ministers

Candidates **examined and approved for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** (Arts. 6 and 10): Jeremiah Mitchell, Kevin Moxon, Natasha Specht, Erik Pluemer.

Ministers welcomed **from other denominations** (Art. 8-c): Soonhyuk Kwon.

Ministers **loaned** (Art. 13-c): Rich (Eui Goo) Kim to Hosanna Presbyterian Church (Korea).

**Ministers released from ministry in a congregation** (Art. 17-a): Revs. Anthony Matias from The Good Shepherd CRC in Prospect Park, N.J. (due to church disbanding); Paul Droogers from Iron Springs (Alta.) CRC; Lorie Jonkman (ordained in the Reformed Church in America) from Ivanrest CRC in Grandville, Mich.; Dan Roels from Boston Square CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.; Jake Porter from Immanuel CRC in Hudsonville, Mich.

**Eligible for call:** Allan Kirkpatrick, Anthony Matias, Dan Roels.

### Leaving Ministry in the CRC

*Classes may end a pastor’s ordained ministry status guided by Church Order articles 14 and 17. In the case of Art. 14, designations of release (reflecting the manner and spirit in which the minister acted during the time leading up to and including resignation from office) are “honorably released,” “released,” “dismissed,” or in the “status of one deposed.”*

**Honorably released:** Via Article 14-b: Andrea Baas, Nick Baas, Amanda Benckhuysen, Kristy Bootsma, Joyce Borger, Michael Borgert, Richard Braaksma, Kelly Buist, Cynthia de Jong, Nate DeJong-McCarron, Samantha DeJong-McCarron, Erika Dekker, Joel C. DeMoor, Daniel DeVries, Elisabeth DeVries, Joy Englesman, Julie

DeGraaf Feenstra, Arianna Tolsma Hiskes, Sarah Hoogendoorn, Laurie Hogge, Tony Holmes Curran, James Holwerda, Meg Jenista Kuykendall, William Jensen, Kelsi Jones, Rebecca Jordan Heys, Deb Koster, Steven Koster, LeRae Kuperus, Ruth Lemmen, Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, Jeff Meyer, Lisa Meyer, Marc Nelesen, Karen Norris, Matt Postma, Chris Rea, Robert Rienstra, Dan Roukema, Katrina Schaafsma, Ryan Schreiber, Sarah Schreiber, Ben Snoek, Heather Strooboscher, John Terpstra, Geoff Vandermoden, Ellen Van Tongeren, Sarah VerMerris, Caitlin Visser, Klaas Walhout, Joanna Wigboldy, Timothy Wood, Brad Zwiers, and Dan Zylstra. Via Article 14-c: Nate Al-Attas Bradford, Aminah Al-Attas Bradford, Sarah Roelofs, and John D. Witvliet.

**Ministers retiring and granted emeritus status** (Art. 18): Revs. Ed Top, Chris DeVos, Roger Sparks, Joel De Boer, Anthony Selvaggio, Gideon Wamala, Jay Shim, Edward Visser, Randall Ledeboer, Tony Maan, Gerry Koning, Peter Tuininga (effective Sept. 1), Mike Vandyk (effective Oct. 10), Ron Vanden Brink (effective Nov. 23).

**Resigned as minister emeritus:** John K. Jansen and Nick Overduin.

### Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors called to specific roles within their classes** (Art. 23): Dario Mendez (Northern Illinois); Daniel Navarro (Hackensack); Joe Gruppen (Georgetown); Ron Sato, Tim Cordova Jr., and Tim Park (Greater Los Angeles); and Crisanto Escabalzeta and Mark Urban (Grand Rapids East).

**Ending service as commissioned pastors** (Art. 24-d): John Simon, Melanie Wright, Jim Bushoven, Heather Cowie, and Jacqueline Bonk Mignault were **honorably released**.

**Granted commissioned pastor emeritus status** (Art. 24-e): Angel Casas (California South).

## New Ministries and Ministry Changes

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

Received **organized status**: Las Vegas Vision Church in Las Vegas, Nev.; HyungJe Presbyterian Church of S.C. in Anaheim, Calif.

Recognized as **emerging**: Rhema Community Church in Bakersfield, Calif.; Living Water CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

**Disbanding or closed**: The Good Shepherd (El Buen Pastor) in Prospect Park, N.J.; Fellowship CRC in Greeley, Colo.

**Dissolved**: Hope CRC in Carvel, Alta.

**Disaffiliated**: Bethany CRC in Muskegon, Mich.; Boston Square CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.; Calvin CRC in Grand Rapids; Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids; Community CRC of Meadowvale in Mississauga, Ont.; Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids; Ebenezer CRC in Leota, Minn.; Fellowship CRC in Edmonton, Alta.; First CRC in Grand Rapids; Fuller Ave CRC in Grand Rapids; Grace CRC in Grand Rapids; Immanuel CRC in Caledon, Ont.; Neland Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids; New Hope Church in Bangor, Maine; Oakdale Park Church in Grand Rapids; The Road CRC in Calgary, Alta.; Saugatuck CRC in Holland, Mich.; Sherman Street Church in Grand Rapids; and Washington D.C. CRC.

**Affiliated**: Conklin (Mich.) Reformed Church and La Casa de Mi Padre in Holland, Mich.

## Other Matters

**Classis Ontario Southwest hired chaplain Richard VanManen to serve the campus of Western University** starting Aug. 1.

**Classis Toronto accepted an overture “to reduce (the) 2026 budget by at least the amount of giving that will be lost from the churches that are disaffiliating”** from the CRCNA. It also **formed a committee “to review ministry values and priorities and how to fund our ministries in the long term.”**

—Kristen Parker

# Banner's Editor-in-Chief Resigns

Shiao Chong, editor-in-chief of *The Banner*, the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church, tendered his resignation June 23, with his final day as editor July 11.

“I am resigning, partly, in protest of synod’s decision to change *The Banner*’s mandate,” he said. “I believe it is not good for the denomination’s long-term spiritual health. I am also resigning because I discerned that, with this mandate change, God has released me from my call.”

Chong was appointed to the role by Synod 2016 under a mandate and publishing guidelines that included to “lead and encourage a responsible discussion of the issues important to the life of the church through editorial comment and publication of articles that represent the various views held within the church” and to “permit people of the church to voice their views and reactions even though some of these views may be unacceptable to others in the church.”

Those two responsibilities were struck by Synod 2025. *The Banner* now is tasked with representing “the denomination publicly to the broader Christian church and to the world at large by speaking from a distinctly Reformed perspective in line with our confessions and synodical decisions, representing the CRCNA as its official publication” (p. 34).

Chong said he’s grateful for God’s call to serve through *The Banner*. “Even though it was often challenging, it was a joy to serve God with the posture, gifts, and perspectives he has given me,” he said.

CRCNA general secretary Zachary King said, “We are sorry for this loss and thank Chong for his prophetic wisdom and leadership over these past nine years.”



**Shiao Chong, 12th editor of *The Banner*, speaking to Synod 2025.**

Chong was the 12th editor of *The Banner*, which started in 1866 when Rev. John Y. De Baun began publishing a 16-page monthly for the True Protestant Reformed Dutch Church in New Jersey.

“I do regret leaving at a challenging time for *The Banner* and for staff,” Chong said. “I pray God will raise up an editor gifted to live well into the new mandate and help *The Banner* thrive for the denomination’s sake.”

Shirley De Vries, chief administrative officer for the CRC, is “working with the Office of General Secretary, *Banner* staff, and the *Banner* Advisory Committee to make sure that staff is well supported and the publishing schedule is maintained” while the search for a new editor begins.

Dean Heetderks, art director of *The Banner* who, in his role as co-director of Ministry Support Services, is also involved in many of the management activities of the magazine, said, “A deep respect for thinking CRC and non-CRC readers has always driven our small staff to do their best work. ... I can’t imagine that level of focus and quality to change, even with this revision of the magazine’s mandate.”

—Alissa Vernon

# How I Came to Terms With Death as a Child

I need to become  
like a child again,  
trusting God  
completely



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

**A CHILD AT MY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** in Iowa died in a horrible accident involving farm equipment. His name was Brian.

As I peered into the casket at his funeral, I saw what looked like a swollen, waxy version of Brian's face. I whispered to my mom, "Why did they make a doll that looks like Brian?"

"Oh, that is Brian, honey—at least, that's his body," my mom whispered back as we took our place in the church pew. "Brian's body is there in the casket, but his spirit is in heaven with Jesus."

When we got home from Brian's funeral, I tiptoed to my room and closed the door. The fragility of life pressed all around me. After some serious reflection, I had a vulnerable chat with God. I said, "If you need to take me to heaven when I'm still a kid, too, that's OK, because I trust you, Jesus."

As it turned out, Brian wasn't the only child I knew from school who would die. There was a sweet eighth-grade girl named Missy who liked pushing us little kids on the swings; she died in an accident almost exactly two years after Brian died. Then, when I was in fifth grade, a preschooler at my school died of brain cancer.

As a child, I accepted the reality of death and God's sovereignty in the timing of people's deaths. I recognized that heaven was a wonderful place to be, too, because that's where we can be with God face to face. As a little girl, I had an implicit trust in Jesus that today I have to work harder to achieve. I have responsibilities and worries as an adult and have a harder time giving those over to God. I need to become like a child again, trusting God completely with my life and the lives of those around me.

Last summer, my husband's grandfather died. We attended a beautiful service. It was my 7-year-old son's first time at a funeral with an open casket. Holding his hand, I whispered to him, "Do you see that box over there?" He nodded. "Great-grandpa's body is in that box, but his spirit isn't there any more. It's in heaven with Jesus." My son's eyes grew round as he processed the information. He took a peek in the casket before running to hug his grandparents.

After the ceremony and burial, we got in our car to head home. From the back seat, my son said, "I loved Great-grandpa, and I'm sad he's gone." He paused, then added, "It's sad for us, but happy for Great-grandpa—right, Mom?"

I smiled, tears coming to my eyes at my young son's insight and understanding.

"Yes, honey," I replied. "That's exactly right." **B**



# A Pastor's Identity

Maintaining  
a healthy,  
differentiated  
pastoral identity  
requires a  
persistent focus  
on the Bible's  
descriptions of  
this role.



Susan LaClear lives in Hudsonville, Mich., and currently serves as the director of Candidacy for the Christian Reformed Church. Monroe Community Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., is her calling church.

**CANDIDATES FOR MINISTRY** know they will soon wade through a variety of expectations from their churches and communities. People might expect them to be a Bible expert, counselor, mediator of quarrels, visionary leader, community organizer, and church growth expert in addition to a range of other roles they might or might not feel gifted to fill. They will very likely be compared to previous pastors and feel pressure to either be more like their predecessors or to be nothing like him or her. So maintaining a healthy, differentiated pastoral identity requires a persistent focus on the Bible's descriptions of this role.

I want to highlight a few biblical images of pastors that I have come to appreciate:

**Pastor as gift:** Ephesians 4:11 tells us that pastors are gifts to the church from Christ himself. But Paul also makes it clear that pastors aren't the only gift to the church. Alongside apostles, evangelists, and teachers, they equip the body of gifted believers for acts of service. All members of the body are deeply connected to each other through the Spirit, and each offers gifts that are indispensable to the shared work of building the body of Christ into maturity. To become a pastor who does everything would throw the body all out of whack. Healthy ministry comes from faithfully leaning into the particular graces you've been given while enjoying and empowering the gifts of the rest of the body. Pastors often need to remind themselves when experiencing the pressures of leadership that Christ is the head of the church and that their job is simply to respond to Spirit-sent signals.

**Pastor as witness:** After Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, John described himself and the other apostles as witnesses who testified about

the Word of Life who had appeared to them and whom they had seen and touched for themselves (1 John 1:1-2). But those who had physical encounters with Jesus were not the only ones to be called apostles. The outpouring of the Spirit has made all believers "witnesses ... to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), and the pastor's responsibilities of preaching and pastoral care provide unique opportunities to live out that call to be a witness. Effective witnesses give primary attention to their own journey of knowing and experiencing Christ. Pastors who regularly embrace the truth of the gospel for themselves can proclaim it effectively—not as abstract theological truth, but through real testimonies of what they've seen and heard Christ do in their own lives and in the lives of other first-hand witnesses. This kind of joyful, courageous, vulnerable proclamation inspires people to follow!

**Pastor as shepherd:** Maybe it goes without saying that a pastor is a shepherd—it's the literal meaning of "pastor." But sometimes pastors' expansive job descriptions can leave them scrambling to accomplish their shepherding tasks of guiding, feeding, and protecting. And even more important than those specific tasks is the heart condition that each shepherd needs to attend to and cultivate. Whether administering the sacraments or cleaning up the mess left after a potluck, the motivation of deep love for God's people develops through daily communion with the Good Shepherd, who also gives the strength, courage, and wisdom needed for every task God lays before them.

Through the many high and fluctuating expectations that our pastors might face, I pray first and foremost that their identity will stay rooted in Christ. **B**



Peter Urie Bae



Joseph E. Bartels



Tha L. Bawi



Kyle P. Beckrich



Rylan W. Brue



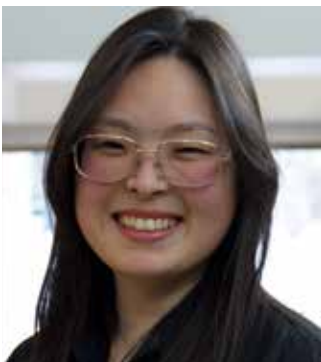
Josiah D. Chapman



Raymond D. Evans



Masao Fujishima



Julia Gho



Kanghyeon Heo



Dylan Kern



Kyo Chan Koo



Peter N. Kranenburg



Israel Ledee



Kevin W. Lobert



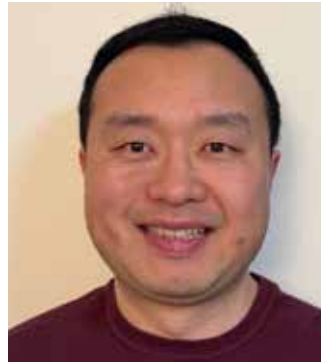
Caley J. Meza



Rachel Park



Christopher F. Smid



Matthew Sun





# A Life of Worship

By Elly Boersma Sarkany

I grew up surrounded by mountains in the Pacific Northwest—“God’s country,” as I was told when I came to Ontario for my first church position. I think I often took the landscape for granted while I was living in Vancouver. The sights and smells around that city were always my default idea of what the world looked like. Moving to an area with no mountains made it feel as if something was missing on the horizon. I return to

those mountains regularly and always enjoy encountering them with awe through the eyes of my husband, who has spent most of his life in Ontario. His amazement at the beauty of the surroundings, even the view from my parent’s back porch overlooking the Fraser River, opens my eyes anew to the wonder and beauty I was so privileged to grow up around.

One might be wondering what on earth this has to do with worship. As

a student of biology and a lover of nature, I find something about the mountains brings me *coram deo*—that sense of being pulled into the very presence of God, of gazing at the beauty before me, at the intricate details and grand landscapes that only a Creator could bring about, and being able to respond only by taking a deep breath and saying, “Wow!” For me, a mountain vista is what elicits this response. For others it might be cherry blossoms in full bloom, a soaring line

of choral music, or a newborn child or grandchild. Wow. Our Creator is amazing.

I remember remarking to someone after a busy season of worship planning that this concept of “all of life is worship” simply means I never get enough rest. All of my life I had felt overwhelmed by the busyness and organization of worship. “All of life is worship” is a pretty daunting call for a pastor of worship. My job description includes a responsibility for “worship in the life of the church,” and my church is a hub of activity every night of the week. Busy parents rush to drop off a child at a youth program and dash to the grocery store to run errands they didn’t have time for earlier in the day. The frantic pace of modern life makes it hard to imagine that all of it—the grocery store lineups, the traffic jams, the Little League games, the board meetings—is an act of worship. How do we orient our hearts to actually see things that way? How do we reframe our perspectives to be keenly aware of God’s presence in the mundanity of everyday life?

### **Continuously Worshipping**

In his book *Unceasing Worship*, Harold Best argues that we were not created to worship or for worship, but to be continuously worshipping. If this is true, then the question is: Where are we orienting our worship?

“At this very moment, and for as long as this world endures, everybody inhabiting it is bowing down and serving something or someone—an artifact, a person, an institution, an idea, a spirit, or God through Christ,” Best writes (p. 17). Regardless of our religious beliefs and convictions, humans are worshipers. But God doesn’t need our worship, Best says. God isn’t somehow diminished when we don’t worship. And if we were created for worship,

God gathers us to  
orient our hearts  
and our lives  
toward the One  
who is worthy of  
all our worship.

that would imply that worship is just a part of who we are. Instead, worshipping God reorients the direction of our worship. God gathers us to orient our hearts and our lives toward the One who is worthy of all our worship.

If all of life is worship, then what is the purpose of corporate worship? Corporate worship is a continuation of a life of worship. If we’re being honest, our daily life of worship is not always a life oriented toward the worship of God. As humans, we spend much of our time focusing on ourselves. Our weeks are overrun with meetings, activities, and doomscrolling through social media. Yet in corporate worship, God invites us to come together as the whole body of believers, spur one another on in faith, reorient our hearts and minds toward God, and realign our hearts with God’s will. Corporate worship reorients our hearts and our eyes, reawakens us to the presence of God, and reminds us that God is God and we are not.

Corporate worship makes me think of the ebb and flow of the sea. Worship, like the moon’s gravitational pull causing the oceans’ tides, draws us in and sends us out. Marva Dawn, referencing the Westminster Catechism, says in her book *A Royal “Waste” of Time* that worship should have no other

end than to glorify God. She pushes back against the attractional model of worship, which has been all too present in evangelical worship services, and says the only way worship attracts unbelievers is because they are drawn into God as we worship together. In his book *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence*, John Jefferson Davis explains, “The Christian realizes that worship is not just incidental and preparatory to some other activity (such as mission or evangelism), but rather, worship is intrinsic and central to the purpose for which God created the universe and humanity: that we might ‘glorify God and enjoy him forever’ (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 1). Worship in the Spirit and in truth is the highest act of a human being, the act in which we are most truly human, and the highest act of the church. At its best, Sunday morning can be the high point and culmination of the believer’s week.”

The time worshipers spend together in corporate worship helps form their spiritual lives. Jean-Jacques von Allmen, who was a professor of practical theology at the University of Neuchâtel, compared the purpose of corporate worship to a whale coming up for air. I love the feeling this metaphor invokes. I enjoy swimming at my local pool, and sometimes, in an effort to expand my lung capacity, I will see how far I can go without coming up for a breath. That moment right before surfacing is an almost panicked longing to fill my lungs with a life-giving, soul-reviving breath of air. Breathing is a vital biological function, but it also can be calming or energizing. When I break the surface of the water, a burst of air fills my lungs with oxygen and feeds the continuous process of circulation. Oxygenated blood feeds the muscles and organs for as long as possible until I come up for air once

more. The breath of air doesn't benefit me only in that moment, but continues to serve a purpose as I return under water. Each breath sustains my swimming a little longer.

Worship gathers us. It reorients our hearts, distracted and tugged by competing loyalties, and turns us back toward our Creator. Corporate worship takes us on a journey through the gospel narrative as we praise the God who created us, redeems our lives from the pit, forgives us, and sends us out into the world.

### **Laying Down Our Burdens**

Those who are gathered must also be scattered. As beings in continuous worship, our corporate worship reorients us toward God as it sends us out into the world. So how are we being formed as worshipers to prepare us to go out into our daily lives? Research is currently being done on this very topic. The Worship for Workers project through Fuller Theological Seminary is creating and curating resources to help worshipers better connect corporate worship with their daily lives. Together with The Porter's Gate, a group of writers and musicians from various denominational and ethnic backgrounds across the U.S., Worship for Workers is writing and producing songs, prayers, and other liturgical offerings to speak to this often-neglected aspect of worship. Their songs address justice, climate action, mental health, lament, and other daily challenges. Many of these songs speak to our everyday lives as all-of-life worshipers, and soon Worship for Workers will release an album of sending songs—songs that charge and bless worshipers to go into the world and help work for the kingdom of God in their workplaces, homes, and neighborhoods.

A song from The Porter's Gate called "Bring It to the Altar" invites worshipers to bring the joys and sorrows of their week into worship: "Bring it to the altar, don't leave it at the door. Whatever you carry, come and give it to the Lord." How often are we invited into worship with a call to lay down our burdens at the door, or to come to worship only with joy? Every time we come to worship, we come with the joys and the pains of our week, and God receives it all in our worship. Many of us at some point have been told to show up for worship in our "Sunday best," to "turn that frown upside down," and to enter into worship as a form of escape from our everyday lives. But our lives' continuous worship is blessed when we invite those same lives into corporate worship.

When we recognize that everything we do is an act of worship of someone or something, we can start paying attention to where we notice Jesus in our everyday lives. We don't need to segregate worship from the "real world," especially not when all of life is lived in the presence of a holy God. Instead, we can bring our daily lives into corporate worship and carry the things we experience there into our daily lives. What practices can we incorporate into our corporate worship as the body of believers that we then can take with us into our daily worship?

At the Calvin Symposium on Worship in February, attendees were introduced to music from the forthcoming The Porter's Gate album *Sending Songs*. One of the songs invites worshipers to put the events of the week at the front of mind as they worship. It asks: What will you be doing at this time tomorrow? One suggestion was to have worshipers pause at the end of a service and consider what 10:45

a.m. Monday morning might look like. Will you be in a meeting or a doctor's appointment? Will you be working on a school project or giving a presentation? Will you be volunteering somewhere? Invite worshipers to pull out their phones and set an alarm for that time, and, when that alarm goes off, to pause, to pray, and to recognize God's presence on a regular Monday morning.

Where will you be at this time tomorrow? As you live in continuous worship, where will you orient your praise? May your life of worship open your eyes in awe and wonder as you go about even the most mundane tasks of life. Whatever you carry, whether joy or sorrow, come and give it to the Lord. **B**



Elly Boersma Sarkany is a commissioned pastor in the Christian Reformed Church and has been serving as the pastor of worship at Covenant Church in St. Catharines, Ont., for the past 11 years.

1. What do you immediately think of when you think of "worship"? Why?
2. What in your life gives you that "sense of being pulled into the very presence of God"?

**READ MORE** **ONLINE**



# The Secret Life of Birds

**CHIRP, CHIRP. PEEP, PEEP.** *Tweet, tweet.* These are bird calls, right? Not exactly! Those words might sound like some bird calls, but birds are far more creative with the sounds they make than we might think.

Some birds make sounds like *tsk-tsk*, *chut-chut*, and *wooooo-eeee*! Birds' voices are as specialized as people's voices, and birds have as much diversity in their languages as humans do—and they can even have regional accents!

Are birds talking to each other when they sing, chirp, trill, or hoot? Yes! Birds use different notes for different reasons: as a warning, to attract a mate, or to scare off other birds. Birds also call to alert and unite one another in dangerous situations. They also know how to interpret the voices of other bird species.

We all know most birds build nests, but they don't live in them. Birds build nests to lay their eggs. The nests keep the eggs safe from predators, and birds sleep in the nests to keep their eggs and their newly hatched chicks warm. To stay hidden from predators, nesting birds most often do not make any sounds. Once the baby birds are old enough to leave the nest, the parent birds leave too.


Where do birds usually sleep, then? Songbirds are perfectly happy to perch on a tree branch to sleep. Crows tend to roost in large groups in trees near water; there could be hundreds of crows roosting in one tree! Even large birds like wild turkeys will fly up to tree branches to sleep and will fly down again at daybreak.

Did you know that God loves birds? God created them as a part of the wonderful ecosystems and webs of life on our earth, and God is well pleased! Genesis 1:20 states, "And God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.'"

Birds are found in natural habitats all around our beautiful world and in our skies. The next time you hear the voice of a bird, try to mimic its voice in a response. Maybe the bird will answer!

## A Deeper Dig:

[kids.nationalgeographic.com](http://kids.nationalgeographic.com)

YouTube: *Have You Heard the Nesting Bird?* By Rita Gray; illustrated by Kenard Pak. Read by Luiko. 

tsk-tsk

chut-chut

wooooo-eeee



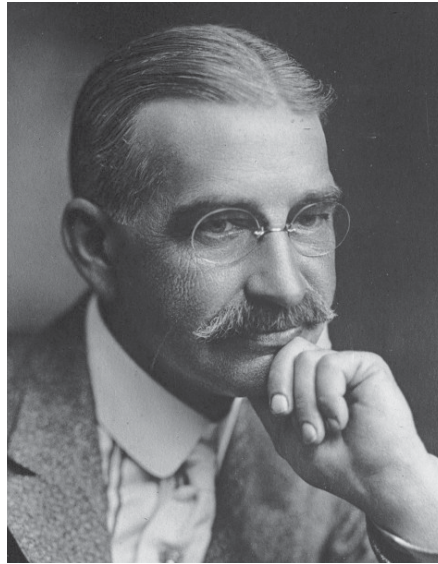
Amy Kinney is originally from Michigan but now lives in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. When she is not teaching, she often can be found singing or exploring God's creation.

# Oz-ily Ever After: Writing L. Frank Baum Into 'Magical' Fiction

**JANIE, ONE OF TWO** main characters in *A Hundred Magical Reasons*, is a little girl living in the early 1900s with rigid, unimaginative parents and a secret friendship with a family who brings wonder and care into her love-starved soul.

Carrie comes from a restrictive family too, and she graduates from Calvin College in 1980 with a secret dream to open a literary cafe infused with bookish whimsy.

When Janie, now elderly and going by a different name, seems to pluck Carrie at random from the sidewalk to be her personal assistant, their lives become intertwined. As the summer progresses, the older woman slowly



**L. Frank Baum in 1915 (left) and Laura DeNooyer (right).**



reveals her long-ago friendship with L. Frank Baum, formed when he, his wife, Maud, and their sons vacationed each year at a summer home on Lake Macatawa in Holland, Mich.

Like Janie and Carrie, author Laura DeNooyer has deep ties to the Christian Reformed Church and to the Lake Macatawa area. The author grew up attending Battle Creek (Mich.) CRC, graduated from Calvin College (now Calvin University), and spent her summers vacationing at a family cottage on Lake Macatawa. Her interest in Baum began early: "I loved the movie *The Wizard of Oz*," DeNooyer said in an interview. "I didn't understand how television worked. I thought it was a reenactment of some kind. *One day Judy (Garland) will be too old to play Dorothy,*

*and I will take her place, I thought.*" A few years ago, her interest in Baum was rekindled when her family sent her on a treasure hunt. "The last stop was a used bookstore," she said. "There I found a bio of L. Frank Baum, and I was smitten."

Anyone who reads DeNooyer's book will be equally taken with the delightful Baum, who is depicted as a loving family man with a huge heart and an even larger imagination. Whether he was a Christian is debated, but Baum shows love, grace, and kindness to Janie, even when her Christian parents are joyless and harsh.

One of the book's themes is grace versus legalism, and its Christian Reformed characters illustrate both sides of the spectrum.

"I know a lot of Christian families who use criticism as their main parenting tool," DeNooyer said. But for Baum, one of the most Christ-like figures in the book, the author drew from the well of God's mercy toward all creation. "I like the theme of common grace," she explains. "God blesses us in many places and in many ways."



For *A Hundred Magical Reasons*, her second book, DeNooyer immersed herself in all things Baum, visiting some of his homesites and the tiny Oz museum in Kansas. She returned to her family's cottage on Lake Macatawa trying to see it through Baum's eyes.

Baum bought his lake house, called *The Sign of the Goose*, with proceeds from his book *Father Goose: His Book*. Baum spent at least 10 summers there racing boats, swimming with his boys, and writing some of his Oz books. "Baum considered Macatawa a fairyland, a paradise, and a summer haven—the perfect place for 'a dose of ozone,'" DeNooyer said, quoting Baum. The home burned down in the Macatawa fires of 1927.

DeNooyer researched her book meticulously, consulting several Baum/Oz scholars and even Baum's great-granddaughter, Gita Dorothy Morena, who "loved how Baum was portrayed in a factually correct way."


The book has already received multiple awards, including the Hawthorne Prize for Fiction, first place in The BookFest for literary historical fiction, and a bronze Illumination Book Award for general fiction.

DeNooyer hopes readers will dive with her into the Lake Macatawa of the past and especially into the ideas of self-discovery, openheartedness, and God's boundless grace.

She invites fans of *The Wizard of Oz* to walk in the sandy footsteps of a loving, though flawed, man whose imagination continues to capture ours through the original Oz books and retellings or

spinoffs of his stories. "(Baum) might appreciate and applaud the ingenuity of *Wicked* (the smash hit musical and movie about the Wicked Witch of the West's backstory with Glinda the Good Witch) and be flattered that artists, writers, and filmmakers are still using his source material," DeNooyer said, "but he might bristle at the deviations from his own Oz series and backstories of characters."

DeNooyer's own novel began with her own spark of imagination: "I had this picture of a young woman walking down the street, and then an old lady asks her to water her flowers."

Readers can learn more about Baum, Oz, and DeNooyer's work at [LauraDeNooyer-author.com](http://LauraDeNooyer-author.com), where they can find book club questions, a playlist of 1970s soft rock Carrie's coffee shop singer friend might perform, and Oz-related recipes to accompany her book. 



Lorilee Craker, a native of Winnipeg, Man., lives in Grand Rapids, Mich. The author of 16 books, she is the Mixed Media editor of *The Banner*. Her latest book is called *Eat Like a Heroine: Nourish and Flourish With Bookish Stars From Anne of Green Gables to Zora Neale Hurston*.

### The Lowdown

**Dim Sum and Faith:** Imagine gathering around a dim sum table, a lively setting where stories and heartfelt moments are shared over flavorful bites. Drawing from her own rich tapestry of experiences, Jenn Suen Chen helps readers explore how our personal narratives shape our spiritual journeys. (IVP)

**Jurassic World Rebirth:** Five years after *Jurassic World Dominion*, Earth's ecology has proven largely inhospitable to dinosaurs. Those remaining exist in isolated equatorial environments with climates resembling the one in which they once thrived. Within those tropical biospheres, the three most colossal creatures across land, sea, and air hold in their DNA the key to a drug that could bring life-saving benefits to humankind. (Rated PG-13. In theaters July 2.)

**Book of Joshua: Walls of Jericho:** In this animated feature film, after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites stand at the threshold of the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership. (Fandango at Home)

**A Book Spinoff of The Chosen TV Series:** *The Chosen: Not My Will*, by Jerry Jenkins, takes readers on a speculative journey deeper into the hearts and minds of the show's many intriguing characters, such as Mary Magdalene, Pontius Pilate and his wife Claudia, and Judas. (July 1, Broadstreet)



## The View From Here

# Fostering Hearts of Hospitality

**HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED** transformational hospitality? Early in our ministry, my wife and I served as seminary instructors in Donga, Nigeria. I was invited to preach at one of my student's congregations in a very rural area. As usual, we were seated in the front of the church and given bottles of water, Coke, and Maltina (a non-alcoholic beer that's an acquired taste). In full view of the gathered congregation, we worshiped, preached, and sweated through our Sunday best, gratefully fortified by plenty of liquids.

But we weren't ready for what came next. After the service and greetings, we were led to the home of a deacon and seated by ourselves at a table abundantly provisioned with rice, pounded yams, sauce, chicken, goat, and a lot of foods we didn't recognize. Everyone—men, women, children—looked at us, beaming ear to ear. We prayed, filled our plates, and felt distinctly uncomfortable. Why wasn't everyone else eating? After some sheepish questions we learned that this family, including some very hungry-looking children, wanted nothing more than to watch us enjoy their best cuisine. They would eat only if any food was left over.

That day my understanding of hospitality was transformed by a family that put feeding strangers over feeding themselves. The author of Hebrews writes, "Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:1-2). This likely refers to the three strangers who visited Abraham and Sarah and brought news of Sarah's coming pregnancy in her old age (Gen. 18:1-15). Abraham displayed the same hospitality as my Nigerian hosts when he insisted that the three visitors stay with him to eat, drink, and rest (18:3).

## Transformative hospitality is the light shining from God's toothy smile.


It's fair to say that hospitality plays a somewhat diminished role in our personal and congregational lives presently. Stickers on our front doors shoo solicitors away, and our yards bristle with "No Trespassing" signs. There is little time for serendipitous encounters in lives filled with sports, meetings, and work. Even on Sundays we often move quickly from one event to the next, leaving little time for the kind of hospitality lauded in Hebrews 13 (or Rom. 12:13, or 1 Pet. 4:9). In our annual denominational survey, only 64% of respondents said it is definitely or mostly true that they know their neighbors, and only 27% said they knew the people in their churches' neighborhoods. Clearly there is room to grow.

God's hospitality is so transformative that Jesus Christ, God's own Son, gave his life so that we might become members of God's own family. 1 Peter 2 tells us that we "are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation," that once we "were not a people, but now ... are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:9-10). Once we were "foreigners and strangers," but Christ has made us "fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household" (Eph. 2:19). Hospitality is central to God's heart, and we are the transformed beneficiaries of God's beaming smile.

As I write these words in May 2025, I am aware that in a few weeks leaders from all parts of the Christian Reformed Church will be gathering at

Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ont., for synod. In the past few years, hospitality has been difficult for the CRC, especially as it relates to our discussion of human sexuality. Perhaps there are some who believe that hospitality requires acquiescing to sexual relationships that didn't fit a historically biblical understanding of sexuality. Perhaps there are some who assume, unconsciously or consciously, that any kind of behavior toward those they disagree with is justified as long as it produces fidelity to what they believe is correct doctrine.

Transformative hospitality is different. Being hospitable doesn't mean that we must agree with the people we encounter at work and in our neighborhoods. If that were so, none of us could have become God's people. It also doesn't mean that righteous ends are achieved through means that are incongruent with grace-filled Christian love. If that were so, none of us would *want* to be God's people.

Transformative hospitality is something very different indeed. Transformative hospitality is the light shining from God's toothy smile, warming us at God's table of abundance, inviting us to enjoy grace we cannot earn at a cost we cannot imagine. 



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.

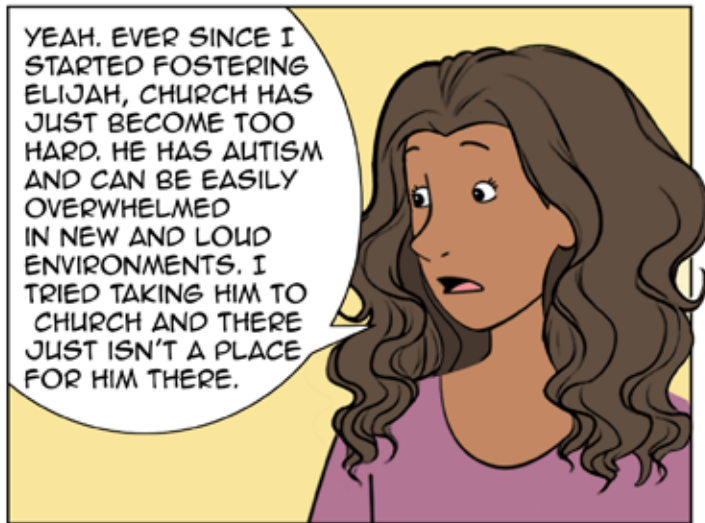
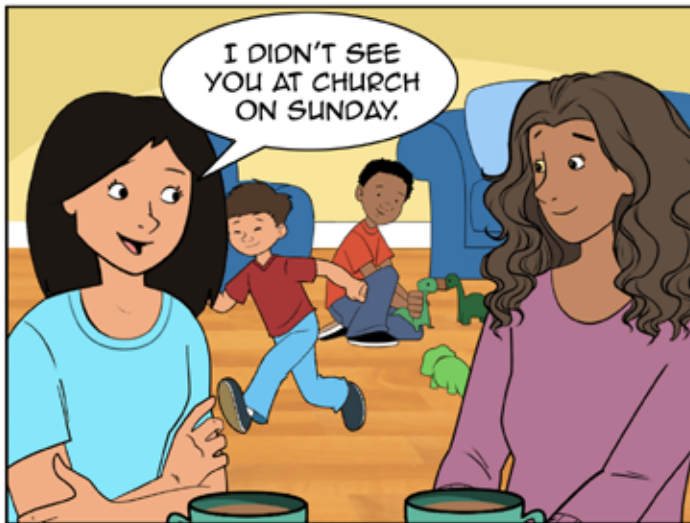
Spanish and Korean translations of this editorial are

available at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

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# A Church For Elijah









# Gratitude in the Body of Christ

THE CITY OF KAYA, BURKINA FASO HAS BECOME HOME TO THOUSANDS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE.

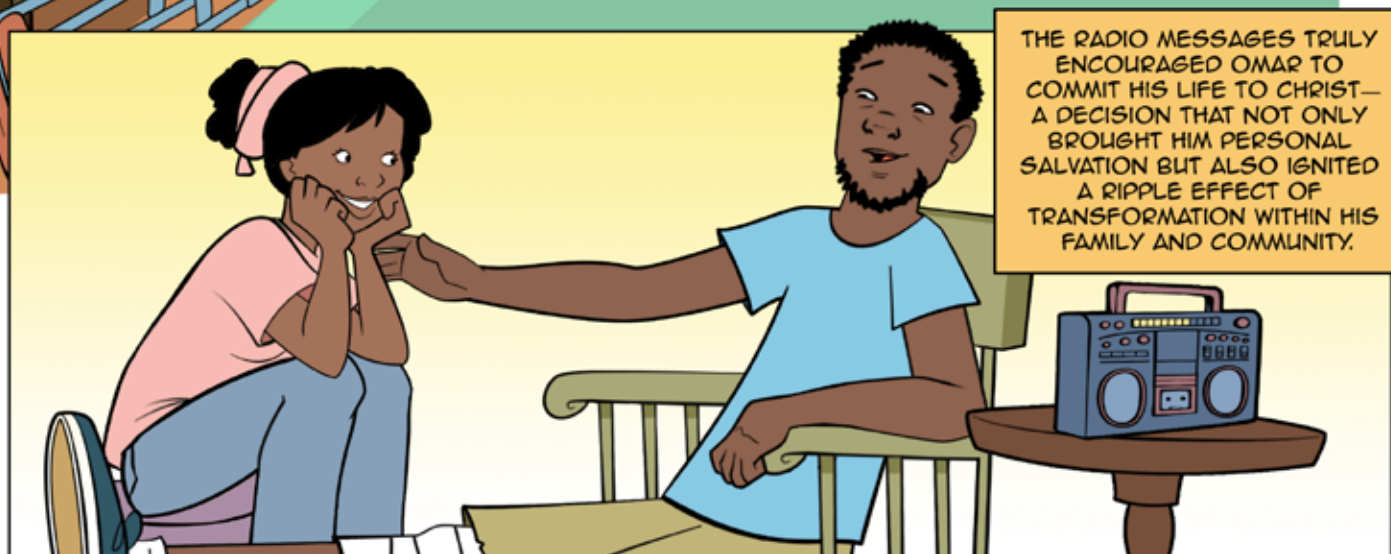
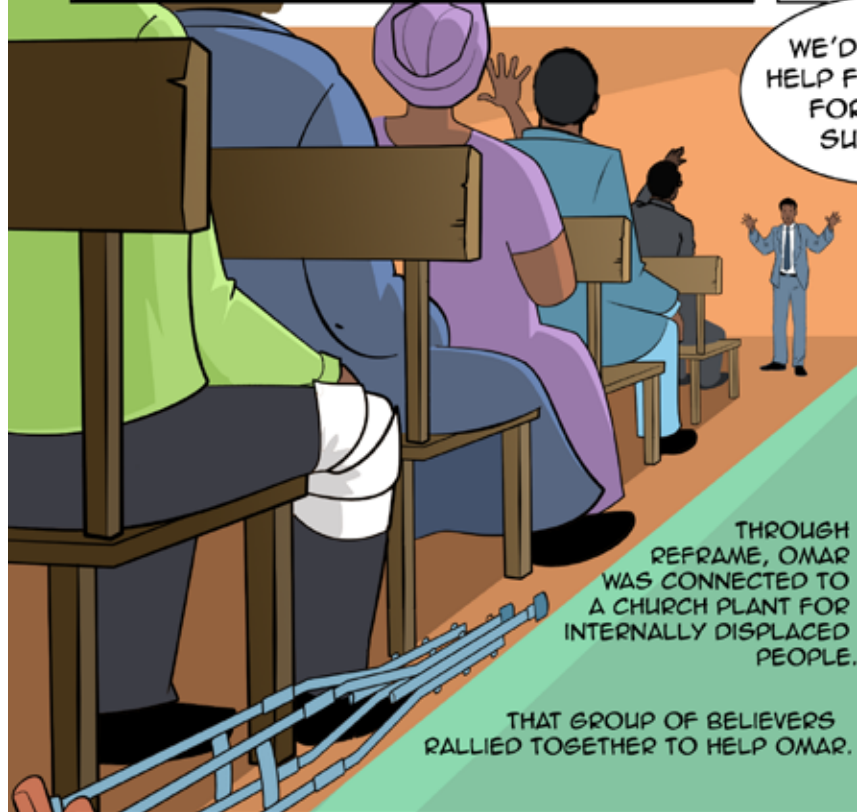
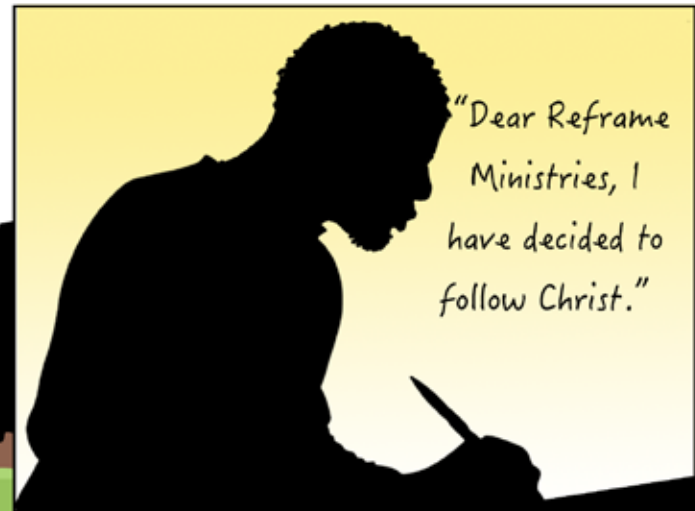
I HURT MY LEG.

DUE TO OVERCROWDING, RESOURCES ARE STRETCHED AND MANY SERVICES ARE INACCESSIBLE TO THOSE WHO NEED THEM.

I'M SORRY, OMAR, WE SIMPLY DON'T HAVE THE CAPACITY TO HELP YOU RIGHT NOW. WE'LL PUT YOU ON THE LIST, BUT IT MIGHT TAKE A YEAR BEFORE WE CAN GET A SURGEON FOR YOU.

AND NOW FOR A LIFE-CHANGING MESSAGE OF HOPE BROUGHT TO YOU BY REFRAIME MINISTRIES...

YET THROUGHOUT THAT PERIOD OF FACING DESPAIR, OMAR WAS ABLE TO FIND SOLACE THROUGH HIS RADIO.

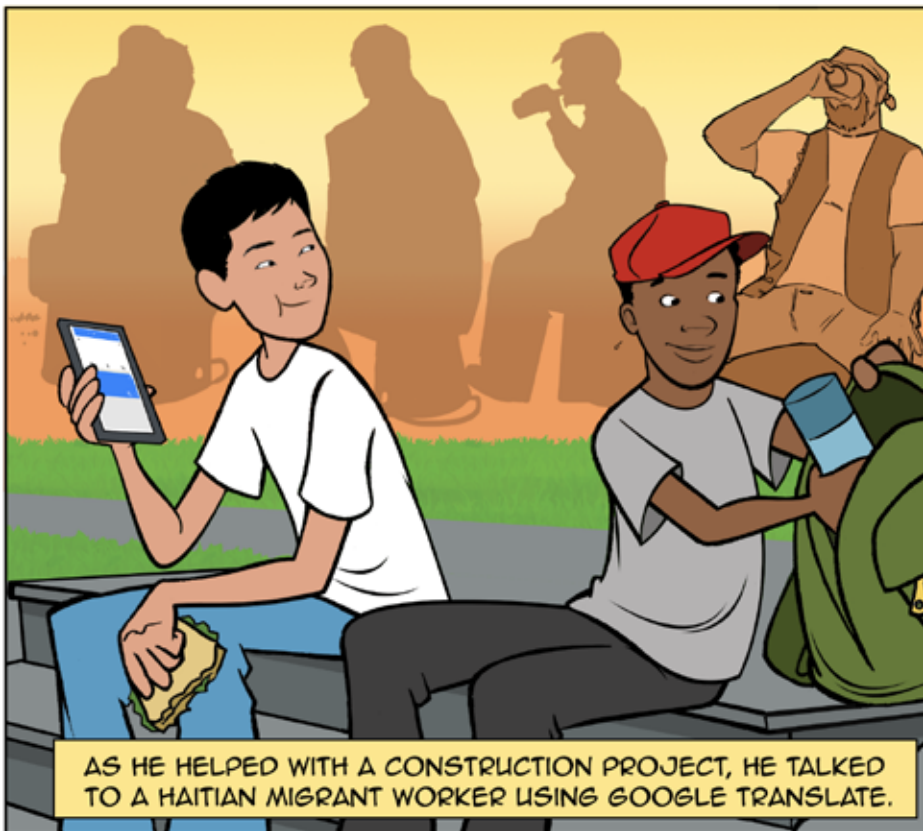
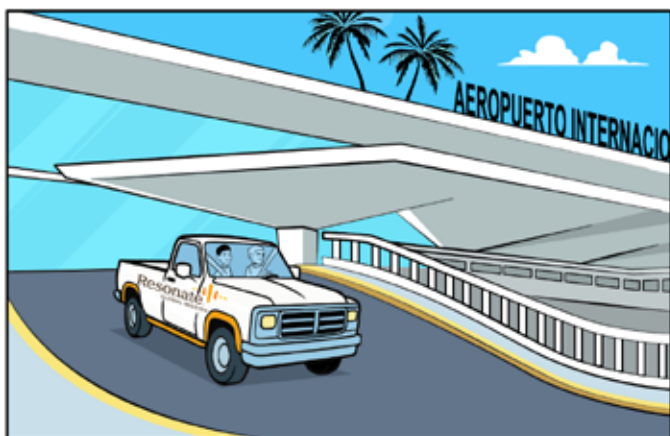




## Learning to Listen

AS A SEMINARY STUDENT WORKING TO BE A MISSIONARY SOMEDAY, I'M EXCITED TO GET HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE IN A REGION OF THE WORLD I'VE NEVER VISITED. I'M ESPECIALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO WORKING ALONGSIDE HAITIAN IMMIGRANTS LIVING IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC.

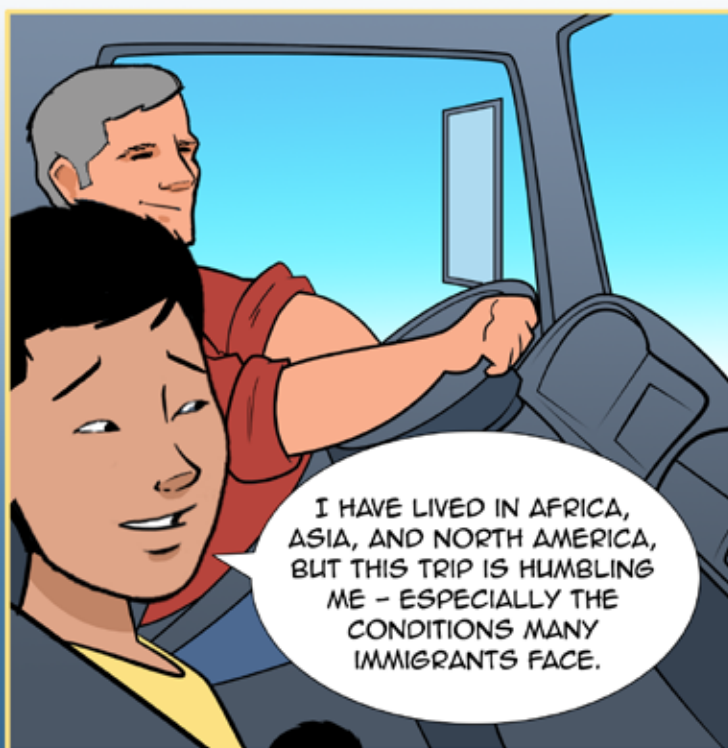
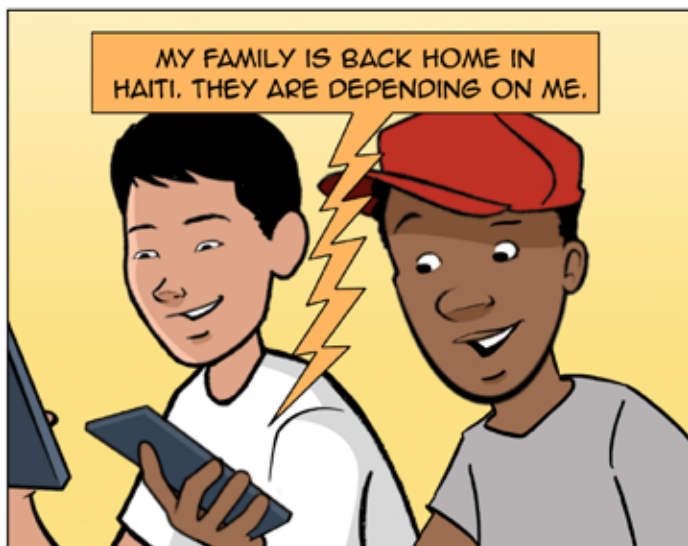
JIN SOO PARK IS AN MDIV STUDENT WHO DECIDED TO SPEND THREE WEEKS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC WITH RESONATE GLOBAL MISSIONS PREPARATION FOR BECOMING A MISSIONARY.



AS HE HELPED WITH A CONSTRUCTION PROJECT, HE TALKED TO A HAITIAN MIGRANT WORKER USING GOOGLE TRANSLATE.







**Isaiah 1:17**  
**Learn to do right; seek justice.**  
**Defend the oppressed.**  
**Take up the cause of the fatherless;**  
**plead the case of the widow.**

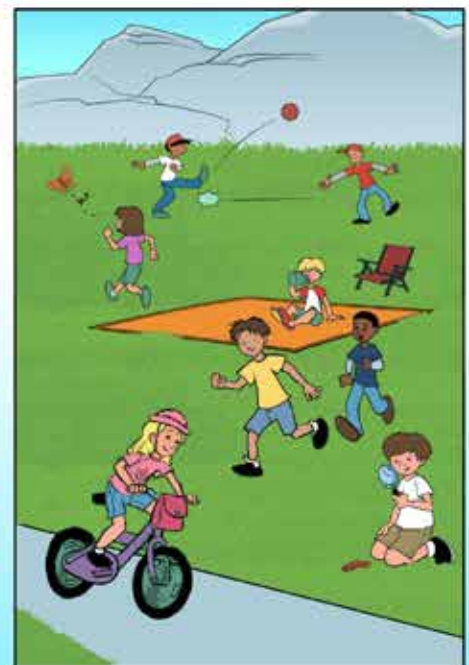
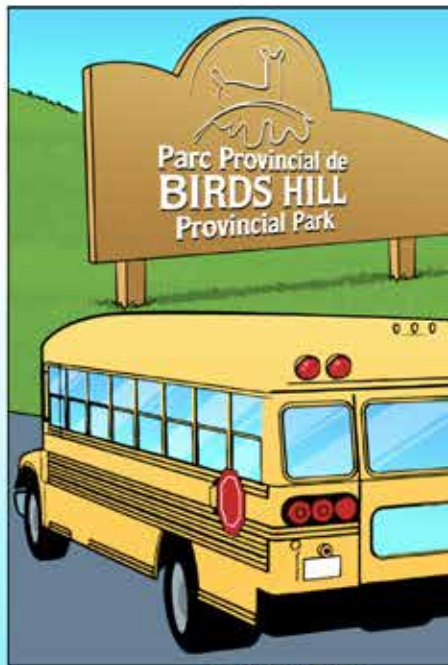
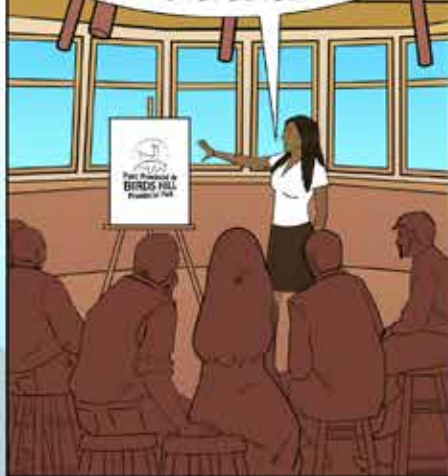
WHEN JIN SOO RETURNED TO MICHIGAN, HE SHARED THE LESSONS HE LEARNED WITH SEMINARY STUDENTS.

# Supporting Indigenous Parents



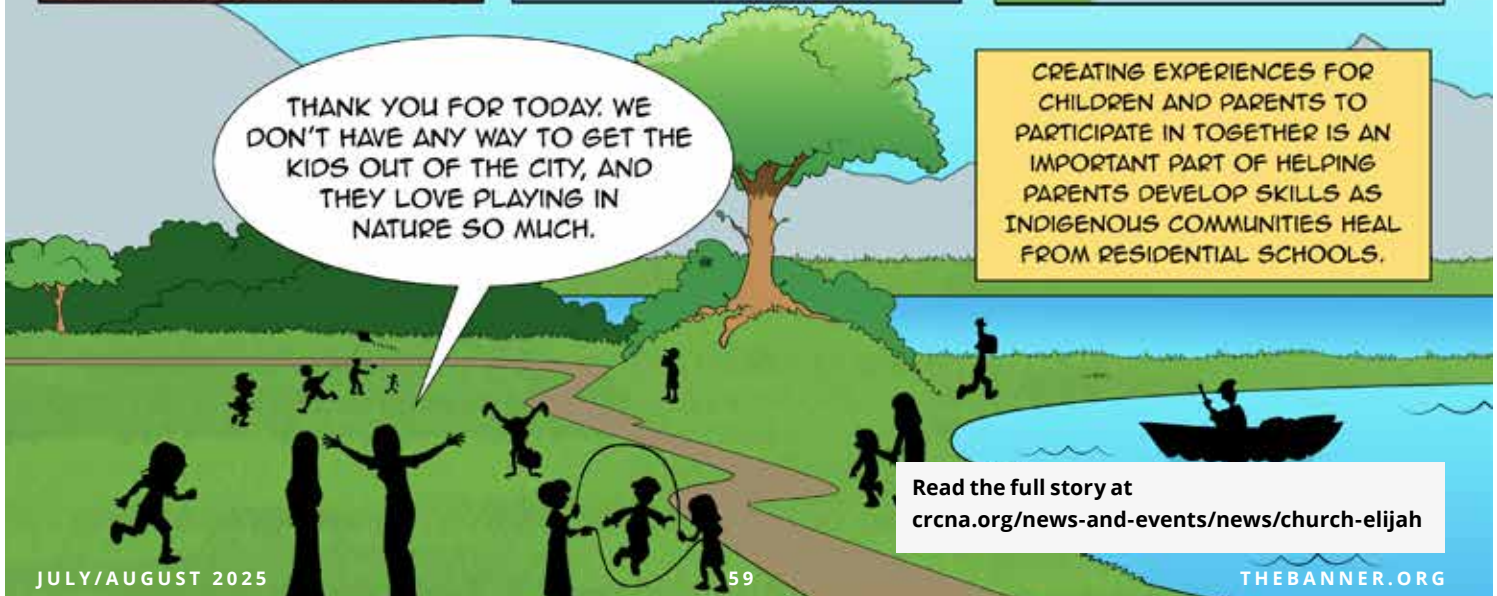
YOUR SUPPORT IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF FAMILIES SERVED BY THE INDIGENOUS FAMILY CENTRE, A CHRISTIAN REFORMED MINISTRY IN WINNIPEG, MAN.

THAT'S IT FOR TODAY'S SHARING CIRCLE. DON'T FORGET THAT WE WILL BE GOING TO BIRD'S HILL PROVINCIAL PARK THIS WEEKEND. LET ME KNOW IF YOU ARE INTERESTED.



THANK YOU FOR TODAY. WE DON'T HAVE ANY WAY TO GET THE KIDS OUT OF THE CITY, AND THEY LOVE PLAYING IN NATURE SO MUCH.

CREATING EXPERIENCES FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN TOGETHER IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF HELPING PARENTS DEVELOP SKILLS AS INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES HEAL FROM RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS.



Read the full story at [crcna.org/news-and-events/news/church-elijah](http://crcna.org/news-and-events/news/church-elijah)



**DEADLINES:** Ads for the September 25 issue are due July 25, 2025; October: August 29, 2025. Subject to availability. Details online at [thebanner.org/classifieds](http://thebanner.org/classifieds), or for display ads see [thebanner.org/ads](http://thebanner.org/ads). Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

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## Church Positions Available

**FULL-TIME PASTOR POSITION** Maple Ridge (B.C.) CRC, is looking for a full-time pastor who will focus on pastoral care, preaching, discipleship, and outreach. Email [office@mapleridgecrc.com](mailto:office@mapleridgecrc.com) for more information.

**FULL-TIME PASTOR** Emmanuel Reformed Church, Woodstock, Ontario. This mid-sized, multi-generational, caring church is prayerfully seeking a qualified, individual who is eager to serve the Lord. The successful applicant will have Master of Divinity Degree and will adhere to Reformed Theology. By coupling their shepherding skills with the talents and skills of the congregation will strive to bring the good news of God's saving grace to all.

Please contact: Bill Rood [brood@execulink.com](mailto:brood@execulink.com) or [office@emmanuelreformedchurch.ca](mailto:office@emmanuelreformedchurch.ca)

**LEAD PASTOR** - Calvin CRC, located in Canada's capital Ottawa, Ontario, is prayerfully seeking a full-time lead pastor. The successful candidate would have a strong faith, prayer life, and spiritual vitality expressed through inspiring biblical preaching and empathetic pastoral care. Ottawa is a vibrant city providing many opportunities for our lead pastor to shape a unifying vision for our community programs. A strong commitment to Reformed theology and the denomination is essential. More information can be found at our church website at [calvincrc.ca](http://calvincrc.ca). Direct inquiries for more information about this position should be sent to: [pse-co-chairs@calvincrc.ca](mailto:pse-co-chairs@calvincrc.ca).

**PASTOR:** Grace CRC in Welland, Ont., Canada, in the heart of Niagara is seeking a full time Pastor of Preaching & Congregational Care. To faithfully preach the Word, nourish the spiritual growth of the congregation and reach out into the community to facilitate growth. For more information, our profile is located at [network.crcna.org/jobs](http://network.crcna.org/jobs), also contact George Sportel at [sport57geo@gmail.com](mailto:sport57geo@gmail.com) and/or call 905-714-1100.

**SUNNYSIDE CRC SEEKING ASSOC. PASTOR** Join us in connecting the Lower Yakima Valley to Christ! Job description can be found at: <https://www.suncrc.org/jobs>

**SUSSEX CRC IS SEEKING A FULL-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR** with a focus on Worship and Discipleship. If you have a love for Jesus, worship, and discipleship of all ages, and are eager to serve God in the local church, we invite you to join us in growing disciples of Jesus. Please inquire at [search@sussexcrc.org](mailto:search@sussexcrc.org) or visit us at [www.sussexcrc.org](http://www.sussexcrc.org).

**UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR A FT SR. PASTOR** at Golden Gate CRC ([ggcrc.org](http://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@ggcrc.org](mailto:srpastorsearch@ggcrc.org).

## Church Anniversary

### 150 YEARS



**YOU'RE INVITED! KELLOGGSVILLE CHURCH'S 150TH MINISTRY YEAR KICK-OFF** Join us as we celebrate 150 years of God's faithfulness! Sunday, September 14, 2025 Worship Service • 10:00 AM

Celebration with Food, Refreshments & Program • 4:00 PM

Bring your family and friends for a joyful day of worship and community as we honor the past, celebrate the present, and look to the future. All are welcome! More info: [www.kelloggsvillechurch.org](http://www.kelloggsvillechurch.org) Let's celebrate 150 years—together!

### 100 YEARS

**EAST LEONARD CRC** in Grand Rapids, MI is celebrating its 100th Anniversary at 9:30am on October 19, 2025. We invite you to join us for worship as we celebrate God's blessings and look forward to serving Him in the years to come!

### 50 YEARS

**GEORGETOWN CRC HUDSONVILLE MI** will celebrate 50 years on Sunday, September 7, 2025 with a worship service at 9:30am and a meal at 11:30am. A time of fellowship will follow the meal. All are welcome! ([office@georgetowncrc.org](mailto:office@georgetowncrc.org))

## Birthday

### BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS

**SCHOOLLAND, JOHN** will celebrate 100 years on Aug 17, 2025. His wife Helen and he are blessed with 75 years on Aug 8, 2025. They've been blessed with 4 children, 13 grandchildren, and 41 great grands. God is good and faithful. Greetings can be sent to 368 S Wilma Ave. Ripon, Ca 95366 #7.

## Anniversary

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS

**DEWAAL, NICK AND MARIA** celebrating 70 years of marriage on June 2, 1955. They are celebrating with their children, Mary, Wendy, Wilma, Tony, Brenda and their families.

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### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 50 YEARS

**VOS JR., HENRY AND CAROL (HUBERS)** celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary June 14 with their 3 children, their spouses, and their 9 grandchildren. We love you!

## Obituaries

**DEJONGE, R WAYNE** age 87, passed quietly into the arms of Jesus on May 21, 2025. Wayne was the former Art Director for the *Banner*. Surviving is his spouse of 56 years, Joanne E DeJonge.

**DWARSHUIS, JEANNE (BRONSEMA)** 94, formerly of Berwyn, IL, left her earthly body to be with Jesus on 18 May 2025. Family: husband John; Lynn & Bob Frens (Aaron (deceased), Micah & Mackenzie Frens (Caden, Madison), Noah Frens, Caleb & Jenn Frens (Jael-Jeanne, Noah-Lynn); Brian (deceased); John & Diana Dwarshuis.

**REV. ARNOLD RUMPH** went to glory on June 19, 2024. Arnold served several churches in Canada including Cobourg CRC, Fruitland CRC and Mt. Hamilton CRC. In 1966 Beverly CRC of Wyoming, MI called him to be a missionary to Argentina, then going on to serve in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Guatemala, before retiring to Florida where he provided pulpit supply to several churches. He is preceded in death by his wife Ann Marie and is survived by his wife Cathy, his children, grandchildren and greatgrandchildren.

**SPEE, JEAN (GELDERMAN)** 93, went home to her savior on May 18, 2025. Jean and her husband Rev. George Spee served as missionaries to Nigeria and Eleuthera. She was selfless in her dedication to sharing the gospel with everyone she met. Her gentle spirit will be greatly missed by her family and friends.

**SWEETMAN, SHIRLEY (SMITH)** age 96, of Denver, Co. went to be with her Redeemer on May 12, 2025. She was preceded in death by her husband Ivan, and is survived by her 4 children, Christie, Linda, Sally and Ross; 8 grandchildren and 16 great grandchildren. She was



devoted to her family and to faithfully serving others. Her faith remained strong until the end, she finished well.



**VAN DER AA, TERRY** age 79, a long-time resident of Hinsdale, Illinois, went to be with his Lord and Savior on January 17, 2025. He passed away peacefully at his home in Naples, Florida. For 54 years he was the beloved

husband of Linda Van Der Aa (née Eenigenburg); a devoted father to Michael, Kristin (John) Gianoulis, and Kelly (John) Wilbraham; and a cherished grandfather to Kees, Gage, Katelyn, Libby, Rita, Jane, and Margaret. Terry is survived by his dear sister, Joyce (the late Jim) Lagestee, and was preceded in death by his older brother, John "Son" (the late Joan) Van Der Aa, mother Katie Van Der Aa (née Schepel), and father Mitchell "Mike" Van Der Aa. Born on January 16, 1946, Terry was raised in South Holland, Illinois. He attended Calvin Christian Grade School and Illiana Christian High School, forming the foundation of his lifelong dedication to faith, family, and Christian education.

Terry was a visionary entrepreneur. Terry's father, Mitchell, founded what later became Vancom, a transportation company in 1925. By the time Terry was 25 years old he was a co-owner of Vancom and played a pivotal role in its growth, turning it into the largest privately held school bus company in the United States. His leadership and vision extended to the privatization of public transit systems and airport shuttle services across the country. He also collaborated internationally, introducing competitive practices and the privatization of transit operations in the Netherlands.

Terry was deeply committed to giving back. In 2004, Terry became a founding member of Providence Bank & Trust, serving as Chairman of the Board. The bank became a trusted financial institution that reflected his values and dedication to supporting the community. He supported the Calvin Prison Initiative, which provides education to incarcerated individuals. The "Terry Van Der Aa Legacy Award" honors contributions to the program. He was passionate about prison ministry and will be laid to rest in a casket handcrafted by prisoners at Louisiana State Penitentiary.

Terry served on the boards of the Prison Seminars Foundation, The Brooklyn Tabernacle, Timothy Christian Schools, Trinity Christian College, Calvin University, Ingalls Memorial Hospital, and the University of Chicago Hospitals. He also served as an Elder and on the Senior Leadership Team at Elmhurst Christian Reformed Church. He was Chairman of the Board of Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship ministry, reflecting his lifelong commitment to Christian education, faith, and community.

Terry loved traveling with the love of his life, Linda. Together they visited over 40 countries on all 7 continents. Known for his strong

work ethic and unwavering dedication to excellence, Terry lived by the motto, "Anything worth doing is worth doing well." He was a man of deep faith, a loving family patriarch, and a trusted mentor to many. His influence will be felt for generations to come.

Terry will be remembered for his remarkable vision, generosity, and the profound impact he made on those around him.

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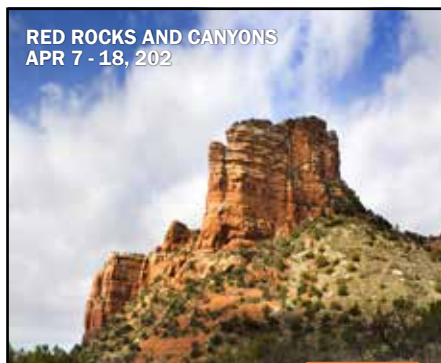
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**BONHOEFFER & CHRISTMAS MARKETS**

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**PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS  
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Apr 3 - 13, 2026 | Dr. Jeffrey A. D. Weima

**RED ROCKS AND CANYONS**

Apr 7 - 18, 2026 | Gerry and Jan Van Kooten

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**YONKER, WENDELL E. "WENDY"**, age 101, of Palos Heights, IL was welcomed into Heaven Wednesday, May 29, 2025. He was born January 15, 1924, in Chicago, IL. Son of the late Martin James and Catherine (Hoort) Yonker. Wendell is preceded by his wife of 73 years Dorothy Persenaire Yonker, daughter Cathy Larsen, brothers Kenneth (Mary) Yonker, Norris (Peggy) Yonker, his sisters-in-law Betty (Con) Douma, Phyllis (John) Groot, Jean (John) Rossier, June (Earl) Wolff, brother-in-law Charles (Phyllis) Persenaire, and brother-in-law John Leo. Wendell is survived by his sister-in-law Donna Leo, his daughter Wendy Sue (Eric) Van Vugt, son Thomas (Judy) Yonker and son-in-law Dave

(Sally) Larsen. His nine grandchildren Josh (Debbie) Larsen, Anne (Dave) Vander Weele, Jennifer (Chad) Harris, Erin (Craig) Haan, Cate (Joe) Huizenga, Heather (Austin) Ramirez, Kyle (Heather) Yonker, Tim Van Vugt, and Chad (Lorien) Yonker. His 23 great grandchildren and countless nieces and nephews.

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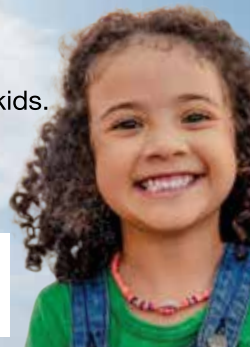
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