

BANNER

OCTOBER 2025

THE BANNER.ORG

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair and a young girl with long brown hair, both smiling warmly. They are in a field of tall grass, with the woman leaning over the girl. The scene is bright and natural, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Passing on Your Faith

Happy Thanksgiving
to our Canadian readers!



TALKING BIBLES



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Every Tribe, People, and Language

Thirty percent of CRCNA churches are multicultural or multilingual, and ethnic and diaspora congregations are quickly growing and expanding throughout the denomination. This is a beautiful glimpse of the Revelation 7 vision of the new heaven and new earth!

Thrive's work through the Revelation 7 Fund will equip churches with the tools and resources needed to participate in this vision so that people of every language and nation can worship and engage in denominational life without language barriers.

Join us in encouraging and equipping congregations in their missional, multilingual call.



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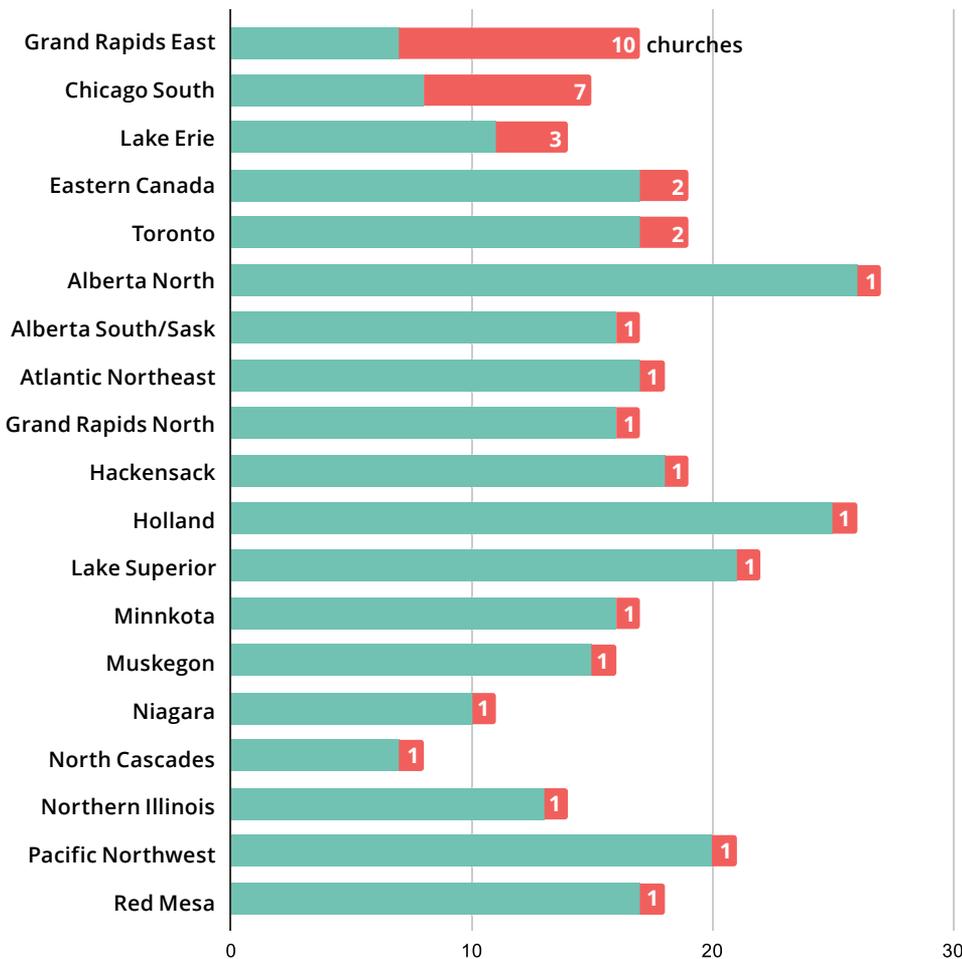


BANNER

BY THE NUMBERS

At least 38 congregations have begun or completed a process of disaffiliation from the CRC since Synod 2024 required congregations to repent from opposing the church’s confessional definition of “unchastity” (that it necessarily includes same-sex sexual relationships) or disaffiliate. Not every disaffiliation is directly related to that synodical decision, but here are the regional groups of churches facing a loss and how many congregations each one has lost.

Disaffiliations Since 2024



Data comes from the received agendas and minutes of 2025 classis meetings as of Sept. 1, 2025.

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.)

- » Church Worldwide: Christian Nonprofit in Honduras Battled Gangs, Corruption; Now It's Inspiring Chicago
- » Music: *Greatest Hits (Acoustic)*, by Jason Gray
- » Children's Book: *Parks*, by Marc Majewski
- » Movie: *Fountain of Youth*

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Ending Well: How Hope Christian Reformed Church Disbanded

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The Greatest of These is Love: The '5 Solas' and Theological Virtues

Kyle Dieleman // It all begins with the love of Christ.



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Notice to Our Readers

The Banner staff has discovered that some of the submissions sent to us in the past several months have been sent by people who are not who they say they are and who we suspect are creating articles using artificial intelligence. This includes the articles “Reclaiming Sabbath in a Burnout Culture,” published in the July/August 2025 issue, and “Finding Our Center in a Divided World,” published in May 2025. *The Banner* regrets publishing these articles, considers the use of AI in writing to be a form of plagiarism, and has put steps in place to better recognize AI and those who use it. Submissions of original work only will be considered for publication.

OUR SHARED MINISTRY

Editor Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



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

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“We’ve long appreciated the trusted voice of *The Banner* and began advertising with you in 2013 as part of our effort to connect with Christian communities who share our passion for missions and outreach. Your readers are thoughtful, engaged, and mission-minded—exactly the kind of partners we seek.”

We would absolutely recommend *The Banner* to other ministries and organizations. It’s more than advertising—it’s a mission partnership.”

—Paul Hoekstra, president of Talking Bibles International, a ministry dedicated to providing the Word of God in audio format to those who cannot read



BANNER

TheBanner.org/Ads Expand your reach.

Hospitality

If God's
assignment is
God's enablement,
we have been
equipped
countless times.



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*.

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

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

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

"I CAN'T TAKE ALLEN*," my friend texted me on a Thursday morning. "I'm so sorry; I have Covid."

My stomach clenched. The week was already more than I could handle, with all three of my grown children visiting at the same time and welcoming a new international student, Jared, from China the day before.

That day we also had a wedding. Our second student, Tanner, from South Korea, was flying in during the wedding. (Our daughter was picking him up.) There had been a flurry of laundry, beds made, and rooms swept. Tanner, at least, was in his second year with us; he knew the ropes. Jared, however, had to be taught everything, from where to find cups to how to use our shower. And now we would be hosting a third student that very night because he had nowhere else to go.

Allen, from China, had been with us last year. But where would he sleep? All the beds were taken. And who would pick him up at the airport at 1 a.m.? All my carefully laid plans were scattered. This was not just hospitality; this was "gritty hospitality."

When Pastor Peter Jonker, of LaGrave Avenue CRC, had spoken at a meeting of host parents to international students, he had said hospitality was connected to the word for "hospital." It was a healing art, different from entertaining.

The word "hospitality" in the Bible is a translation from the Greek word *philoxenia*, a compound word meaning love (*philo*) of strangers and foreigners (*xenia*). He encouraged us as host parents to "practice the craft of love" as we cared for these students from faraway lands. "How do people feel when they are in your home?" he asked. "Do they feel accepted, encouraged, and cared for?"

Hospitality is about "creating a space where people can let their hair

down and be themselves," he said. "Sometimes the less fancy it is, the more hospitable. It's where vulnerabilities are shared instead of strengths."

The biggest takeaway: practising the "craft of love" could be "gritty," hard, and costly. That very night, we were also dealing with a potentially serious crisis of a 15-year-old international student in our home. These situations and others over the years had thrown grit into the gears of our household machine, our lives.

As we've latched onto "gritty" as our word for all the "situations," we've also clung to the grace and wisdom God gives us to grow in love for the "strangers" he has brought to us. If God's assignment is God's enablement, we have been equipped countless times.

According to Scripture, hospitality is not optional. Love of strangers could be anyone: a widow or an orphan, a refugee or immigrant, a foster child, a disabled person, a neighbor, or an unhoused person. Hospitality doesn't even have to take place in your home. As Jonker said, it is not just a place but a "quality of spirit." How can we all extend a more welcoming and generous spirit to those we meet, whether on the street, in the workplace, or in our homes?

Allen slept that night on a camping cot, bunking with his former host brother, Tanner. He stayed with us for two days until we drove him to Michigan State University for his freshman year.

As they say, it's not the size of your house but the space in your heart. Thankfully, God always increases our limited capacity for welcome. Despite a regular dusting of hospitality grit, day by day we are stretching and growing in the costly but necessary craft of love. 

*Names changed for safety.



REPLY ALL

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

Sanctity of Life

In “Canadian Justice: Happy to Talk More,” you noted concerns and ignorance about our resources, with specific mention of sanctity of life and the KAIROS Blanket Exercise. I’d like to remind *Banner* readers that our Canadian justice ministries and Thrive do provide and promote resources related to the sanctity of human life, including both abortion and opposing legislation on Medical Assistance in Dying. I also wanted to remind readers that the KAIROS Blanket Exercise is something that synod has, itself, participated in and encouraged for all CRC churches. We also continue to adapt our ministries to support Canadian churches in robust public witness. I am happy to respond to any additional questions and hope that it will help future synods fully express appreciation for these valuable ministries.

» Rev. Al Postma // executive director, Canada

Synod 2025

Synod 2025’s decision to remove the word “diverse” from the mandate of *The Banner* is a significant step toward limiting the voice of *The Banner* and its readers (“*The Banner’s* Mandate Curtailed,” July/August 2025). It is difficult to envision how *The Banner* will be able to encourage biblical and Reformed thinking without being able to present diverse positions. Will *The Banner* still be able to “provide prophetic and responsible criticism and evaluation” if it cannot present diverse positions held within the church, or “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” (Synodical Mandate 2015 *The Banner*) or in line with Synodical decisions?

» Joanne Spoelstra // Hamilton, Ont.

Synod’s 2025 decision on a new mandate for *The Banner* is indicative of a fear of its readers, that they might be led astray into erroneous thinking by contrarian writers. It’s not *The Banner’s* task to be the guardian of correct theological thought. The CRCNA is to be highly admired for allowing vigorous exchange of ideas in its official paper. Such debate is indicative of minds and hearts that care deeply in the cause of engaging minds and hearts in seeking God’s truth. Synod’s action comes out of a white Caucasian silo, hardly reflecting the cultural, regional, and educational diversities that exist in our blessed North American context. What does need “policing” to my mind is the appalling political-theological indiscretions that come from CRC pulpits.

» Bernie De Jonge // Kitchener, Ont.

Synod 2025 curtailed freedom of speech for both Calvin University and *The Banner*. I have sympathy for both sides of the argument. If the university and this magazine belong to the CRC, should their teachings not reflect CRC confessions? Yes, but school is more than an echo chamber and media more than propaganda. Both sides have some truth. The problem is the church should not own schools and magazines. That ownership must end. Without such separation, schools and media cannot attain their God-ordained purpose. Abraham Kuyper saw that very clearly. In the meantime, *The Banner* should continue to speak to matters of faith. ... If we love God, we will

act justly and love mercy. Please keep pointing out how we can love God by bringing healing to a broken world. Then you will shape our faith, which is your mission. Your work is not done.

» Nick Loenen // Richmond, B.C.

The decision of Synod to muzzle voices in *The Banner* deeply disturbed us. Shiao Chong was an editor who we deeply admired for his integrity and pastoral leadership. We wish him blessings as he moves through new open doors. Funds which in the past were given as support for *The Banner* will now be directed elsewhere.

» Jim Jacobs and Henrietta Hulse // St. Catharines, Ont.

Editor Resigns

I’m sorry to see editor Shiao Chong leave his position but am supportive of the new mandate determined by Synod 2025 (“*Banner’s* Editor-in-Chief Resigns,” July/August 2025). Less controversial issues should serve *The Banner* well, as a publication of the CRCNA. Having said that, I believe it should be incumbent on the denomination to financially bear all costs associated with its publication.

» Alex Krikke // St. Catharines, Ont.

I’m saddened and dismayed by editor Chong’s resignation. I’ve been deeply blessed and encouraged by his nuanced and thoughtful editorials against the backdrop of an increasingly polarized denomination. Thank you, Shiao Chong, for the years and gifts you shared with the CRC. May you and your family know God’s richest blessings as you explore new avenues in an environment of greater freedom.

» Diana Boot // Oshawa, Ont.

Small Acts of Service

Though not surprised, I read your resignation with sadness. Your writing has consistently been faithful, insightful, and inviting. Under your leadership, *The Banner* offered a rich mix of content that informed, encouraged, and challenged its readers. I've saved and reread countless pieces during your tenure. In contrast to the thoughtful deliberations that shaped *The Banner's* previous mandate, this year's synodical decision feels rash. Your departure grieves me especially because the church needs more of your kind of hospitable, open-handed leadership, not less.

» Stanley J. Groothof // Rock Valley, Iowa

I want to extend my sincere appreciation for the remarkable work of Shiao Chong in the nine years that he has done his work. Personally I have loved his balanced editorials and his emphasis on reconciliation in our polarizing times. In my opinion, his resignation is a loss, though very understandable in light of the decision of Synod to force editorial strictures of compliance and conformity to "official views." I will continue to receive *The Banner* because I appreciate news from the CRC, but I will miss Chong. May the Lord bring someone of equal skill and integrity to this important position.

» Rev. Edward Brouwer // Canton, N.C.

As I Was Saying

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

- » The Disappearing Neighborhood: A Call to Rebuild Community
- » The Forceful Hospitality of Kèqì
- » Whispers in the Garden

IF IT WERE UP TO ME, my bed would never get made.

But the fact is that I got married, and so I now make the bed.

I make the bed because one of my wife's love languages (as described in Gary Chapman's famous book *The 5 Love Languages*) is "acts of service." And one of the things my wife enjoys in life is crawling into a perfectly made bed each night.

And so, despite my own thoughts, feelings, and inclinations, I've become a bed-maker. It's something small, something simple, and something entirely ordinary, but it's something my wife enjoys, so I do it to serve her.

And this, I think, is more or less what Christian life looks like.

You see, sometimes we get to participate in big, flashy, monumental acts of service. For instance, over the years I've had the privilege of helping raise large amounts of money to send to underprivileged communities, both in North America and across the world. I've also been able to go on and help lead short-term and long-term service trips. And I've been invited into the lives of our friends, family members, and neighbors to serve them in one-off, bigger ways over the years too.

But recently I've been thinking that it's not always the big, flashy, monumental moments of service that matter. Those are great, and they're no doubt important when they come along, and we should certainly say "yes" to them when they do.

Yet it seems to me that often it's the small acts of service that matter more. It's the regular string of simple service opportunities that are more important to say "yes" to. And it's the mundane, ordinary acts of service that, over time, make more of a difference.

Despite my own thoughts, feelings, and inclinations, I've become a bed-maker.

First, those small acts of service often matter more to those we're in closest relationship with (our family members, friends, church community, neighbors, and even the total strangers we regularly cross paths with). Second, though, those small acts of service also train us to be ready to say "yes" when the bigger, more monumental acts of service come.

So I've been trying to say "yes" more regularly to the small acts of service God puts in front of me. Those, I think, in the grand scheme, are what the Christian life, or at least part of it, really amounts to. It amounts to serving others in small ways, so that I can be ready to serve them in big ways, just like Christ did for me.

You know, like making the bed. 



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



Ending Well: How Hope Christian Reformed Church Disbanded

By Melle Pool

Hope Christian Reformed Church of Stony Plain, Alta., ceased to exist at the end of 2024. It served as a Reformed congregation in Parkland County of Alberta for about 120 years. It began as a German Reformed Church and ended its life as a Christian Reformed Church. During all those years the congregation was part of the community, with the Old White Church and the “New Church,” on the corner of Highway 16 and Highway 779, serving as beacons and assets in the service of the congregation’s ministry. This story is an account of the ending or disbanding of the congregation.

Hope Church’s decline began about 10 years ago. We saw the writing on the wall as a number of challenges—including an aging membership, younger members leaving, and no new growth—left a small, committed group

of mostly older members to fulfill the calling of being a faithful congregation. Hope Church faced the challenge bravely. It appointed a transition team to help the church council and congregation discern how it could best move forward. After a time of prayer, self-reflection, and reorientation, we called a pastor and committed ourselves to do ministry as we believed God called us to do it. But it was a big challenge for the new pastor and for all of us as aging members.

In June 2018 the church was presented with two options: the first one a grandiose vision of expansion, and the second one closing its doors. The options hit the congregation very hard. It did not have the financial means to support a grand vision. It did not even have enough income to support a pastor on a full-time basis. Our financial picture was such that we could not carry on much longer. Many worried about losing their church

family, the only church family they had ever known, which had baptized and confirmed them and with whom they had worshiped their whole lives. We listened to each other as we were guided by a facilitator to share our feelings, thoughts, and hopes.

As the weeks went by, a third option became clear—namely, to be a viable congregation with the resources we still had at our disposal. It also became clear to the church council that creative thought needed to be given to that option. In view of our financial situation, the council advised our pastor to find work in another congregation and again appointed a transition team to help the council and the congregation think about its future. We are thankful to God that our pastor, Jacob Boer, soon received a call to serve another congregation. The transition team began its work.

By the end of February 2019, the congregation agreed that for the time

being it could be a viable congregation and worship, teach, fellowship, and care for one another without the services of a pastor. We agreed to take time to think through and pray about how we could best be the small church we were. We did not rush into a specific course of action but decided we would mutually discern where God was leading us in the coming months. We asked Natasha Specht to serve part-time as a ministry coordinator and administrator, with the task of doing much of the day-to-day office work to help the church function, keep tabs on pastoral care needs, and plan and lead occasional special worship services. She was a seminary student at that time and is now a CRC pastor.

By the end of April 2019, the congregation agreed it would not disband at that time nor pretend there was no cloud in the sky, but to carry on and to realistically face the future as it came. It envisioned carrying on by doing what we were doing, that all of us use our gifts to the fullest, that we hire people to do maintenance work when we could no longer find volunteers, that we sell the property when the burden of ownership was too much and distribute the funds to denominational and local charitable agencies, that when we sense the time has come to disband, we do so in accordance with the procedures outlined in the CRC Church Order, and that we make sure we care for one another and that no one falls through the cracks.

A year later we revisited our decisions and noted that we did have to hire outside help to do maintenance work. We agreed it would be best to sell our church property. We learned that a vibrant, non-denominational church-planting ministry in Parkland County was looking for space. After conversing with the leaders and being impressed with their Christian

We saw it as a journey with tasks to be completed along the way.

commitment and drive, we agreed to sell the property, excluding the old white church property and building, to the church plant, called Saints Church. The deal was to sell for half the market value, with a lease-to-own arrangement for four years with 0% interest, during which we would have free access to the church building for our ministry needs. During that time they would make annual mortgage payments to Hope Church. The old white church and property was "sold," or given to the Old Hope Society as a historical building.

Specht did a fine job serving us. Toward the end of 2021 she accepted a full-time pastoral position at Maranatha CRC of Edmonton. We agreed that with her departure, the time had come for us to move toward disbanding. We saw it as a journey with tasks to be completed along the way. Those tasks included caring for one another, disbursing the additional funds we would receive from Saints Church, and helping one another transition to other churches in due time. We informed Classis Alberta North of the decision and held our last official worship service as a congregation on the last Sunday of 2021. But we agreed to carry on as a Christian Reformed congregation until the contract with Saints Church came to an end. Members were encouraged to worship

on Sundays with other congregations as a way to find another church home and, meanwhile, we would continue to meet on the last Sunday of each month for fellowship, sharing, and prayer until the end of 2024. We have fulfilled those tasks.

Saints Church was able to do what we wish we could have done, namely, draw young families, hear the sounds of children in church, and fill the building with hundreds of worshippers. But our calling became helping a new congregation acquire a building in which the work of ministry in Christ's name could carry on, without incurring a heavy debt load. Our calling also became financially giving more to classical and denominational ministry shares and giving support to local charitable organizations by way of the annual mortgage payments we received from Saints Church. We thank God for their ministry.

We blessed them and they blessed us, and together Saints, the vibrant congregation, and Hope, the disbanding congregation, brought life to Parkland County, Stony Plain, and Spruce Grove. In the last years of Hope Church, we often prayed that God would bless the ministry of Saints Church and strengthen us to let go of our identity as members of Hope Church, and to grow in us our identity as members of the Body of Christ. God answered our prayers. We praise God. 



Melle Pool is a retired Christian Reformed pastor. He and his wife, Diane, were members of Hope CRC for 18 years. They are currently members of Westend CRC of Edmonton, Alta.

BIG QUESTIONS

Digital Life

Should preachers use artificial intelligence when writing sermons?

Surprise! It's very likely they already are.

Almost all modern computer-based applications have jumped on the artificial intelligence (AI) wagon—not necessarily to replace core functionality but to enhance it. Better grammar, quicker referencing, complete sentences based on your writing style, and more.

Yet I suspect this question is asking about more than just *enhancements*. It's asking about it—the machine—writing entire sermons or at least contributing significantly to them.

But before we get to that, a few reminders for this place in AI time: Most of the previously published text or pictures the machine is using to serve up those amazing compilations were gathered without the original creators' permission, a violation of copyright law. (The courts are working through this. Slowly.) The computing power needed for AI is incredible. (Hence the renewed interest in nuclear power to supply the juice for these machines.) What we don't know about how AI works still exceeds what we do know. (Be warned: just because it spits out perfectly composed text does not mean it is accurate or reliable.) We won't even get into cognitive offloading, a term used to describe what happens to humans when we adopt new technologies. (Think the printing press, calculators, GPS, Google search, and so on.)

Back to your question. While I've listened to thousands of sermons, I'm



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bonórquez

not an expert on writing them so I went to an expert: Scott Hoezee". Scott is the director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin University. He's been thinking about this for a bit but admitted he was thinking out loud when he wrote, "If a sermon is just facts and figures and truths packaged in a certain way, I suppose AI could accomplish that much. If a sermon is just information, AI will do. But if a sermon is also about passion and inspiration and faith and human joy and the personality and gifting of a specific person who has been called to be a preacher, then AI cannot do any of that."

On a (ReFrame Ministries) Church Juice podcast, ChurchTechToday.com's Kenny Jahng added a helpful caution about the use of AI: "The way you have to think about these chatbots is as a very very green seminary student."

Writing sermons is a creative endeavor. All the creative people I know need to exercise their creativity to stay sharp, engaged, and, in the end, satisfied with their work. AI can make some things fast and easy, but I fear that if we let the machine have all the fun, it's going to make what we get to do pretty dull. And our listeners are certainly going to notice the missing Spirit-guided human in our work.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the Christian Reformed Church and art director of *The Banner*. Have you found surprise and delight somewhere online? Tell him at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.

Vocation

I've been looking for a job in my field for a while, but I haven't found anything permanent. Is this a sign that I should pursue something else?

It's difficult when things aren't going the way we hope. Yet this can be an opportunity to ask whether God is inviting you to something different. This could be a different career, a different area in your field, or even approaching your current situation differently.

The lack of a permanent job might indeed mean that this field is not the best fit for you. Feedback you've received at work might give you a better sense of your skills and how you fit in this field. Ideally, you'd find someone you trust to look through this feedback, someone who is able to be honest about your weaknesses and strengths and who isn't affected by your decision.

It might also mean that there are few permanent jobs in your field. The question then is how long you keep trying to find something. For each person the answer is different, but it's good to

pay attention to how much of a burden these contracts might place on your family. If you have aging parents, not having a permanent job might give you more freedom to help them, but it might also make it harder to use benefits and take time off. If you have children at home, more stability is usually better for everyone.

If you have the freedom and gifts to pursue a job in your field, you should think through how you can do this well. It can be lonely moving from place to place, so it's important to develop strong relationships with old friends, family members, and a local Christian community. You should anticipate the work involved in constantly looking for positions and the disappointment if and when you receive rejections. Last of all, can you let go of what you had expected with your career and wonder how God might be inviting you into new ways to "give freely and gladly of your money and time" (*Our World Belongs to God*, 48)?

It is wise to re-evaluate as your situation and experiences change. At the same time, no matter what position you have or how permanent it is, you can trust that God is able to use your gifts to help others and glorify God.

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

Church/Bible/Doctrine

What does the Christian Reformed Church teach about demonic possession? Does the CRC in general believe in exorcism?

One of the councils of Synod 2009, in response to study reports on Third Wave Pentecostalism, said: "Acknowledge the reality of the believer's warfare against his or her sinful nature, temptations of the world, and demonic powers. With discernment and caution, be willing to engage in scripturally sound deliverance ministry against demonic powers in the authority and name of Jesus Christ" (crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/pentecostalism).

Therefore, in answer to your question, yes, the Christian Reformed Church believes in the possibility of demonic attacks and conducting exorcisms, but it sounds a note of caution and discernment in both. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, the CRC does not have a formal rite for exorcisms.

We need to avoid either extremes of, on one hand, denying the existence of demons altogether and, on the other hand, too quickly blaming demonic activity for any sinful or even mental health issues. We need, therefore, to be cautiously discerning whether something is truly demonic or not.

There is debate about whether demons can possess true Christians or merely oppress them, citing the Holy Spirit's presence in the believer as preventing full demonic possession. Without going into the theological weeds of this debate, either still requires some form of spiritual deliverance.

In general, the Reformed tradition emphasizes the broader framework of spiritual warfare against "the devil, the

world and our own flesh" (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 127), and places the works of deliverance and exorcisms in that broader context. Our emphasis falls on the power of the gospel, of scriptural truth, of prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit to empower believers through spiritual warfare. We must remember that Christ has already defeated Satan and will triumph fully at the second coming. We battle, so to speak, with confidence for ultimate spiritual victory.

John Algera's book, *Signs and Wonders: A Reformed Look at the Spirit's Ongoing Work*, has a helpful chapter, "At War with the Devil," that summarizes a Reformed view on this subject.

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



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

Michigan Church Hosts Homeschool Hub to Reconnect With Community

NEWS

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

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Got a news tip?

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

Ada (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church is hosting the Ada Homeschool Hub for its third season, seeing new life serving as a community resource.

Amy Toman, mother of four and wife to Jacob Toman, the pastor of Ada CRC, directs the Ada Homeschool Hub, a project she developed out of necessity when the family moved to Ada three years ago.

The family, with children then ages 2 to 10, had been homeschooling for years, but Ada was at least 20 minutes from any homeschooling hubs they could find. Plus, those full-day programs were unsuitable for the family’s kindergartener with severe food allergies. The Tomans created an allergen- and neurodivergent-friendly co-learning environment that serves their family and their community.

“The teachers are friends of friends from other CRC churches or retired educators from different Christian schools, or grandparents who are retired from their careers and now contributing those skills to teach the next generation,” Amy Toman said. The goal was to create a community for homeschooled children to meet friends. It’s a two-day-a-week drop-off program that meets for just under three hours, with academics—science, history, or language arts—on one morning and electives such as art and music on the other.

Toman said parents are still responsible for their children’s overall learning. This is just a 12-week supplement to offer an opportunity for students to “understand and learn with other kids outside of their family.” It’s been popular, increasing from 15 students at the beginning to 70 (32 families) in two years.



Photo by Ada (Mich.) Homeschool Hub

Homeschool Hub students in grades three to nine work in the Ada CRC woodshop, supported by church volunteers.

“Ada CRC is a hidden church that has kind of been quiet for many years,” Toman said. Since launching the hub she’s noticed more recognition in the community, hearing things like, “Oh, I’ve heard about your church. I didn’t even realize there was a church up there.”

Toman said the hub proposal had the support of the church council and many of the older congregation members contribute to the venture. Of their willingness to help, she said: “Yes, you are an older congregation, but you still have a lot to offer, and there is a large community here who could benefit from your help and the community (feeling) they are looking for.”

—Alissa Vernon

Noteworthy



U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander Lloyd Wicker, who most recently served with the U.S. Coast Guard, was honored with the 2025 Military Chaplains Association Distinguished Service Award during the association's annual training event in Columbia, S.C., on Aug. 1. The award is given annually in recognition of dedicated ministry and servant leadership, exemplifying the motto of the U.S.

Navy Chaplain Corps, *Vocati Ad Servitium*—Called to Serve.

Ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in 2003, Wicker initially pastored CRC congregations in Washington and California and began military chaplaincy in 2014.



Photo by Luke Seerveld

Philosopher, theologian, professor, author, and mentor Calvin Seerveld died Aug. 5, in Toronto, Ont., just 13 days short of his 95th birthday. Seerveld was involved in the establishment of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill., and taught there from 1959 to 1972 before joining the faculty of the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. *Rainbows for the Fallen World* (1980) is one of his influential works.



John Wildeboer (left), most recently pastor of Rehoboth Christian Reformed Church in Bowmanville, Ont., started Sept. 15 as the new national director of Diaconal Ministries Canada. Ron Vanden Brink, national director since 2016, expects to retire in November. The ministry's board of directors announced the appointment in July. "With a heart for servant leadership and a deep commitment to the ministry of the church, John brings valuable experience and a collaborative spirit to this national role," the board said, noting "the intentional overlap allows for a smooth and supportive leadership transition, ensuring continuity in Diaconal Ministries' mission to equip, support, and encourage deacons and churches across Canada."

James Dobson, an influential evangelical Christian leader in America who founded Focus on the Family in 1977, died Aug. 21 at age 89. "Dr. Dobson was a pioneer—a man of deep conviction whose voice shaped the way generations view faith, family and culture," said Gary Bauer, senior vice president of public policy at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

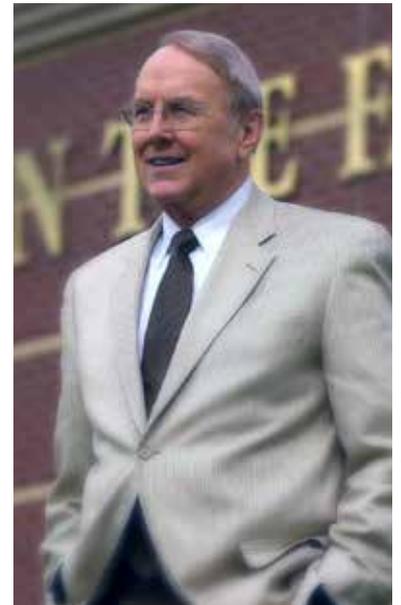


Photo by Dr. James Dobson Family Institute

Edmonton Couple Strives to Help Small-Scale Kenya Farmers Work Their Way Out of Poverty

Jerome and Ella Mae Cupido, long-time members of West End Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alta., have spent the past four years investing in helping small-scale Kenyan farmers maintain nutritious food for their animals through periods of drought. The venture, focused on manufacturing hand-fed hay balers, sees Jerome Cupido making frequent trips to Maanzoni, Kenya, staying 13,500 km (8,390 miles) from home for as long as three months at a time.

“Going back to Kenya is difficult. It means being alone, separated from those I know and love, and facing the challenges that come with life in a third-world country,” Cupido wrote in a letter to supporters ahead of his most recent trip in May. He continued, “It means I am privileged to be able to carry on developing a business that has the goal of changing lives by introducing mechanization to pastoralist farmers in East Africa, bringing hope, raising the standard of living, and enabling. We also hope this business will provide a living for us.”

The idea for the baler project began 24 years ago when Cupido was part of a feasibility study team from the Northern Alberta Diaconal Conference, an organization of deacons within Classis Alberta North. The team was looking at implementing the Cattle in Kenya Project, headed by professor and researcher Harry Spaling at The King’s University in Edmonton (now emeritus). The study found that while Kenya’s rainy season promotes phenomenal growth of nutritious grass and other vegetation, the very hot and dry season that follows degrades the vegetation to the point that it dies. When farmers cut the healthy grass and pile it for later use, it’s left exposed to high heat and oxygen and natural oxidation results in less nutritious feedstock.



Jerome Cupido's (standing at left, bearded) hand-fed baler is at work in Kenya.

Fed on this source, cattle, goats, and sheep lose weight, produce less milk, and can die. The cycle prevents farmers from getting ahead, contributing to intractable poverty.

“The obvious answer,” said Cupido, whose line of work in Edmonton is the design and fabrication of manufacturing equipment, “was building something that would preserve the nutritious grass for feeding livestock during the long hot dry seasons and drought periods. We resolved to design, develop, and manufacture a small baler that could be hand fed and moved manually.”

Baling packs the grass very tightly so that it won’t oxidize or degrade because the air can’t get to the inside of the bale.

“In 2000, I had promised one of the directors of the Maasai Rural Training Center that I would design a proper hand-fed baler for him,” Cupido recalls. After working on two different prototypes in his shop in Edmonton, he returned to the

training center in 2017. “I fulfilled that promise by traveling to Kenya with the baler, delivering it to his farm, and showing him how to use it,” Cupido said. “It proved to be a huge success.”

Recognizing the possibility of changing many more lives by making the technology more available, Cupido decided to start producing balers in Kenya, employing local workers to do the job.

“We believe we are called to use our gifts of invention and craftsmanship not just for our own benefit but to benefit others,” Cupido said. “Supplying the need of basic machinery for hard-working African farmers presents an amazing opportunity to raise their standard of living. We seek to live out our Christian faith and walk with our Maker through our investment of our time, work, and financial resources.”

—Janet A. Greidanus

Pastor Encourages Daily Bible Reading With Text Prompts



Chad Werkhoven, pastor of Worthington (Minn.) CRC, records the Bible reading segments for UnfadingTruth in his church office.

“A Bible that’s falling apart often belongs to someone who isn’t.” That’s a piece of wisdom Chad Werkhoven, now pastor of Worthington (Minn.) Christian Reformed Church, remembers hearing from an elderly Christian woman in Beaumont, Texas, when he traveled there from Sunnyslope, Wash., with the youth group he was leading as a commissioned pastor. Challenged and encouraged that “we’ve got to be reading our Bibles more,”

Werkhoven returned from that trip and started *UnfadingTruth.com* to post daily reading guides for the youth group.

“We then had the whole congregation doing it,” Werkhoven recalls. Later as an ordained minister, when he accepted the call to Worthington CRC, he brought the habit with him.

For the past three years Werkhoven has used one of the Christian Reformed Church’s three confessions—Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort—as a road map to selecting the Scripture passages for each day. Each passage, with the corresponding doctrinal summary from the confession and a pastoral reflection, is posted as a blog post and as a six- to eight-minute recording. Werkhoven said he records them—five days worth at a time—at his desk in his church office.

The plan for 2026 is to read through the narrative of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, with key passages but not the entirety of Scripture. To accomplish that, one would have to read four to five chapters a day, something most people can’t absorb, Werkhoven said. It’s “not every chapter and verse of the Bible in 2026 but through the whole Bible in quantities that people can absorb well,” he said.

Werkhoven said UnfadingTruth had about 500 subscribers at the end of July, more than double the 180 to 200 members and adherents of Worthington CRC, about 60% of whom subscribe, Werkhoven guessed. Participants can select daily reminders by email or either a morning or afternoon text message.

There are subscribers from Georgia and Oklahoma, a state without a lot of CRC congregations, Werkhoven noted, and still a concentration of weekly listeners from Sunnyslope, Wash., where UnfadingTruth started.

—Alissa Vernon

Historic RCA Church Now Dually Affiliated Congregation



Classis Chicago South welcomed representatives from First Reformed Church with a cake on July 8.

From left: Joanne Hoeksema, Russ Paarlberg, Clair Hoeksema, Anthony Bolkema, and Roger DeGraff.

First Reformed Church in South Holland, Ill.—a congregation with 177 years of history in the Reformed Church in America—now has dual affiliation with the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church. Members of the classis interim committee of the CRC’s Classis Chicago South signed the formal covenant of participation with representatives from First Church at the July 8 meeting of classis.

“As a classis we’ve been experiencing the sorrow of saying good-bye to beloved congregations within our classis, so this felt like a particular encouragement to welcome in a congregation eager to be a part of the CRC,” said pastor Derek Buikema, who served as classis vice president at that meeting.

Anthony Bolkema, pastor of worship and ministry at First Church, who has served there for 15 years, said the church has been discerning its possibilities for further denominational or network attachment since leading up to its 175th anniversary a few years ago.

“We wanted the opportunity to broaden the number of mission partners with folks who shared a confessional identity,” Bolkema said. He and Corey Buchanan, First Church’s associate pastor, as well as the congregation’s lead pastor who has since left the church for another ministry, have attended Classis Chicago South’s Chicago Company of Pastors for the past several months, an extension of years of collegiality, Bolkema said. “We’ve had personal and professional relationships with ministries and staff at a colleague-level that we’ve been grateful for.”

First Reformed Church remains a congregation of the RCA in this dual affiliation. “We very intentionally chose” a place to “broaden our scope of ministry partners” but not subtract from their original affiliation. “That aligns with who our congregation is,” Bolkema said.

—Alissa Vernon

Meeting and Discipling Beyond ‘Brick-and-Mortar Church’



Synod 2025 encouraged continued experimentation in digital-based ministry. *The Banner* checked in with one online church plant.

“Experiment” is a good word, said Corey Van Huizen, pastor of Redeemer Online Church, in a July 18 interview. It “affords you a kind of latitude for making mistakes, being on the frontier, the edges.” There’s a messiness inherent in experimenting that Van Huizen compared to the early church. He’s reaching people who are not otherwise being disciplined.

That “missional” edge is one of the reasons Synod 2025, the annual general assembly of the Christian Reformed Church, encouraged continued

experimentation when it received the Virtual Church Task Force report in June. (“Synod Gives ‘Virtual’ Churches More Time to Experiment,” July/August 2025, p. 24)

Van Huizen is one of three pastors working in online spaces who contributed to the report, which was requested by Synod 2023 after that synod was asked to “declare that a virtual church is not a church.”

Since 2022 Redeemer Online, which operates in partnership with parent church Redeemer CRC in Sarnia, Ont., has grown to over 6,000 followers and subscribers from 89 different countries. They access livestreams, teaching videos, liturgies

Pastor Corey Van Huizen, set up to record live-streamed content for Redeemer Online Church.

and daily devotions through digital video and photo-sharing platforms YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Some reach out to Van Huizen for one-on-one discipleship and pastoral care through video calls, messages, or emails.

Synod encouraged the calling churches of digital church plants, along with the classis (regional group of churches), “to pray for, partner with, and offer intentional support for church planters who are navigating the unique challenges of digital ministry.” It also instructed

churches “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.” Van Huizen said he supplied a ministry plan to Classis Ontario Southwest when he first applied for funding and he annually attends classis in person to share statistics and stories.

While synod encouraged, when applicable, to move virtual church participants “toward gathering as a hybrid or in-person church,” Van Huizen, who planted an in-person church before launching Redeemer Online, doesn’t think this should be universal. He said he initially wanted to see in-person groups form, similar to what might be labeled “small groups” in a typical congregation. But “the reality is when you decentralize control like this, it’s very hard to control what things look like.”

While some of Redeemer Online’s followers do meet in person, for example “in a pub on a Wednesday night or in a lady’s living room on a Sunday morning,” Van Huizen says he no longer tries to push that. He’s found that some people connected to Redeemer Online are those who, for good reasons, cannot attend a brick-and-mortar church—like a 50-year-old British man who “wants to grow as a follower of Jesus, but literally cannot leave his house” because of a panic disorder, or a New York marketing professional who deconstructed her faith a decade earlier after her brother, a gay man, was rejected by his church.

“I don’t want to make Mr. Parker, who is trapped inside his room, feel like a second-class citizen,” said Van Huizen, suggesting that mandatory in-person attendance would be “an anxious requirement.” In-person church and virtual church seek the same thing, and it’s not just attendance: “The goal of our faith is

more love, more joy, more peace, more patience, more kindness.”

Synod encouraged those experimenting with digital ministry to share learning with each other and continue discerning together “the legitimacy of virtual churches including especially how they might fulfill the marks of the true church in their context.” The marks of the church, articulated in the Belgic Confession, one of the CRC’s Three Reformed Standards, are “pure preaching of the gospel ... pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them ... (and) practic(ing) church discipline for correcting faults.” Van Huizen thinks the confession “is not restrictive” on how those would be demonstrated.

“Ten a.m. on Sunday mornings in a beige brick building with a maroon carpet is not the norm by any stretch in the church globally. The question (I asked) the task force is, ‘if we can throw it all back on the table, what would be other effective, efficient ways to preach the gospel, do discipleship, and have people experience the tangible grace of God?’” he said.

Synod 2025 directed the Office of General Secretary to work with denominational agencies to be a resource to classes and churches that are considering how best to support virtual-church experiments. Van Huizen recognizes there is “a lot of anxiety” around the idea of virtual church, which he thinks is understandable. But if lessons can be learned from virtual church’s in-person counterparts, the task force reporting to synod also acknowledged it goes in the other direction, too: “We have much to learn from people who are on this missional edge in our denomination” (Agenda for Synod 2025, p. 320).

—Maia Vandermeer

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Larry Dean Meyer

1945-2025

Larry Meyer “loved sharing the Word of God, whether through casual conversations, thoughtful advice, or the way he treated others with compassion and humility,” said a granddaughter. Larry, 80, died July 4 with end-stage Parkinson’s disease. To the end he spoke, even with a wavering voice, of the goodness of God.

Growing up in a small farming community in north central Iowa, Larry eventually graduated from Dordt College (now University) and Calvin Theological Seminary. Ordained in 1971, he served Holland (Minn.) Christian Reformed Church and Crossroads Fellowship CRC, Des Moines, Iowa. Feeling called to work more exclusively with teenagers, he took a teaching job at Watson Groen (now Shoreline) Christian School in Seattle, Wash.

After 17 years of teaching, Larry became congregational care pastor at University Presbyterian Church, Seattle, Wash., then served as on-call weekend pastor at Bellevue (Wash.) Presbyterian Church and as a substitute teacher for Seattle’s King’s High School.

Larry enjoyed playing and watching baseball. He and his wife enjoyed hiking and ferry rides to various West Coast islands. They later took up distance walking, completing several half marathons and one full marathon.

Larry is survived by Barbara, his wife of 58 years; three children; and three grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Photojournalist's Work Captured Mission



A retrospective of former Christian Reformed World Missions' media director Edwin de Jong's photography ran June through August at Monroe Community Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Featuring 57 images from 25 different countries, "*Imago Dei: A Photojournalism Retrospective*" included photographs taken for the mission agency (now known as Resonate Global Mission), the Christian Reformed Church's relief agency, now known as World Renew, and *The Banner* in the 1980s and '90s.

"As a believer in a loving and interested Creator, I see the beauty and complexity of *Imago Dei*, the image of God, reflected in human beings," de Jong wrote in his artist's statement as part of the exhibit.

The project was the brainchild of de Jong's daughter, Amy Elise de Jong, a musician and visual artist based in New York City. The younger de Jong suggested the idea of a photo retrospective in connection with her father's 65th birthday.

"How do you choose pictures from decades of travel and shooting all over the world?" said de Jong, who spent nine months going through more than 10,000 35mm slides of pictures taken during his

Edwin and Amy Elise de Jong, with Edwin's work at the *Imago Dei: A Photojournalism Retrospective*.

time with World Missions. "That's all we shot back then, color slides," he said.

Once de Jong whittled the list of photos down to about 250, his daughter helped further curate the selections for the exhibit.

A native of Sarnia, Ont., who earned his degree in photojournalism at California State University Long Beach, de Jong took a media position at World Missions in 1985. Not long afterward, he proposed going overseas to different World Missions outposts around the world to take pictures of missionaries at work.

"We were getting pictures back from missionaries and occasional visitors, but ... we couldn't publish them," de Jong said. The quality wasn't what it needed to be.

"Once they (the mission agency) understood the usefulness of really good photography and the potential that it had to touch people, they went in full hog," he said.

De Jong would spend two months every year going to different missions, capturing images of missionaries and the people they were serving, and writing stories to go with the photos he

took. He documented mission and relief work in Nicaragua, Honduras, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Taiwan, and mainland China.

Monroe Community Church has been home to several art exhibits since its building was redesigned in 2020. It has been a popular venue for ArtPrize, the international art competition held in Grand Rapids in September.

"It's an art gallery with a worship space attached to it," said de Jong, who was connected to the venue through Steven Fridsma, an architect and Monroe Church member who helped design the church space.

While most of the images in the exhibit were in the church lobby, about a dozen images, mostly depicting worship and prayer, were displayed in the sanctuary.

The exhibit, which ran June through August, is now headed to the headquarters for World Renew and will later be on display at two Grand Rapids churches.

—Greg Chandler

Deacons Encourage Support of Community Meal Program

Owen Sound (Ont.) Hunger and Relief Effort, known as OSHaRE, distributed its one millionth meal in August—a milestone that is both troubling and comforting for the Georgian Bay-area community. Designed around the slogan “What we have, we will share,” the fully community-funded organization was founded by Owen Sound’s ministerial group, a collection of local pastors from many denominations. OSHaRE opened in 2013 and typically hosts one annual walk-a-thon fundraiser to help meet its yearly goals.

Executive director Colleen Trask Seaman said all churches are still involved in different ways, as well as community groups. With that support OSHaRE serves free, nutritious meals six days a week—twice on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday and once on Saturday and Wednesday. It also hosts family assistance markets and supportive outreach services every other Wednesday, serving as a needed resource for community members with financial shortfalls.

In May, five deacons of First Christian Reformed Church in Owen Sound spent a Saturday helping prepare meals and shared about the experience with the church family to encourage more assistance.

Deacon Brenda Foster called OSHaRE a “model in compassion, mercy” and said the deacons chose it for their group community work partially because of its availability on Saturdays, as most deacons work throughout the week. “We have been so blessed with this opportunity to serve the Lord and our community,” Foster wrote in the church’s summer newsletter.

Sid Couperus, pastor of First CRC, has been volunteering with OSHaRE once a week with his wife, Sue, since 2019 when



Pastor Sid Couperus (right) with his wife, Sue, and their daughter, Monika, serve in the OSHaRE kitchen in 2020.



First CRC in Owen Sound, Ont., deacons Kevin Williams and Brenda Foster package meals for OSHaRE.

he began his pastorate in Owen Sound. “They really have their ear to the ground, listening to tough changes taking place in our community,” Couperus said. It’s “another reminder of real-life realities that are only news stories to so many.”

Trask Seaman said OSHaRE values First CRC’s support. “They come to volunteer, help financially—(they’re) great community partners.”

—Kimberly Simpson



Celebrating 150 Years of Christ-Centered Education

The Enduring Legacy of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary

By John Zimmerman and Matt Kucinski, Calvin University

In 1876, a seed was planted—small, hopeful, and rooted in a bold vision: to equip students to be beacons of Christ’s promise to renew all things. From that beginning, Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary have grown into thriving institutions that have shaped generations of leaders for service in every sector and sphere of life.

As Calvin celebrates its sesquicentennial, the milestone marks more than the passage of time. It commemorates a legacy of faith, formation, and far-reaching impact.

From Junior College to Global Influence

It began with one small institution—De Theologische School—a theological training school in Grand Rapids, Mich., that would take an initial seven students through six years of curriculum that incorporated literacy and theological training. This was the forebear of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary.

In 1884, the school expanded to admit aspiring teachers in addition to pastors in training. It expanded again in 1900 with the addition of pre-professional courses. By 1906, the literary department, which provided four years of preparatory classes and two years of college work, became known officially as the John Calvin Junior College, a separate entity from Calvin Theological Seminary. And in 1931, Calvin College (now University) was officially launched as a four-year college.

Today, more than 60,000 Calvin alumni serve as ambassadors of reconciliation and renewal around the world—from classrooms to courtrooms, sanctuaries to scientific labs, local communities to global mission fields.

This expansive impact stems from a deeply rooted, Christ-centered community. It’s a place where faith and learning are inseparable, where professors know their students by name, and where relationships are the crucible for transformation.

“Our staff and faculty love Jesus, and out of the overflow of their hearts, their lives, and their mouths speak,” said Rev. Mary Hulst, Calvin class of 1991 and university pastor. “They could go anywhere, and some have standing job offers from other big places, but they say, ‘I couldn’t do there what I get to do here.’”

The Franklin Campus, opened in 1917, was a shared space for Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary until 1973 when the move to the Knollcrest campus was fully complete.



Knollcrest Farm was purchased in 1956 and became the future home of both Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary.

The Power of Relationships

The Calvin story is one of community—of lives changed by intentional mentoring, faith conversations, and transformational relationships. Hulst’s story intertwines with the stories of those she now mentors, just as she was once mentored.

Levi Carr, a 2024 graduate, recalls being a skeptical Christian when he first came to Calvin. He found in Hulst a trusted guide through his questions.

“At the beginning of my Calvin education, I was kind of a doubtful or skeptical Christian,” Carr said. “And so that’s when I came to Pastor Mary as a mentor or as a teacher, someone who could answer some of the really tough questions I had.”

That mentorship became a regular conversation grounded in deep inquiry and faith formation. “We started meeting his sophomore year, reading *Mere Christianity*, and discussing big questions,” said Hulst. “That was a transformative time in his life—and mine.”

These kinds of relationships are the heart of Calvin. They ripple across generations and roles, continuing long after graduation.

Mentors Who Make a Difference

Hulst reflects on those who shaped her own journey at Calvin: Nancy Meyer, her swimming coach and the only



Knollcrest campus. Outdoor space continues to be valued and appreciated by Calvin students—from grass lawns to mature trees and a 100-acre nature preserve.

female professor she had during her time as a student; Dale Cooper, her chaplain and professor who encouraged her to teach a class as a sophomore; and Ken Bratt, a Classics professor whose infectious curiosity helped redirect her academic path.

Join the Celebration

Check the calvin.edu/150 website for details on many events going on at Calvin throughout the anniversary year including:

- » **Calvin on the Road events:** We're bringing the celebration to you! Throughout the anniversary year, Calvin will be visiting 30 cities across the USA and Canada. We'd love to see you! For a full list of locations and dates, visit calvin.edu/150.
- » **Anniversary Worship Celebration:** Mark your calendars for Sunday, March 29, 2026, and join us at the Calvin University Covenant Fine Arts Center, or via livestream, for community worship.
- » **150th Anniversary Hymn Text Contest:** In celebration of Calvin University and Seminary's 150th Anniversary, the worship service planning committee invites hymn-writers to submit a hymn text to be sung at the worship service. The winner of this contest will receive a \$1,500 award. Submissions must be sent via email by Nov. 1, 2025. Find all the rules at calvin.edu/150.

"Nancy was a professional, an educator, and a coach, and I got to see how she did life," Hulst said. "Later, she was in my parish church, and I became her pastor. Now we're neighbors. That relationship started in 1987 and has lasted a lifetime."

For Meyer, the relationship was mutual. "I remember meeting Mary at the coffee shop when she started asking me pastoral questions," Meyer said with a laugh. "I thought, 'I'm the coach, you're the student,' but that wasn't true anymore."

For Bratt, Hulst's journey from student to chaplain was a joy to witness. "She was brilliant and fun-loving as a student,"



Calvin's chapel features a weekly rhythm of services that help shape the community. It has also been the site of numerous concerts, weddings, festivals, and denominational synod meetings.

he said. "And I was delighted to share the last 20 years of my career with her as our chaplain."

These bonds are a part of what makes Calvin unique: a culture of deep care rooted in the love of Christ, passed from mentor to student, and repeated again and again.

A Legacy Passed Down

That legacy of mentoring has always been part of Calvin's fabric. Bratt remembers the moment a professor changed his life. "Robert Otten pulled me aside and said, 'I think you should consider college teaching.' That one conversation changed everything for me."

Meyer echoes that experience: "Lori Hageman was my softball coach in our first varsity season. She didn't know much

about softball, but she knew how to build community. I modeled her example when I was hired at age 23 to coach swimming and tennis. I didn't know those sports either—but I knew how to build a team."

From coach to student, professor to chaplain, questions of faith to vocational clarity—this is the way of Calvin.



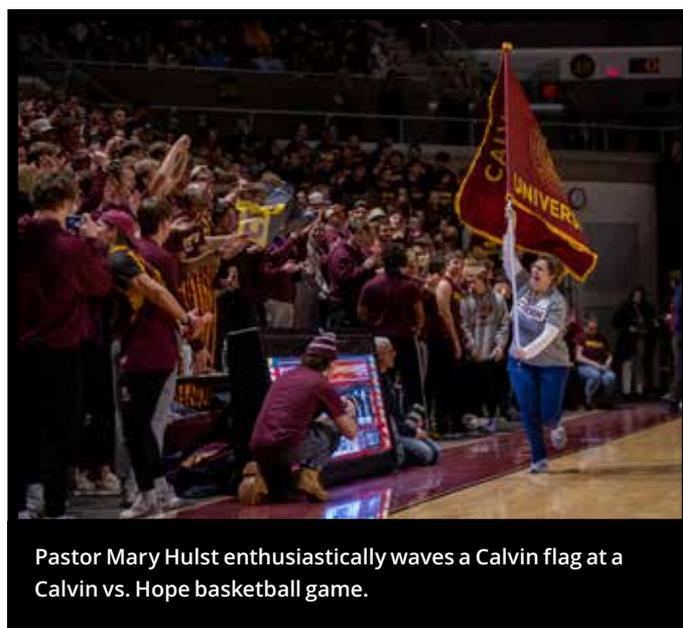
Calvin College became Calvin University in 2019.

More Than a Milestone

As Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary reflect on 150 years of Christian education, the celebration is not only about historic milestones—it's about enduring mission.

That mission is alive in every classroom and chapel, every lab and dorm room, every alumni story and student journey. It's in the ways students are invited to think deeply, act justly, and live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal.

"I've had a front-row seat in an educational community that takes its faith seriously and takes its people seriously," said Cooper. "Some of my best teachers weren't paid to teach—but they shaped me. And this community has shaped me."



Pastor Mary Hulst enthusiastically waves a Calvin flag at a Calvin vs. Hope basketball game.

A Future Rooted in Faith

As Calvin looks to the future, the commitment remains the same: to form hearts and minds that are equipped not just with knowledge, but with wisdom; not just for success, but for service.

Because 150 years later, Calvin still believes what it always has: that God is always up to something and that the best thing we can do is bear witness, together.

Happy 150th, Calvin. Here's to the generations shaped, the stories written, and the renewal still to come. **B**



From a Gap Year to a Lifelong Call

WHAT DOES FAITH formation in missions look like? For Delaney Plumb, it meant serving with Resonate Global Mission's Cohort for one year—and now she's back serving in Central America long-term.

Resonate's Cohort is an opportunity for young adults to discern God's calling on their lives, engage deeply with their faith, and get hands-on mission experience with a grassroots ministry while living in an intentional, intercultural community. Cohort offers opportunities to serve in Central America, Detroit, Europe, and the Middle East.

"It's a fertile time—working with young adults when they're trying to make sense of the life they've already lived and to set themselves up for the life and future they really want," said Rachel Beveridge, a Resonate missionary who leads Cohort Central America.

When Plumb graduated from college, she was trying to discern her next steps. She had studied to become a Spanish teacher but realized that she didn't find joy or passion in teaching. She didn't think it was her calling. During the summer after graduation, she worked at a Christian camp and realized she loved working in ministry but wasn't sure what that looked like in her future.

That's when Plumb learned about Cohort. With her background learning Spanish, she decided to serve with Cohort Central America in Honduras to discern her calling and learn more about mission work.

While it was intimidating, Plumb embraced the discomfort that came with moving to a culture different from her own. In the same way Resonate supports all Cohort volunteers, the agency's ministry leaders walked alongside her every step of the way by helping her build a strong support network, matching her with a



During her time in Cohort Central America, Delaney Plumb learned about the important postures and practices of mission, and how to work alongside local believers.

service opportunity, securing housing, and placing her in a group of intercultural young adults who were all eager to learn and grow.

Plumb built strong relationships with the young adults in her cohort, and she was particularly inspired by the many people she met in Honduras who are working every day to bring gospel transformation to communities. She learned about the important postures and practices of mission and how to work alongside local believers.

"God just changed me in so many ways," said Plumb. "You can't do Cohort and be the same person. It truly is a very life-changing experience."

Ruth Lemmen, Resonate's Volunteer Ministries program coordinator, said

she sees this change in the agency's 20-plus Cohort participants every year as they learn how to join God on mission.

"Cohort equips young adults to pay attention to where God is moving and how they can join in, both during their year of intercultural service and for the rest of their lives," said Lemmen. "Some live this out as missionaries and pastors, and some live it out as they work in nonprofit organizations, academia, agriculture with migrant workers, and more."

Plumb ended up going back. By the time she returned to the United States, she said she had "fallen in love with the region of Central America" and found her calling. She connected with Resonate about serving long-term and has been serving as a translator with Semillas de Nueva Creación in El Salvador. As an English-speaking translator, she helps build bridges between volunteer groups and other visitors with the local ministry and community.

"God has been working in my life in so many ways," said Plumb. "If you'd asked me five years ago if I saw myself doing something like this someday, I would've said, 'No way. Absolutely not.' This was never in my plans at all."

But she's confident that she's where she needs to be—for now. Cohort has equipped her to follow God's call and live out her faith wherever and however God leads.

"I just want to serve God, whether that's here in El Salvador or wherever next."

—Cassie Marcionetti,
Resonate Global Mission

The View From Here

Is Someone Knocking on the Door?

GOD'S MESSAGE to King Solomon after the consecration of the temple in 2 Chronicles 7:11-22 is intriguing. Imagine this majestic edifice, the weeks of sacrifices, the songs, the celebrations, the awe of Yahweh's *shekinah* glory descending upon and filling the temple. This is the high-water mark of Old Testament faith.

Then the Lord says to Solomon, "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (vs. 13-14). Now *that's* anticlimactic.

Writing after the exile, the author of 2 Chronicles knew that the people would turn away from God and that God would draw them back. That much was clear from the beginning—during the Exodus when Israel continually defied and disobeyed God on the way to the promised land. Despite our best hopes, believers will fall away from their "first love" just like the congregation of Ephesus (Revelation 2). We need God to renew our hearts and our churches.

The good news is that Jesus Christ "stands at the door and knocks," desiring to do that very thing (Rev. 2:20).

Over 13 months in 2024 and 2025, I was blessed to meet with members and leaders of congregations from all 49 of our CRCNA classes (regional bodies) as part of the Gather Initiative (crcna.org/Gather). During these gatherings, God painted a picture of how the Holy Spirit is renewing our churches.

More than anything else, I came away from the Gather events convinced that Jesus Christ is standing at the door and knocking.

At Gather, we recognized our unmet hopes and we acknowledged that we have been slow to believe all of God's promises. We also celebrated evidence of God's faithfulness and listened to stories of revitalization. In fact, we are celebrating a wonderful story of God's faithfulness in this issue: the 150th anniversary of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary.

More than anything else, I came away from the Gather events convinced that Jesus Christ is standing at the door and knocking. He longs to forgive and renew us. He desires to revitalize and energize us for ministry and mission. How do we open the door so that Jesus Christ can come in and renew us?

There is a temptation among believers to think they can "orchestrate" their spiritual renewal. If we just read the right book, have a good discussion, hire a gifted consultant, or follow the correct process, our congregations could be vital, growing, Christ-centered communities.

But that was not God's message to Solomon. Instead, God's message was more akin to, "Hey buddy, you all think things are going pretty well right now, but don't forget you are sinful people.

You are going to need me to get back on track."

The first step in our renewal, therefore, is to collectively humble ourselves and seek God's face. Whether we and our churches are standing tall on the mountain or facedown in a filthy trench, renewal starts with intercessory prayer. Why? In God's inscrutable wisdom, he has made local congregations the channel of the healing and life-giving power to send his gospel and Holy Spirit to a broken world. When those waters are blocked, only one person can unplug them. Jesus is standing at the door and knocking. Will we, through prayer, open that door and receive his renewal?

Over the next several issues, in this column I will share a few important lessons learned about congregational renewal in the CRC during the Gather initiative. I challenge you to discuss these with your families and congregations. Let's start with prayer. Synod 2025 requested that our classes and congregations make 2025-2026 a year of prayerful intercession for the renewal of our churches. Do you hear someone knocking on the door? 



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

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

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

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

First Church Building Loan Program: A New Initiative to Support Congregational Growth

MANY RECENTLY organized CRC churches—especially those planted in the past decade—struggle to secure a permanent location. Often meeting in schools or borrowing space from other congregations, these churches lack weekday visibility and face limitations in offering midweek programming. Rising land and construction costs have made property ownership increasingly difficult, particularly when congregations are small or do not have large membership lists from which to solicit donations. As the Loan Fund considered how to better serve CRC congregations, this challenge became increasingly apparent.

In response, the Loan Fund Board approved the First Church Building Loan Program—a mission-focused initiative to support organized CRC churches that do not yet own property. This new program is designed to help churches establish a permanent home and deepen their ministry in the community.

The First Church Building Loan Program offers loans at 1.5% below the Loan Fund's standard interest rate, with interest-only payments for the first year. This initial grace period gives congregations time to fundraise and pay down principal before regular amortization begins. While the loan might not cover the full cost of construction or purchase—especially in today's economic climate—it serves as a critical foundation.

By demonstrating financial commitment and institutional support, a First Church Building Loan can help churches attract additional funding from other donors, granting organizations, and community partners. The program will eventually be supported by a corresponding Investment Certificate Offering, providing opportunities for investors to support this initiative while earning meaningful returns.



Members of *Cristiana Reformada Comunidad de Fe Poinciana* looking forward to worshipping in their own church building in the future.

One congregation that demonstrates the potential impact of this initiative is *Iglesia Cristiana Reformada Comunidad de Fe Poincianna* in Poinciana, Fla. Planted in 2009 and organized as a Christian Reformed church in 2018, *Comunidad de Fe* has about 75 regular attendees and is the only Latino CRC congregation in central Florida. The congregation includes Puerto Rican immigrants and first-generation bilingual families. For them, having a dedicated house of worship is not only culturally important—it is key to their ability to grow and serve their community more fully.

Currently *Comunidad de Fe* meets in a school gymnasium, but parishioners dream of a permanent space for worship, discipleship, and outreach. As a first step, the church purchased 2.52 acres of vacant land in 2017 with plans to build a modest 6,000-square-foot facility. The Loan Fund initially approved a \$150,000 loan for the project, but local permitting complications—due to the land straddling two municipalities—delayed progress. As the church paused to reassess, construction costs continued to rise, and the total project cost is now estimated at \$500,000.

The launch of the new First Church Building Loan Program has rekindled *Comunidad de Fe's* hope. They are now reviving their building plans and exploring creative ways to raise funds, partner with local organizations, and reapply for a loan to move their vision forward.

The Loan Fund is looking for other churches to participate in the First Church Building Loan Program and invites any organized CRC congregation seeking its first permanent location to apply.

The Loan Fund is committed to supporting churches that are faithfully serving in the places where God has planted them, even when financial resources are limited. By making building ownership more accessible, the Loan Fund aims not just to finance buildings, but to empower congregations to deepen their presence and gospel witness in the communities they call home.

—Layla Kuhl,
Loan Fund

The Canadian National Gathering Returns in 2026



Participants at the last Canadian National Gathering, which took place May 2023 in Ottawa, Ont.

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH in Canada is actively looking toward its future, with key questions guiding its path: Who are we as a denomination in this time and place, and what is God calling us to do together?

These questions will be at the heart of the next Canadian National Gathering, scheduled for May 28-31, 2026, at Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ont. This triennial event brings together CRC churches from coast to coast across Canada to celebrate flourishing ministries, discern challenges, and envision the next steps for impactful ministry at local, regional, and national levels.

"We are filled with anticipation for the Canadian National Gathering in 2026," said Al Postma, Canada's executive director for the CRC. "This is our opportunity to come together, listen to one another, and prayerfully discern how God is calling us to live and grow as a vibrant church that continues to make a positive difference in Canada."

The gathering will be more than just a few days in 2026. Plans are underway for robust conversations leading up to the event and continuing afterward. A dedicated steering committee, with a representative from each classis, is working to ensure the gathering truly

reflects the needs and aspirations of CRC churches across Canada.

Making this national gathering a reality relies on the collective support of the denomination, funded through denominational ministry shares, classis contributions, and individual and organizational donations, ensuring accessibility for all. The CRC invites all interested members to consider attending and engaging in these vital conversations about the future of the church in Canada.



—Victoria Veenstra,
CRC Communications

The Our Shared Ministry section of *The Banner* is where you'll find news and inspiration from the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church.



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Wind

COOL BREEZES, chilly blasts, gentle gusts, strong squalls, whispering winds, wild zephyrs, and fierce gales are all ways that wind can be described. But where does wind come from? In the book of Job, God asks Job where the east wind is stored and scattered. We feel breezes all the time, and we know that wind causes many good things here on earth, but how does the wind form?

Let's start with a local wind, the one you feel at the beach. In the summer, the winds you feel are called on-shore breezes. The reason you feel the breezes on the beach is the same reason there are winds all over the earth. As an area gets hot, the air above it gets hot as well. When the air gets hot, it rises. When that air rises, air rushes in to take its place. This is what causes wind. Air moving in to take the place of air that is rising. This phenomenon can be small events such as at a beach, beside a hot parking lot, or beside a lake. But it can also happen all over the earth and cause global winds.

Because of the angle of the earth, the sun hits the earth most intensely near the equator. The sun hits the earth

and heats it up. The air above these areas rises up. This rising air cools and forms thunderstorms. These thunderstorms cause the rains that form the tropical rainforest all along the equator.

The cool, dry air then descends around 23.5 degrees north and south of the equator. These are called the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. This cool air does not carry moisture with it. This is what causes the deserts, such as the Sahara, Kalahari, and Arabian deserts.

So God asks Job if he knows where the east winds are stored and scattered. In Israel these winds are caused by air rising from the Sahara and Arabian deserts. When the air rises, the wind blows across Israel to fill in those spaces. So when God asks Job where the "east wind" is, God is referring to a very real, tangible, and often devastating wind.

Winds can be gentle, devastating or chilly, but God made them all. 



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



The Greatest of These is Love: The ‘5 Solas’ and Theological Virtues

By Kyle Dieleman

In 2005 Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Anglican theologian and Noble Laureate known for his anti-apartheid work in South Africa, wrote a beautiful book titled *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time*. In the introduction, Tutu writes, “We all lose hope that the suffering in our lives and in the world will ever end. I want to share with you my faith and my understanding that this suffering can be transformed and redeemed. ... Indeed, God is transforming the world now—through us—because God loves us.”

Tutu gives testimony to the truth that the Christian faith can provide hope even in the face of the horrors of apartheid in South Africa because it is based in the glorious, gracious love of God.

Most Protestant Christians are familiar with the Five Solas—*Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Gratia*, *Solus Christus*, and *Soli Deo Gloria*. These categories were not systematically expounded in their five-part form until centuries after the Protestant Reformation, though the themes and sometimes

even the language itself can be found in the writings and teachings of any number of early Protestant Reformers. Also well known to Christians are the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and love, drawn from 1 Corinthians 13:13 and alluded to by Tutu above.

In this article, I suggest that the Protestants’ Five Solas can remind us that the Christian faith begins with the love of God made known to us in Jesus Christ. With the grace of the Holy Spirit empowering us, we respond with hopeful love to the glory of God. That is, at the core of the Five Solas and at the core of Reformed theology is the love of God shown to us in the grace of Christ.

Pairing the Five Solas with the three theological virtues can provide us comfort and assurance while inviting us to live as reflections of God’s love and glory. Because the basis of our salvation is God’s love for us, we are freed to live a life of love dedicated to the glory of God. We are empowered to live confidently and joyfully according to the kingdom of God. A life of faith gifted by the Holy Spirit, confidently

hoping in the grace of Jesus, and enlivened by the love of the Father should cast for us and the world a compelling vision of Reformed theology.

Solus Christus and Sola Scriptura

Jesus Christ is the center of the biblical narrative. John Calvin, drawing from many theologians before him, emphasizes this point. In *Preface to Pierre Robert Olivétan’s French Bible*, he writes, “Scripture is also called gospel, that is, new and joyful news, because in it is declared that Christ, the sole true and eternal Son of the living God, was made man, to make us children of God his Father, by adoption.” The Bible makes known to us the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. As *The Jesus Storybook Bible* beautifully emphasizes, the story of the Bible is a love story because “every story whispers” the name of Jesus and, thus, the love of our Triune God for the whole of his creation.

Reformed Christians confess this story told in the Bible is the primary way that the saving work of God in Jesus is made known to us. God certainly

reveals himself through other means—creation and the sacraments, for example. But God’s primary revelation to us is in the person of Jesus Christ, and Jesus is made known to us through the Bible. As the Belgic Confession articulates, God is “known to us more clearly by his holy and divine Word.” At the heart of that revelation is “God’s glory” and “our salvation” (Belgic Confession, Art. 2). The Bible ties the glory of God and our salvation to Jesus Christ (John 1:14, John 17:3-4, and Rom. 5:1-2). What Scripture reveals to us above all else is Christ alone, in whom we see the fullness of God’s glory and our salvation.

God’s revelation to us in Jesus, the Word made flesh who is testified to in the Bible, shows us God’s love. Calvin makes the connection between Christ, Scripture, and love in his Genevan Catechism. In the context of discussing trust in God, Calvin asks how the love of God will be made apparent to us. The Catechism answers, “In his Word, where he reveals his mercy to us in Christ, and testifies of his love towards us” (Calvin, *Concerning the Faith*). Calvin points us to the Bible, which points us to Christ, which points us, ultimately, to God’s love for us. In other words, the virtue of love flows from God to us through God’s self-revelation in Jesus and the Bible. God revealing himself to us is an act of love because it flows from who God is. God is love. In revealing himself to us in Jesus and the Bible, God invites us in as participants in his divine love. We love because God first loved us, a love that comes to us in Jesus as he is made known in the Bible.

Sola Gratia and Sola Fide

That God reveals himself and his love in Jesus and through the Spirit’s work in Scripture is sheer grace. In creation, we come to know the God who graciously creates all that is good and beautiful. This knowledge should

With the grace of
the Holy Spirit
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glory of God.

persuade us, Calvin says, “that God is the fountain of all goodness, and that we must seek everything in him, and in none but him.” In this way, our knowledge of God the Creator is the result of God’s grace to his creation.

Because of the original sin that Adam and Eve unleashed in their disobedience, humanity is no longer able to clearly and fully see the grace of God in creation. God’s grace continues, however, as God reveals his plan of redemption through the Bible. That story, focused on Jesus, is one of grace from beginning to end. The Canons of Dordt speak beautifully about the grace of God’s work in Christ “to demonstrate his mercy, to the praise of the riches of God’s glorious grace” (Canons of Dordt, First Main Point of Doctrine, Art. 7). The Canons go on to make clear that salvation is never earned. Instead, our salvation comes to us “without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 60). The story of Jesus Christ made known in Scripture is one of complete gift.

Reformed Christians, echoing Romans 3:27, are clear that we have access to that grace through faith. We are justified by faith alone. Still, faith is not what justifies us. The Belgic Confession emphasizes this: “We do

not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness” (Belgic Confession, Art. 22). Faith is the instrument by which we have communion with Christ. Through faith all of Christ’s benefits and merits become ours. Faith is a gift, complete grace, the Holy Spirit kindles in us that embraces Jesus Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 21; Canons of Dordt, Second Main Point of Doctrine, Art. 7). Faith is not something we produce. It is not another work. To connect to the previous three “Solus,” faith is the result of grace, which comes to us in and through the work of Jesus Christ and made known to us in the Bible.

Faith gives comfort because it is more than intellectual knowledge. As the Heidelberg Catechism famously says in Q&A 21, faith is “a whole-hearted trust.” Even the most faith-filled hearts might find it difficult to trust whole-heartedly. But, because these are gifts God gives to us, our own weaknesses and doubts are not reason to despair. Instead, they are invitations to turn again to the sure foundation of our faith—the grace of God shown to us in Jesus.

The assurance found in the Reformed tradition’s emphasis that God’s gracious salvation made ours through faith connects to the theological virtue of hope. If faith were up to us to achieve, we would all be literally hopeless. Because our faith is a result of the grace of Jesus, faith is a hope-filled posture. The work of salvation has already been accomplished. Our hope truly is built on nothing less than Jesus, and his love is a firm foundation. *Sola Gratia* and *Sola Fide* are statements of hope because they base salvation not in ourselves but in God.

This means for Reformed Christians that the life of faith is one of hope and freedom. We are free. We are free

from needing to muster up enough faith for the next day. We are free from needing to somehow earn God's grace. We are free from sin that condemns and from the evil that overwhelms and from death's inescapable verdict. But Reformed theology is adamant we are not just free from; we are also free for. We are freed for a life that walks more and more in step with the Spirit. We are freed for communities that demand justice and to give generously and serve humbly. We are freed for life with God, a life focused on the glory and love of God, precisely because of the grace that Christ has shown us and is ours through the Spirit producing faith in us.

Soli Deo Gloria

This vision of the loving grace of God shown to us in Jesus Christ, revealed in Scripture, and made ours through faith, motivated those early Protestants in the 1500s to seek the glory of God. Consider the lesser-known reformer Johannes à Lasco. Drawn in by the grace of Christ he read in Scripture, Lasco turned away from a posh career in the Catholic Church. Instead, he worked as a leader in Protestant churches throughout Europe. His faith led him to work for the glory of God but required great hope, especially when persecution forced him to flee first to London, then to Germany, and finally to Poland. Lasco's hope was rooted in the gracious love of God and led him to a life of love dedicated to serving his congregations. Reformed churches around the world today continue to testify to the love and glory of God, in part because of Lasco's faith, hope, and love.

The Reformed tradition emphasizes that salvation is both for the assurance of Christians and for the glory of God's name (*Canons of Dort*, 5th Main Point of Doctrine, Art. 15). The concept of *Soli Deo Gloria*—to God alone be the glory—means that God alone is

the one who is worthy of all glory for all things, including the work of salvation. The phrase also is used in the Reformed tradition to note that in all things Christians are to glorify God. These two ways of thinking about *Soli Deo Gloria* are not opposed. Because God's glory is at the core of our salvation, we are freed to pursue God's glory in the whole of our lives.

We see that God's love for us is rooted in his own glory. We are invited to find our true humanity and purpose in glorifying God. This also connects to love. We reflect the glory of God's salvation through loving God and loving others. In other words, we see God's glory, and his alone, in his love that enacts our salvation. In being filled with God's Spirit, our redeemed lives bring God glory when we love God and others.

Reformed Theology and the 'Greatest of These'

What is at the "core" of Reformed theology is often debated—predestination, Scripture, God's sovereignty, something else? What the Five Solas can show us is that what underlies all Reformed theology is actually God's love. It is God's love that reveals God's glory to us, most clearly in Jesus and in Scripture. It is God's love from which his grace flows, working faith in us and salvation for us. And it is because of God's love that God invites us to experience his glory now and for all eternity.

Consider in recent decades the way in which the love of God can move faith-filled women in the CRCNA and beyond to tell their stories as victims of abuse with remarkable hope for justice and healing. Their faith hopes against all earthly hope that the love of God can reach into and redeem the darkest places of victims' lives, families, churches, and communities. Those specific stories are not mine to

tell here. But, they are stories where the grace of Jesus can work faith and hope in women (and men) even when the powers of evil have done their worst to these saints. In their work, we see testimonies of the Word of God working in divine ways so that God's love and glory can fill them and us with love for others, especially those who are most vulnerable, ignored, or disregarded.

The beautiful, lifelong task of Reformed theology is exploring how the love of God will stretch to every corner of our faith and of our lives. How will God's loving revelation in his Word transform how we conduct our businesses? How will God's loving grace that extends forgiveness to us impact our willingness to forgive others? How will God's glory that he invites us into lead us to care for God's creation or produce glorious music or use our bodies in sports? Reformed theology is always a theology lived before the face of God, *coram Deo*. We who have seen Jesus' face have seen the glory of God (John 1:14). His glory is that of love, a love he invites us into (John 15:9). Christ alone and Scripture alone, grace alone and faith alone, and to the glory of God alone—all of it produces in us faith and hope. Faith and hope and these Five Solas all point us to the greatest thing, God's saving love for us and his invitation to join in the Triune love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 



Rev. Kyle Dieleman is associate professor of theology and history at Dordt University. He's the author of *The Battle for the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformation: Devotion or Desecration?* Kyle and his wife and three children are members of Covenant CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa.

A Rainy Ride and a Prayer

I should have
crashed. I should
have been under
that truck's tires.
But I wasn't.



Fendy Satria Tulodo is a writer and musician from Malang, Indonesia. He works in the motorbike sales industry and has a background in management.

I NEVER LIKED RAIN. In Malang, where I live, it pours heavily, making roads slippery and the air cold. But as a motorbike salesman, I don't get to choose when to ride. If a customer needs a test ride or help, I have to go, rain or not.

One evening, rain poured down. I was delivering a motorbike across town. The road was crowded, my thin raincoat useless against the cold. My tires hissed on the wet asphalt.

As I turned onto a smaller road near the traditional market, a truck's honk startled me. Headlights flashed. My front wheel slipped. *This is it*, I thought.

But something strange happened. My mind went silent. My hands tightened on the handlebars, and I whispered, "God, help me." Somehow I didn't fall. The bike wobbled but stayed upright. I pulled over, heart pounding. The truck roared past, the driver yelling something I couldn't hear.

I sat there, rain dripping from my helmet. I should have crashed. I should have been under that truck's tires. But I wasn't.

That night, after delivering the bike, I rode home slowly, replaying the moment. It wasn't luck. I'd ridden in the rain for years. That slip should have meant a fall. Maybe it was just reflex. Maybe something more.

Since then, every time I ride in the rain I remember that moment. And before every trip, I whisper a prayer.

A week later, I had another delivery to Batu. The winding roads were misty, the air thick with moisture. Halfway there, I stopped for coffee. The old owner noticed my damp jacket. "Heavy rain in the city?"

"Yes, sir. Almost fell recently."

He nodded. "Sometimes we forget to pray before we go. But that's the most important thing."

His words stuck with me. I did pray before riding, but not always. Maybe that night, when I whispered that quick prayer, it wasn't just my hands keeping me steady. Maybe it was a reminder: I wasn't riding alone.

The rest of the ride felt lighter. For the first time in a long time, I felt like every moment mattered.

A month later, my wife noticed. "You seem calmer now when you work."

I chuckled. "Maybe I realized that God rides with me."

She laughed, but I meant it. Faith isn't always about big moments, sermons, or miracles. Sometimes it's just knowing you're not alone, even when the night is dark and the rain is heavy.

One evening, my younger brother rode with me to a family gathering. He was still learning, so I told him to follow closely. The rain was light but steady. Near the town's edge, he took a sharp turn and wobbled. Everything slowed down—just like before.

He didn't fall. He steadied just in time. When we stopped at a roadside stall, he exhaled loudly. "That was close!"

I patted his shoulder. "Did you pray before riding?"

Sheepish, he smiled. "I forgot."

We drank hot tea as rain drizzled outside. I didn't say much. I didn't need to. Some lessons aren't taught with words. You live them.

People ask if I believe in miracles. I don't always know how to answer. Some expect them to be grand. But sometimes, miracles are small. A hand that steadies you. A whisper in your heart when you're afraid. A reminder to pray before you ride. And maybe a rainy road in Malang, where a man learns he's never riding alone. **B**

The Ministry of Passing on Your Faith to Your Children

Parents know they have a priestly task to experientially connect their children to God.

A PERSISTENT PRAYER request of Christian parents is asking God to work saving faith into the hearts of their children. Parents know they have a priestly task to experientially connect their children to God. If only it stayed as simple as a 3-year-old learning to sing “Jesus Loves Me,” which can help build a pure trust in Jesus. But our unbelieving or skeptical young-adult son or daughter presents a more difficult challenge.

In my work I often see the obstacles that stand in the way of young people growing in their faith. Ironically, often the resistance to believing is rooted in their relationship with their parents. There are three relational dramas most children in Western cultures encounter, which can either impede or help the development of saving faith. These parent-child encounters come from what is **bought**, what is **taught**, and what is **caught**. In conjunction with these is the wooing work of the Holy Spirit—who ultimately brings about spiritual regeneration—but parents play a large role in the Holy Spirit’s development of saving faith.

First, let us consider what is **bought**. Parents can easily turn their kids into consumers with lavish provision of needs and desires. The May 2000 newsletter of the New York Child Study Center reported on a study about children growing up in households with above-average incomes. It stated that “homes where parents provide children with complete financial security, excessive freedom to explore and learn, a wide range of opportunities and toys for recreation, entertainment and education led to an increase in apathy, entitlement, laziness, indifference to goals, moodiness, depression and insecurity in their children.”

In other words, what is bought, both the stuff and the activities we lavishly stuff into living, can become a false

idol to which they attribute ultimate value and tenaciously cling for happiness, though it does not deliver. That is why Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

But parents who withhold excess, model generosity to the poor, and, if possible, give their kids a third-world exposure to poverty can teach them they are blessed so that they can be a blessing to others. As John Calvin said, “The sum of the Christian life is self-denial,” not self-maximization (Calvin’s *Institutes on the Christian Religion*).

Second, we know that what is **taught** to our children is key to having an informed faith in God. The stories of the Bible teach a deeper narrative of God’s plan of salvation. Yet there is disappointing ignorance in Christians, young and old, about two important discipleship teachings.

First, to better appreciate the deeper narrative inside the stories of the Bible, Christians need to know how and why each book of the Bible got into the Bible. Otherwise the Bible is experienced as a disconnected collection of irrelevant, ancient stories that discourages youth from exploring it for answers to life’s struggles.

Also, it is important to teach that in the often-used profession, “I believe that Jesus saved me from sins,” there are three essential building blocks that go into establishing saving faith. The first building block is to believe that Jesus, as our substitute, lived the life we should have lived to please God and died the death we all deserve to appease God. Next is the step of entrusting oneself by faith to that truth so that we can be adopted as children of God. The final building block is to make faith real in daily living



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



through adoring worship of God and the non-intuitive practice of selfless, sacrificial love toward all that God loves. We do this under the Lordship of Jesus Christ who, by the Holy Spirit, empowers us. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, although “grace is freely given, it is received at a great cost” (*The Cost of Discipleship*).

Third, there is much bias, good and bad, simply **caught** from family life that psychologically establishes itself in the soul of a child. Just as we “catch” a cold from invisible germs, children can catch “soulish colds” with spiritual symptoms that can be expressed as “I don’t know if I can trust God” or “I don’t deserve God’s love.” These symptoms come from either fear or shame.

A fear-based “cold” is caught in three ways. When parents over-parent with “helicopter love,” hovering over the child to intrude, warn and protect, the child infers that life must be dangerous to need so much protection. Such a fearful spirit might receive the promises of God with the same caution and reluctance.

Another reason for a fear-based predisposition is neglect of consistent care for children. If the child learns from infancy that she can’t rely on

parents for basic needs, she infers that she is basically on her own and is reluctant to attach to a secure provider, parent first and God later. Third, fear can be established in a child’s heart from parents who are bullies. “Drill sergeant” parents who demand blind obedience to affirm their authority create a homelife of walking on eggshells in fear of confrontation. Authority is feared—even God’s authority.

Guilt and shame are caught when parents don’t affirm their children or are so rule-oriented that their children are set up for failure. Parents imply and children infer that they don’t measure up to parental expectations. The children might develop a self-image consistent with parental criticism and often behaviorally live out that shameful evaluation of themselves. They “catch” that just belonging is never enough to be good enough—for parents or for God.

My own home leaned toward shame from a lack of praise. But my father did three things that helped his kids catch a more vital spiritual life. First, we always had family devotions at the end of a meal when our father would “preach” his little biblical sermonettes

to his family audience. Second, he hauled his four children to the county jail once a month to be part of worship services for prisoners. We were a little afraid of those scary, hairy men, but we caught that God loves “bad” people too.

Finally, our dad took this CRC family to the local Baptist church for evening services so that we could sing “peppy songs” such as “When the Roll is Called Up Yonder” and hear personal testimonies about real experiences with God. From our dad we caught his passion for God and his conviction that, as he often said, “Either you are a missionary or you need one.”

Children need homes rich with unconditional love, empowering discipline, plentiful grace, and joyous celebration—the same way God treats his children. None of us parent perfectly, but we take comfort from the promise that the Holy Spirit can and will break through the thickest walls of resistance to generate a saving faith in our children. Often the life struggles that fear, guilt, or shame create can be the very instruments God uses to crash down walls of resistance in answer to parents’ prayers.

I know no better way to give little children the beginnings of faith in God than to have tender bedtime rituals with each child, telling stories, singing songs, and listening to their innocent thoughts and concerns. Then going with them to Jesus in prayer with a goodnight kiss. Passing on your Christian faith to your children is a ministry opportunity that quickly passes. But it is a joy and a privilege to carry it out in collaboration with the Holy Spirit. **B**

Changes Challenge a Fictional CRC Chicago Community in the Racially Charged 1960s

GREEN STREET in *Black and White*, by Dave Larsen, sketches an all-too-familiar history about more than one Christian Reformed community in Chicago and beyond during the 1960s. Larsen's remarkable debut novel compactly narrates the backstory of Englewood, a community and CRC enclave on Chicago's South Side, even as it tells painful truths.

I grew up four miles south of Englewood, and I still hear echoes of Englewood's responses to racial changes, changes that drive the engine of this novel.

In these pages, four "Green Street" boys—Erik, Pete, Frank, and Eddie—carry the plot as they roam the 'hood. The historic isolation of their white ethnic and religious enclave sheltered them from the real world, but their parents' anxiety and anger surge after a mugging and the murder of milkman Fred De Vries. Magnus and Fenna Pederson nervously visit the first Black family on Green Street, Rev. Willowby and Sheila Jackson. Carl Bensema wishes Pastor Willowby dead as he berates Magnus, which shakes these long-time neighbors' friendships.

Larsen describes actual and fictional events as the neighbourhood changes. Michael Schaap, missionary to Nigeria, and his Nigerian wife and children live in Englewood while "on furlough." The children feel unsafe attending the Christian school. Rev. Wolhuis's sermon twists the Exodus story into a call for CRC people to leave Englewood. Schaap stands up and demurs: "This congregation sponsors missions in Africa, but you're fleeing African Americans next door." The consistory soon entertains a motion to pull support for the Schaaps.

In reality, many Christian Reformed people from Englewood moved to

Roseland hoping to find "safety." But by 1969, Roseland was on the move like Englewood. My family moved to Oak Forest in June 1969. All four original Christian Reformed churches headed to the suburbs between 1967 and 1969, though integrated Pullman CRC sturdily remains.

Larsen's Christian Reformed characters are not bad people. But the Reformed gospel they'd learned hadn't prepared them to live with strangers whom they feared before even meeting them. The Rev. Willowby Jackson and his wife boldly search for stability, while Magnus and Fenna Pederson naively misgauge the fears of staying. They're ill-equipped to face storms of ethnic and racial upset. Everybody suffers. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of "the arc of history bending toward justice" suffered in many places in those years.

Green Street attempts to dissect those malevolent powers. I highly recommend this novel for book clubs that want to be challenged. Some readers will feel misrepresented. Others will somberly nod their heads. Those who don't remember American cities' racial storms will learn the sad results of intentional social and spiritual isolation. I hope readers will reflect on *Green Street* and the mistakes of the past so we can compassionately and humbly serve those who look different from us in our present day. (Reformed Journal Books) 



James Dekker is a retired pastor living in St. Catherines, Ont.



High Potential

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

ABC's *High Potential*, a critical and ratings hit, follows the sassy, funny Morgan Gillory (Kaitlin Olson), a single mom who struggles to pay the bills despite her off-the-charts IQ. When, during her night job cleaning the police station, she accidentally solves a crime that had been baffling the police, she is hired as a special consultant to the force, working as a partner with the stoic, rule-following Detective Karadac (Daniel Sunjata, the perfect dry-witted foil). Christian viewers will appreciate how this show highlights the fact that everyone has different gifts and none are more valuable than others.

Fans of *Castle* will warm to the delightful chemistry between Morgan and Karadac, as well as the lighthearted approach to the classic police procedural. Season 2 drops Sept. 16. (Rated TV-14 for violence, mild language, and mild sexual innuendo. Watch on ABC, Hulu, and other streaming platforms.)



Deep Water

By Cosmic Cathedral

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

When multi-instrumentalist Neal Morse jammed with former Genesis drummer Chester Thompson, the session was so much fun that they decided to invite veteran guitarist Phil Keaggy and bassist Byron House to join them. The jam sessions formed the seeds of the first album by the quartet, who now call themselves Cosmic Cathedral.

The shared faith of the four members means that even though this is a mainstream release, the lyrics are decidedly Christian. They not only use metaphors that point to the Christian life, but they also explicitly mention Jesus. *Deep Water* showcases the instrumental chops of all four players. Keaggy's lyrical guitar playing and the light, jazz-flavored touch of Thomson's drums are the tip of the iceberg of the wonderful musical moments on this album.



Standoff: Kidnapped from Ukraine #2

By Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch

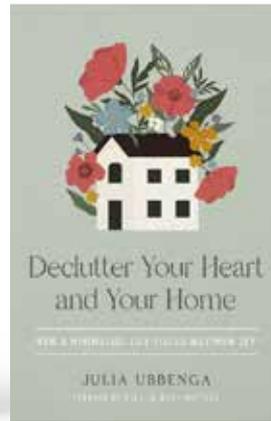
Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

On Feb. 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the apartment building in the city of Mariupol where fictional 12-year-old twin sisters Rada and Dariia Popkova and their parents lived was destroyed by a bomb. Though the family escaped, they were separated. Dariia fled with her mother, and Rada with her father.

Told from brave Dariia's perspective, readers learn about the physical deprivations experienced while under siege, the psychological torment of not knowing what has happened to loved ones, and the constant fear of being killed, even as evidence of death is everywhere.

The book is recommended for children ages 8-12. However, this reader found much of the story so gut-wrenching and too mature for younger children. It is better suited to readers 12 and older, including adults.

(Scholastic Press)



Declutter Your Heart and Your Home: How a Minimalist Life Yields Maximum Joy

By Julia Ubbenga

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Author Julia Ubbenga was raised in a middle-class family with upper-class grandparents who often took her shopping. Ubbenga learned a detrimental lesson: "More stuff equals more happiness. Eventually, the 'stuff + more stuff = happiness' equation became ingrained in me. ... Deeply."

Several years after she married and had children, Ubbenga faced an existential crisis and hit rock bottom. Literally swamped beneath her possessions and debt, she cried out to God for help. The Holy Spirit led her to read Luke 12:13-21, Jesus' parable of the rich fool, in which listeners are commanded to "be rich in what matters."

Peppered with insightful anecdotes and practical inner and outer decluttering tools, Ubbenga's book is a breath of fresh air for Jesus followers who want to "be rich in what matters."

(Zondervan)

The Lowdown

Everything Is a Story:

This book by Indigenous author Kaitlin B. Curtice explores the power of stories to shape our personal lives and collective identities, for better and worse, and helps readers examine which stories are worth passing on and which are worth letting go. (Brazos)

Starring John Corbett:

After suffering an accident, a young boy ends up relying on his family, his faith, and his community in his fight for survival in the faith-based film *Soul on Fire*. (Angel Studios; in theaters Oct. 10)

The Runarounds: This eight-episode series follows a group of recent high school graduates in Wilmington, N.C., who come together to form a rock band. Starring William Lipton and his real-life band. (Prime Video)

By Dog Rescue Advocate Rocky

Kanaka: Sitting with Dogs is a collection of stories about nine rescue dogs that each got off to a rough start but found their way into Rocky's rehabilitating arms. (Penguin Random House)

Cultural Differences

I was reminded of the medicine wheel teachings in which all skin colors and nations are equal.



Agnes Mastin is Tse'khene Indian (People of the Rocks) from north-central British Columbia. She works in a First Nation community as a lands manager where she practices demonstrating God's love and compassion to all people.

RECENTLY I WAS HIRED as the manager of lands and tax administration at a nearby First Nation office. I was astonished when I walked into the office to find several of the positions of power filled by Bangladeshi nationals. I initially worried this was colonization all over again, supposing they would superimpose their culture over a First Nation culture that has not yet been fully reclaimed.

"We will lose ourselves in the abyss," I surmised.

I decidedly gave the situation over to God by presenting my concerns and my thought processes, and asked him to change my heart if my will was not aligning with his will. I was reminded of the medicine wheel teachings in which all skin colors and nations are equal. All are created by God in the image of God, and all were created with purpose and intent. I quickly began to adopt a new attitude and soon realized that these people, too, are indigenous.

I was further reminded of the benefits of four-eyed seeing, the method of looking at the world through two lenses—your own culture's and another's.

I began to see that under the charge of the foreign nationals, department managers were encouraged to purchase food for employees so they could make breakfast and lunch, thereby guaranteeing that no employee would have to work while hungry.

When a fellow manager pointed out that food went missing from the kitchen, managers were encouraged not to say anything about it, but to buy more food to provide for people in the community who might need it, as well as encourage any person in the community that we suspected of being hungry to take some home. Ultimately we adopted an open fridge policy, which reinstated an element of sharing that many First Nations practiced in our communities long ago. The

foreigners were unknowingly helping us reclaim our culture.

Many foreigners come to North America to escape war and oppression and to build a new life. Their learning curve is steep as they struggle with a new language, legal system, and culture. I remembered that Jesus talked to the woman at the well, he sat with tax collectors and prostitutes. His love knew no boundaries.

The Apostle Paul spoke of how he handled cultural differences: "To the Jews I have become like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I became all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some," (1 Cor 9:19-22).

It occurred to me that this is exactly what I should do. To win over some of the Bangladeshi nationals and others like them, rather than criticizing them and making them feel uncomfortable for being different, I should look for the golden things in their culture so that I might win some for Christ.

I began to look for the similarities between our cultures so that I might build bridges. I found myself defending their decisions to fellow managers, reminding them that the worldview of many of the First Nations across the U.S. and Canada became broken under colonization. Opening our doors to employ other, healthier indigenous people might just be God's plan to restore First Nations to who they were created to be. My view of the situation became like a societal ecosystem as I, once again, sit in awe of God's greatness. 

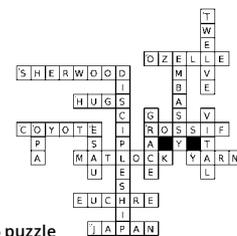
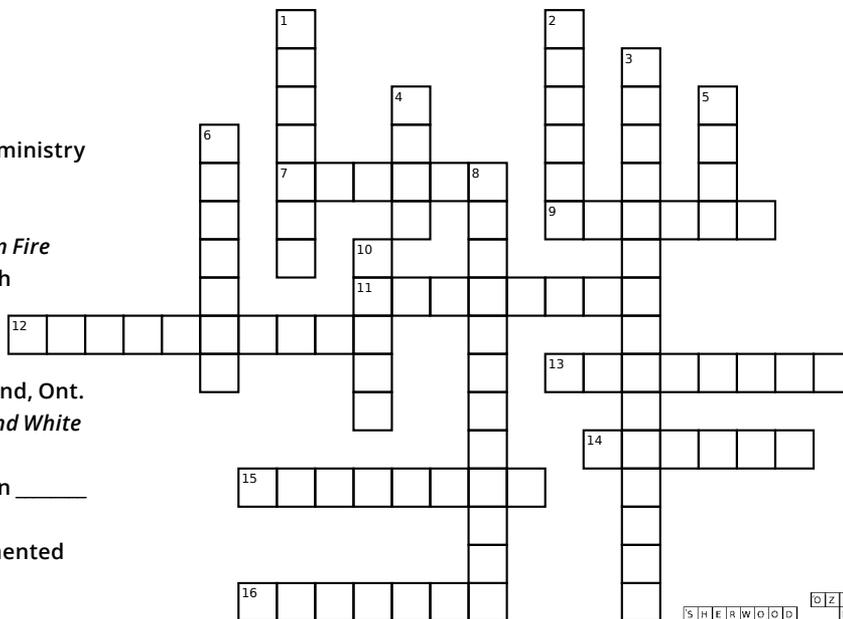
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle throughout this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions in the next print issue. (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

Down

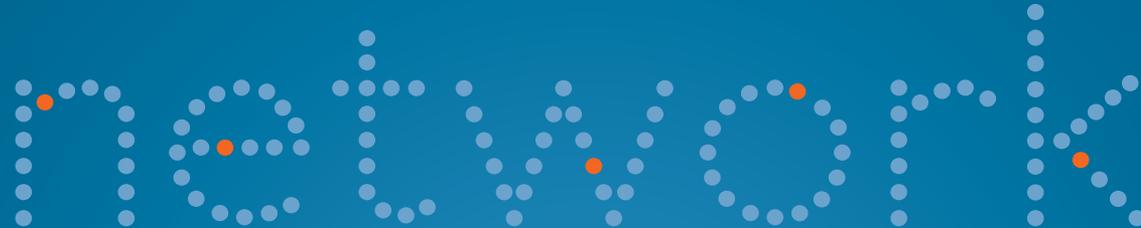
1. ABC's *High Potential*, a critical and ratings hit, follows the sassy Morgan _____
2. "The sum of the Christian life is self-_____"
3. What Synod 2025 encouraged in digital-based ministry
4. A thing to do before every drive
5. CRC that disbanded
6. John _____ stars in the faith-based film *Soul on Fire*
8. Neighborhood kid looking to wash cars for cash
10. The center of the biblical narrative

Across

7. Acronym for a hunger relief effort in Owen Sound, Ont.
9. Dave _____ is author of *Green Street in Black and White*
11. The CRC doesn't have a formal rite for this
12. A baler project helps Kenyan farmers maintain _____ food for their animals
13. One of the places where Edwin de Jong documented mission and relief work
14. School celebrating 150 years
15. _____ Truth is a podcast-style Bible reading guide
16. Where the sun hits the earth most intensely



Solution to the September 2025 puzzle



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PASTOR: Baldwin Street CRC, located in Jenison, MI, is seeking a Christ-led, Scripture centered Senior Pastor. This pastor will provide spiritual oversight and will partner with elders, deacons, and church ministry leaders to guide our congregation. This role also includes inspiring Biblical preaching, empathetic pastoral care, and a passion to shepherd believers in their walk with Jesus. It should be our pastor's goal to perform these duties with godliness, humility, and integrity, all to the glory of our God. Please contact Ray Vandam at baldwinsearch9@gmail.com or call 616-550-8605.

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Church Anniversary

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!

75 YEARS

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta invites you to join them as they celebrate 75 years of God's faithfulness, with a dinner on October 25, 2025. If you would like to attend, please contact the office for more information 403.845.6067/office@rockycrc.ca

Birthday

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

MEDENBLIK, LAMBERT will celebrate 90 years on October 24, 2025. His wife, Martha, and he were blessed with 63 years of marriage before her death in 2022. From Driezum, Friesland to Fulton, IL to Kalamazoo, MI to Fulton again as well as Lantana, FL and now Rock Hill, SC, God has brought him through! Greetings can be sent to 513 Woodvale, Rock Hill, SC 29730.

Obituaries

FEIKEMA, IRENE (SCHAAP) age 100 went home to her Savior on July 21, 2025. She is survived by her 4 children, Brent (Wanetta), Mary (Doug, deceased) Vander Woude, Milo (Cheryl), Colin (Darla), 13 grandchildren, 24 great grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her husband Frank and son-in-law Doug. With thanksgiving to God for a life well lived.

SEERVELD, CALVIN GEORGE (1930-2025) was an outspoken advocate for understanding and appreciating the aesthetic side of life. His lectures and books encouraged many to engage the arts in critical thought, religious settings, and everyday life. Cal was married to Ines Naudin-Ten-Cate (1931-2021) for 65 years. A memorial in his honor will be held 11:30am on 9/13/2025 at Willowdale CRC in North York. The proceedings will be streamed: <https://www.youtube.com/user/ChristianStudies/live>

VANDERWERP PRINS, GERALDINE age 105, of Grand Rapids, formerly of Holland, MI, was welcomed into the arms of her Savior on

August 5, 2025. She was preceded in death by her husband of 57 years, John Prins; her brothers, Gord, George and Russ; her sister, Helen Daining; sisters in-law Carolyn, Linnie, Kay and Norma Vanderwerp and her brother in-law Edward Yonker, Jr. Jeri is survived by her daughters, Joan (Edward) Stuursma and Rose Prins; her sister Marjorie Yonker and brother Stuart Vanderwerp.

Jeri and John were former owners of Prins IGA in Holland and active members of Maple Ave. CRC. In later years, Jeri was employed at Richmond Studio and Baker Book House, took up oil painting and volunteered at local nursing homes and Holland Hospital. She always looked for the best in others and her kind and caring nature was experienced by all who knew and loved her. Jeri lived her life in praise and gratitude to God.

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The Surprising Benefit of Fasting

The longer I've fasted, the more I've learned that the discipline of fasting doesn't just help me control my appetite for food, but it also helps me control my other physical appetites too.



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

As I Was Saying is a forum for a variety of perspectives to foster faith-related conversations among our readers with the goal of mutual learning, even in disagreement. Apart from articles written by editorial staff, these perspectives do not necessarily reflect the views of The Banner. This article first appeared online Aug. 29 at TheBanner.org.

EVERY KID HAS heard it (or something like it).

"Dad, I'm hungry."

A moment of silence, and then:

"Well, heeeelllllooooo, Hungry. I'm dad!"

What's that verse in Ephesians 6?

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children" (Eph. 6:4a)? Yeah, I'm guilty of breaking that command. A LOT.

Bad dad jokes aside, though, I actually think there's something to that "Hello, Hungry!" line we exasperating dads often trot out.

Confusing Appetites with Identity

The simple fact is that whether we realize it or not, many of us do often reduce ourselves to our appetites. "I AM hungry," we say. Not, "I *feel* hungry." Not, as the corresponding Spanish phrase would have it, "*Tengo hambre*," "I *have* hunger." No, we say, "I AM hungry." It's my essence. It's who I am. It's my *identity*.

Now, when it's a kid talking about food and their physical hunger, that sort of linguistic and mental slip isn't a big deal. But when it's an entire culture, an entire worldview that sees our desires and appetites as core parts of our identity, then it starts to become a bit more problematic.

Take, for instance, our culture's view of sex. When sex becomes another appetite, another desire, and another physical need that we just need to satisfy (which is one of the disordered

ways our culture sees sex), it can easily turn it into something that feels like a core part of who we are, something that defines us, and so, as a result, something that we just have to have, no matter what.

Or take consumerism. "He who dies with the most toys wins," we say. But when the next purchase, the next item, and the next product become must-haves, something we *have to own*, *have to buy*, and *have to possess*, well then we end up possessed by our possessions, identified by the stuff we own, and defined by what we have rather than by who God says we are.

And so, the question as Christians is this: How can we learn to control our appetites (which are natural and originally good, and yet bad when they're out of control) so that we don't end up defined and dominated by them?

The Church's Answer

The Christian church (and other spiritual traditions too, but I'm a Christian, so we'll stick with that) has long had an answer: fasting.

Fasting is how we learn to do that.

Fasting is how we learn to control our appetites.

And that's because fasting is how we learn to disentangle our identity and who we are from our desires, our appetites, and the things we think define us, so that we can instead define ourselves rightly, according to the way God defines us.

Fasting From Food

Now, people talk about fasting in a lot of different ways.

For instance, some people talk about "fasting" as abstaining from things such as social media, certain websites, or even the internet as a whole.



Others will talk about “fasting” as abstaining from problematic habits like criticizing other people or comparing yourself to others. In fact, I myself used to do this. That’s because I used to think that fasting could refer to abstaining from anything, as long as it was something that, by abstaining from it, improved your relationship with God.

But over time I’ve learned that that’s not really fasting. Rather, fasting, at least, fasting proper, is the spiritual discipline of abstaining from food.

And here’s why that’s important:

As helpful as abstaining from other things might be (and it’s actually a spiritual discipline all its own, the spiritual discipline of “abstinence”), it doesn’t help us gain control over our physical appetites the same way that fasting does.

And that’s because fasting, by training us to abstain from and learn control over one of our physical appetites (our appetite for food), actually helps us abstain from and learn control over our other physical appetites as well.

The Surprising Benefit of Fasting

Now, there are a lot of reasons people fast.

For instance, some people fast for health reasons. In fact, it’s actually become something of a secular health trend in recent years. “Intermittent fasting,” people call it, and fitness influencers all over the world seem to be picking up on it.

Others fast for the mental and cognitive clarity it provides. That’s because (and this has been well-documented by a number of scientific studies) fasting has been shown to improve mental focus and acuity, both in the short term and the long term.

But as Christians, the main reason we fast is to strengthen our faith. Fasting teaches us dependence on God, recenters our relationship with him, and reminds us that, more than anything else (even including food), we need him to sustain and strengthen us.

And yet I’ve found that one of the surprising “side” benefits of fasting is that it teaches me control over my appetites. Put simply, the longer I’ve fasted, the more I’ve learned that the discipline of fasting doesn’t just help me control my appetite for food, but it also helps me control my other physical appetites too. For instance, it helps me control my appetite for sex. It helps me control my appetite for sleep. It helps me control my appetite for alcohol. It helps me control my appetite for working out. And so on and so forth.

And as a somewhat impulsive Millennial who was raised in a culture that told me my appetites are my identity and so I should do whatever I want, that’s important. It’s important to learn control over those appetites, to put a cap on them, and to remember that, as much as our culture says otherwise, those appetites aren’t truly who I am.

Rather, who I truly am is who God says I am.

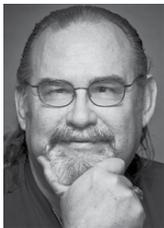
And who’s that? What’s my true identity?

I’m God’s beloved child through his Son, Jesus Christ.

And fasting continues to remind me of that. 

The Neighborhood Entrepreneur

Waxing a car in the hot Arizona sun was miserable work, but he kept at it, covering the car with wax and buffing a nice shine.



Rod Hugen is a retired co-founder of the Village Church in Tucson, Ariz., and disciples and mentors young pastors and leaders on behalf of Classis Arizona.

HE'S 11. A REAL GO-GETTER. He lives two doors down and constantly rides his bike around the neighborhood looking for work.

Maddox wants an iPhone. He's saving up. He told my wife he didn't think his dad would let him buy one, but he was going to save anyway in case dad relents.

Whenever Kathy went out front to water the flowers, he hustled over to ask if she had any jobs he could do. He told her he had a "Price List." He's willing to do anything including washing and waxing cars, helping clean houses, and pulling weeds. When asked how much he'd charge to wash and wax her 1996 Honda Accord, he decided maybe \$200 or so. Kathy told him that was expensive and the professional detailer didn't even charge that much. He assured her he was a good worker and would do a great job. She told him to talk to me.

I said the car needed to be washed and waxed, but I was thinking a lot less than \$200, maybe less than half that amount. We eventually settled on \$100 if he included cleaning the interior. Monday at 1 p.m. was a good time. I told him it would take three or four hours of hard work. "I'm not afraid of hard work, sir. I've been doing it all my life. I'll be here at 1. Dad says I should always be on time."

The doorbell rang precisely at 1 p.m. I uncovered the car for him. "Wow, this car is 30 years old. That's like three of me. You should buy something newer."

He went to work. Careful. Thorough.

He wasn't tall enough to wash the roof of the Honda. I assured him I'd help. He frowned. "I'll have to discount my price since the customer shouldn't have to help. I need to do what's right."

Waxing a car in the hot Arizona sun was miserable work, but he kept at it,

covering the car with wax and buffing a nice shine. As promised, he worked on the interior.

He took a short water break. He'd heard I was a priest. He wondered what it was like being a priest. "You probably don't get to smoke or do dope or drink or swear, right?" I assured him I tried to avoid those things, but that I had also tried to avoid them back when I was his age.

"Was it hard for you?"

"Very hard."

"How did you manage to do it?"

"I had to ask God to help me. I couldn't do it on my own."

"That sounds like good advice. Dad says I should pay attention to older folks when they give advice."

When he finished up, I gave him five 20s. He said I should take one back because I'd had to help him. He proffered the bill. I told him to keep it, that he'd earned a bonus.

He'd taken pictures of the car, both before and after. "I'll show my next customer the quality of my work," he explained.

Les, next door, opened his garage just then. Maddox ran over and asked, "Would you like your car washed? I have a price list and pictures of my work! And you can talk to one of my satisfied customers."

Les asked, "Does he do good work?"

"Absolutely. I highly recommend him."

Les said, "I will keep you in mind. How would I get hold of you when I'm ready?"

"Don't worry, sir, I just live across the street, but I'll be knocking on your door regularly."

He will. Our neighborhood entrepreneur is eager for work. 

Community

The Christian Reformed Church is a community of believers who have decided that we are stronger and can do more when we work together. The 4 agencies, 2 educational institutions, and 3 uniquely Canadian ministries of the Christian Reformed Church are key catalysts in this community, providing support to congregations of any size at any time regardless of their financial means. Whether a church needs help finding a pastor, brainstorming ways to be more accessible to those with disabilities, kickstarting a heart for evangelism and mission, or offering ways to respond to global poverty and disaster, we are here, in community, for you. Learn more.

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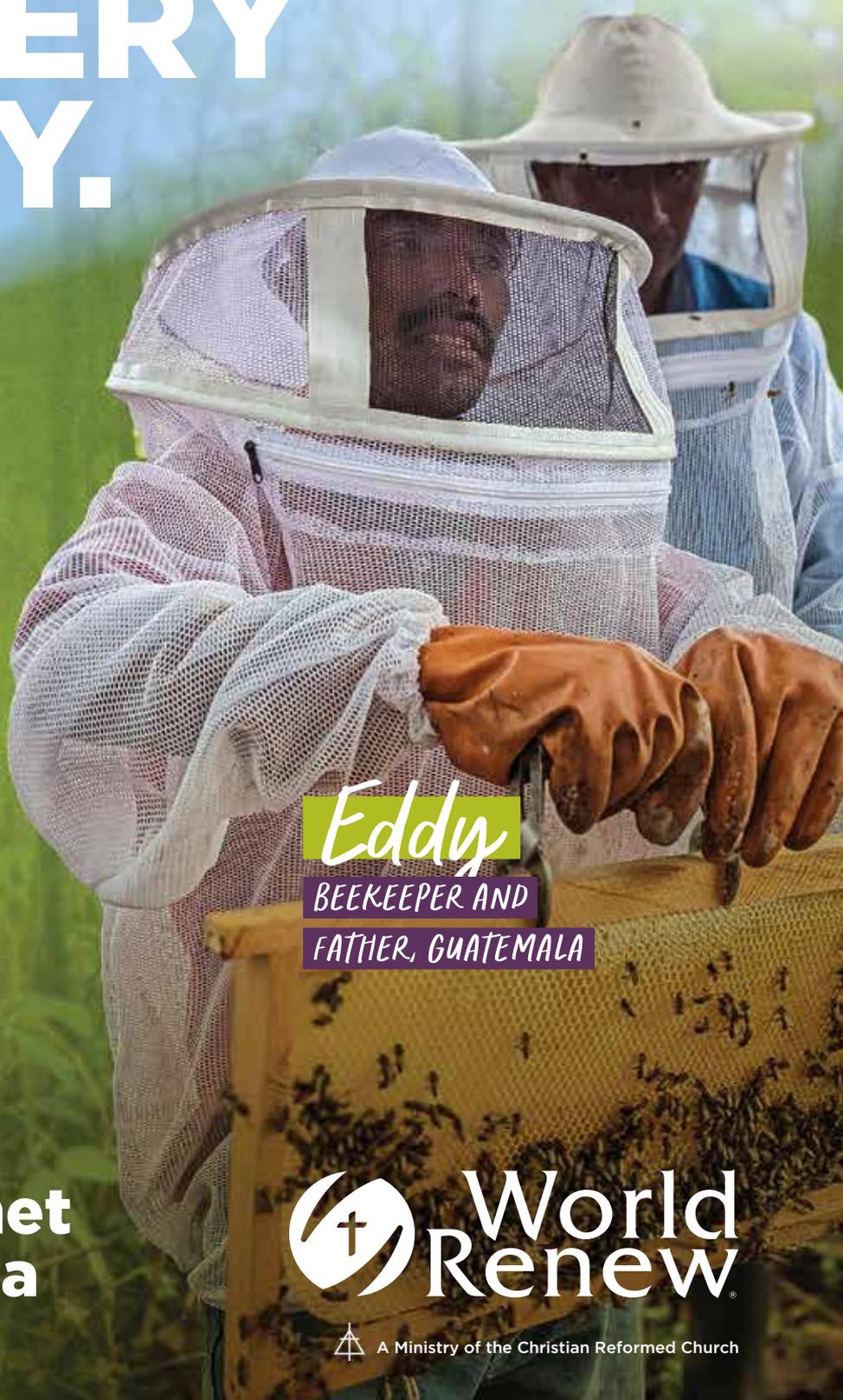
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