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NOVEMBER 2025

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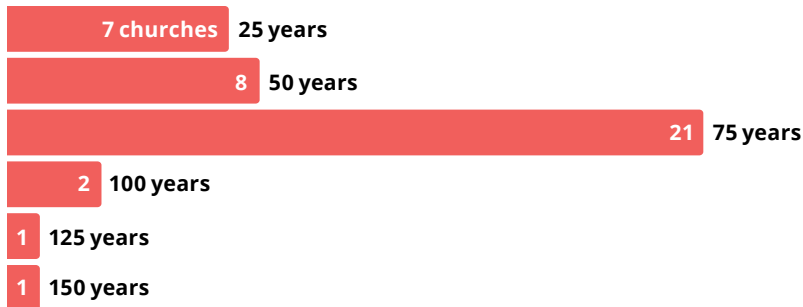


BANNER

BY THE NUMBERS

November has our news editor thinking about birthdays (p. 7), so our infographic this month features church anniversaries in 2025. From Ajax, Ont. (25 years), to Grand Rapids, Mich. (100 years), Kelloggsville, Mich. (150 years), Lynden, Wash. (125 years), Norfolk, Va. (50 years), and Zeeland, Mich. (75 years), 40 congregations of the Christian Reformed Church celebrated significant milestones this year. Thanks be to God for his providence to these ministries. Find the church names at crcna.org/yearbook/anniversaries-churches,

Happy Anniversary!



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: Attacks on Christians in Nigeria Sow Fear
- » Music: *Songs About Jesus* (Deluxe Edition), by Olivia Lane
- » Documentary: *Music by John Williams*
- » Book: *When Salley O' Malley Discovered the Sea*

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The Church Behind Bars: 20 Years of Redemption and Restoration

Troy L. Rienstra // Healing trauma was the new frontier.



Filling our Worry Boxes with Peace

Linda Hanstra // Jesus said, "Do not worry."



Faith Matters: Glory Stories

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema // The people we meet highlight God's glory.



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Corrections

» The town of Sunnyside, Wash., was misidentified (two instances) in the story "Pastor Encourages Daily Bible Reading With Text Prompts" (October 2025, p. 17).

» A Big Question in the October issue should have said that Scott Hoezee is the director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary.

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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On Birthdays

It's right to
remember and
commemorate
the things
God has done.



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

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.

FALL HAS ME THINKING of birthdays. Mine and my two siblings' are within a month of each other in October and November. Last year, a significant round number for me, had me wanting to spend it with them—a rare treat since we live four Canadian provinces apart. This November, as I take my turn for a guest editorial while *The Banner* continues to seek an interim and then long-term editor, the theme seems appropriate.

As Reformed Christians we mark the “birthday” of the Reformation on Oct. 31. It's a recognition of the turning from error, reassessing handed-down tradition, and reestablishing Christ-centered devotion.

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation was in 2017, the year I started as a news editor at *The Banner*. I remember my pastor donning a birthday hat in the pulpit, and I'm pretty sure he blew one of those streamer noisemakers as a perhaps tongue-in-cheek response to the encouragement of Synod 2017 that churches commemorate the occasion.

Growing up I had a classmate who didn't celebrate her birthday or Christmas. Her family were Jehovah's Witnesses, and I recall thinking the reason for the lack of particular commemorations was a verse in Galatians admonishing the practice of “observing special days and months and seasons and years” (Gal. 4:10). I remember wondering as a child if this was indeed correct—was it wrong in God's eyes for me to favor my own birthday over other days God had made? Was it wrong to enjoy being celebrated with my friends and family?

No. I've since learned that that passage, and others such as Rom. 15:5, is about the practice of Sabbath and a correction for those overly concerned about maintaining the seventh day observance rather than the first day—Lord's day—gravitated to by the early church.

And Jesus demonstrated celebratory tendencies: the wedding at Cana, feasting and not fasting with his disciples, and joyously taking children onto his knees. Sounds like a party to me.

It's right to remember and commemorate the things God has done. Congratulating parents on the birthdays of their children is a recognition of the good gifts of God, his blessing of life. When my children were baptized, our church gave us candles marking their new life in Christ. We were encouraged to help our children remember their baptisms, perhaps lighting those candles every year. Marking anniversaries of churches, ministries, movements of the church, or statements of faith help us recall together God's faithfulness, promises fulfilled, the blessing of the work of past generations given to the glory of God.

There's an opportunity for that this year with the Nicene Creed, 1,700 years old. *The Banner* included a feature on the creed in February; Synod 2025 used the occasion “to commemorate and celebrate the doctrinal clarity” in the creed; and the Office of General Secretary compiled a series of resources for churches to teach the Nicene Creed.

Calvin University and Calvin Seminary celebrate 150 years this academic year, and *The Banner* has a significant birthday coming up too—160 years since it was first published in New Jersey by the Rev. John Y. De Baun. As a publication founded to illuminate truth, its continuation for roughly two human lifetimes is a gift to be cherished. Happy birthday! 

Annual Funding Update:

We're 75% to our annual goal. Your gift today is urgently needed to close the gap! Please donate now at thebanner.org/give/! In Canada? Please call 888-827-5272.

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THE BANNER



REPLY ALL

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

Maddi's Bracelet

I enjoyed reading Andrew de Gelder's column about the bracelet he wears to remind him of a spiritual insight ("Maddi's Bracelet," June 2025). Many years ago, I picked up a small stuffed rooster at a craft store. It sat in my window above the kitchen sink for years, reminding me that there is always forgiveness and love. Peter might have cringed when he heard that rooster crow, but it was a reminder that we can always go back to the Lord. That rooster also nudged me to forgive others despite the pain they caused. The rooster will crow, and we can start anew. Over the years the sun beat down on that guy, and he began to disintegrate. He was finally laid to rest, but each day as I worked at my kitchen sink he reminded me that forgiveness is not lost forever.

» Janet Beldman // Dorchester, Ont.

Ecclesiastes

I was pleased to see an article praising Ecclesiastes ("The Most Underrated Book of the Bible," online). I was, however, sadly disappointed in Rev. Aaron Vriesman's failure to check whether Ecclesiastes actually declares that everything is "meaningless." It does not. In Hebrew, Ecclesiastes claims that everything is *hevel*, that is, "a breath," "wind," "vapor," or, as James 4:14 has it, "a mist." "Meaningless" is an abstract, modern word that badly misrepresents this metaphor about life used in Ecclesiastes and elsewhere in the Bible. It robs the book of its poignant realism, which speaks also to the suffering of Christians. Ecclesiastes describes the human condition and its God-given limits. It teaches us humility,

so that we will "fear God and keep the commandments" (12:13).

» Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, professor of biblical studies, emeritus, at Eastern University // Ottawa, Ont.

In Memoriam

Your January/February 2025 issue carried news of the passing of Rev. Louis Tamminga. It deeply saddened me. "Bro Louis" was a true mentor and father figure to me for many years. He authored a devotional series on the heroes of the faith, which appeared in *Today* several years ago. I wrote to *Today* expressing my appreciation for this series, and, to my surprise, Bro Louis responded. From then on, we exchanged letters. ... He and a group of friends paid my tuition for classes with Reformed Bible College (now Kuyper). And he shared his life, his own faith and trials. He became a spiritual father to me. If I demonstrate any maturity or effectiveness as an elder among my prison brethren, it is because God lavished his grace on me through Bro Louis.

» James Doyle // Miami, Fla.

Empathy

I very much appreciated (then-)editor Shiao Chong's answer to a question asking if there can be a "sin of empathy" (Big Questions, March 2025). It amazes me that anyone can be concerned about too much empathy or excessive compassion (synonyms for love), especially today. As the editor answered, Christ stressed concern, compassion, and empathy on numerous occasions while he was on earth. And not only is the New Testament full of admonitions to show kindness, welcoming, and empathy to sojourners

or prisoners, so is the Old Testament replete with God warning against lack of empathy for anyone in need. Thank you for your thorough and kind reply to a puzzling question.

» Nola Latta // Oak Forest, Ill.

Your editorial on empathy completely missed the point of the current empathy discussion. It is not whether we should have more or less empathy. The discussion centers on the abuse and weaponization of empathy to drive opinion and policy in a destructive direction.

» Dirk Start // Holland, Mich.

I had never heard of empathy being considered sinful before reading it mentioned by Shiao Chong in his editorial and the Big Question in the May 2025 issue. In these writings, the words empathy and compassion seem to be used interchangeably. This led me to pursue a word study to discover the differences between "empathy" and "compassion." I find it very helpful in discussions for all parties to clarify the meaning of a word choice, so that everyone has the same understanding when the word is used in the conversation, to avoid assumptions and miscommunication. After better understanding the differences between these two words, I searched Scripture to read the context surrounding when (if any) these words were used. It allowed me to better answer "Did Jesus model empathy, or compassion?"

» Nicole Strampel // Sarnia, Ont.

The Spiritual Discipline of Showing Up

Dear Readers: In light of the reduced amount of ministry shares *The Banner* will receive, we're on a faith-filled journey to become fully reader supported by 2027. That means *The Banner* will be completely sustained by people who value trusted, thoughtful Christian journalism—like you.

We will also reduce our print frequency as a cost-saving measure. Beginning January 2026, *The Banner* will publish six issues: January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December. Readers can expect to get their copy toward the end of the previous month. For example, the January/February issue will be delivered in late December.

We will continue to regularly publish online at thebanner.org. To make sure you are notified about what's new, sign up for the weekly update at thebanner.org/signup.

In Christ's service,
The Banner staff

As I Was Saying

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

- » Unspooling
- » How to Read *The Banner* for All It's Worth
- » Why Has Canada Embraced Euthanasia?

WE'VE BEEN TALKING about the spiritual disciplines at the church I serve. You know, those historic practices of the Christian faith that monks, nuns, and your great-grandma Jean are famous for?

As part of that, we recently wrapped up a four-week sermon series on the historic Christian disciplines of solitude and silence. Contrary to popular belief, solitude and silence aren't just disciplines for introverts and burned-out overachievers. Instead, they're disciplines for all of us to cultivate intentional time and relationship with God. That's because, according to one definition, solitude is "spending time alone with God," and silence is "calming or stilling our souls in our time alone with God."

In other words, solitude and silence are disciplines that help us experience an intentional encounter with God.

And so (especially since I knew I'd be preaching about them), I've been trying to practice these disciplines in my own life. Two days a week I wake up early, before anyone else in my house, make some coffee, and then sit in the dark and quiet, trying to spend time in solitude and silence with God.

I'll be honest: the results are mixed.

Sometimes my practice of solitude and silence is amazing. That's because I feel like I'm surrounded by the presence and peace of God, like he's talking directly to me, and like I'm being filled up and more energized by him than the coffee I'm drinking.

Then there are, well, other times—times I don't feel like anything is happening, times I fall back asleep, and times I wonder why I'm up so early and doing nothing in the dark by myself.

Yet one thing I'm learning about the disciplines of solitude and silence

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(and the other spiritual disciplines as well) is that the most important part of practicing them is simply showing up. Whether they always go the way I want them to, accomplish what I'm expecting them to accomplish, or feel the way I want them to feel, I'm realizing that I need to keep doing them, keep practicing them, and keep trusting that God is doing something with them, even when I don't realize what it is.

And that, I'm realizing, is a discipline all its own. I'm starting to call it "the spiritual discipline of showing up."

If you'd like to read more about the disciplines of solitude and silence, two resources I recommend are the chapters on each in John Mark Comer's book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* and Adele Ahlberg Calhoun's book *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*. Both offer accessible overviews for how these disciplines work and how normal, everyday Christians can use and practice them. 



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



The Church Behind Bars: 20 Years of Redemption and Restoration

By Troy L. Rienstra

Twenty years ago I wrote an article called “The Church Behind Bars,” sharing what it looked like to find faith, hope, and community within the walls of a maximum-security prison. Ten years later, I followed up with another reflection, tracing the roots of transformation and the ways God was continuing to move behind bars and beyond them. And now, twenty years from that first piece, I offer this: not just another update, but a testimony to the enduring power of grace, healing, and community.

When I first wrote in 2005, I was still serving a life sentence. I had already spent years in solitary confinement, years searching for identity and meaning beyond the labels the state had given me. I had begun to study the Word, to pray earnestly, and to lead others toward the same spiritual renewal I was just beginning to taste. The church we built in that prison wasn’t made of stained glass or polished pews. It was made of repentance, reconciliation, and radical vulnerability. It was gritty. Raw. Real.

By the time of my second article in 2015, I was preparing for release. God had opened doors I never thought would budge. I had worked alongside Calvin Theological Seminary to help create a groundbreaking in-prison degree program—though I wasn’t able to enroll myself, I helped pave the way for others to pursue theological education behind bars. I had co-founded the Life Change Group—a powerful, in-prison initiative that invited community leaders, CEOs, mayors, and even NFL players into the prison to speak with men who were starving not for freedom, but for meaning. We read over 100 books in that group, discussed the hard truths of life, and confronted ourselves. It wasn’t just church. It was discipleship. And it was radical transformation.

In 2016, I walked out of prison after serving 22 years. But the real journey—the one I want to share with you today—was what happened next.

My release was not the end of my story; it was the beginning of another chapter. I was stepping into a world that didn’t know what to do with formerly

incarcerated people who had dreams, who were healed, and who were called.

In those early months I faced rejection, mistrust, and the weight of stigma. But I also found something else: purpose. I became the director of outreach for Safe and Just Michigan, then the development director for Nation Outside. I helped lead a statewide campaign that reformed expungement laws in Michigan, affecting over 3 million people by giving them a path to clear their records and reclaim their futures.

In Genesee County, I was deputized by Sheriff Chris Swanson as part of the IGNITE program, a groundbreaking effort to reimagine education and rehabilitation in jails. In 2025, I was officially reappointed to a second term as a deputy sheriff in that same program. From prisoner to deputy. Only God.

But the greatest accomplishment hasn’t been political or professional. It has been deeply personal: learning how to heal. Learning how to feel. Learning how to grieve what I lost—and how to forgive.

One of the hardest truths I had to accept after prison was this: I had been free for years, but I was still reacting to life like a man in survival mode.

Everything felt like a threat. I struggled with trust. I misread people. I would shut down or lash out when I felt unsafe. It took me a long time to name what it was: trauma.

That realization birthed something new: a program called *PTSD+ME*.

PTSD+ME is a 12-week trauma recovery curriculum built specifically for people who have experienced incarceration. It doesn't just define trauma. It walks people through it—from origin to ownership. It teaches emotional regulation. It helps people trace their triggers, rebuild their relationships, and reclaim their narratives.

Through CODA, the nonprofit I cofounded, PTSD+ME has now been piloted in multiple Michigan counties. The early data tells a powerful story:

- » Over 88% of participants report experiencing trauma before incarceration.
- » Seventy percent experienced trauma before age 12.
- » Nearly 80% report not having a safe person to talk to after release.

We are in the process of creating the first national trauma and incarceration impact report based on this data. And we're using it to educate state leaders, corrections administrators, and faith communities on what healing really looks like.

The church behind bars saved my life. But what I've come to see is that the church *beyond the bars* needs saving too.

Too often our churches on the outside talk about grace but are uncomfortable when grace shows up wearing a

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record. We say we believe in second chances, but we hesitate to give someone with a felony the mic, the keys, or the trust.

Yet in Scripture we see God use the broken, the imprisoned, the dismissed. From Joseph to Paul, from Moses to the man on the cross next to Jesus—our faith is rooted in redemption stories.

So I say this gently, but boldly: if your church doesn't know how to embrace the formerly incarcerated, it doesn't yet know how to fully embrace Christ.

I still believe in the church. I believe in its power to restore, to reconcile, and to rise up as a voice for justice and healing.

And I also believe we need to go deeper than we are—much deeper. Not just in welcoming people home, but in walking with them through the trauma, the confusion, and the hard questions that come after the cell doors open.

Prison doesn't prepare a person to live a new life. That's the hard part. A person coming home has to learn to quiet the storm within them—the storm that keeps them hypervigilant, anxious, and overwhelmed after entering back into a world that doesn't look the same as when they left it.

We need churches that host trauma healing circles. We need churches that

create mentorship pathways. We need churches that listen first and preach later. We need churches to come alongside people and help them learn what healing looks like.

We need churches that understand discipleship isn't just about doctrine—it's about restoration. It's been 20 years since I first wrote those words: *The Church Behind Bars*.

Since then I've been transformed. I've buried loved ones. I've started over more than once. I've been disappointed. I've been amazed. I've sat with men who still have life sentences, and I've stood on stages in rooms I never thought I'd be allowed to enter.

But through it all I've held onto the same truth: God doesn't waste a story.

Not mine. Not yours. Not the man still in prison. Not the woman trying to raise her kids after serving time. Not the pastor who doesn't yet understand reentry. Not the policymaker who needs to be educated.

None of it is wasted.

So I write again today to say this: the church behind bars is alive. And the church outside the bars? She's being called to rise.

Let us rise together. 



Troy Rienstra is a justice reform advocate, PTSD+ME creator, and executive director of CODA. He serves as deputy ambassador to Sheriff Chris Swanson and is a Church of the Servant member and ministry developer.

BIG QUESTIONS

Relationships

I just dropped my child off at college. I'm not coping very well, and I sense that my child is not either. What can I do?

This is a big change for a family. As a college professor, I get a front-row seat to campus visits, move-in day, and the difficult goodbyes. What I also get to observe is how students adjust once parents leave to go back home.

The students who seem to adjust well are confident their parents are doing OK too.

When we drop our children off to preschool for the first time, we're taught to demonstrate warmth and confidence. As soon as the child sees our anxiety, the child feels it too. The college transition seems to have a similar dynamic.

With four children of my own in elementary school, I understand that the bond we have with each of our children is different given their birth order, sex, and even how their personalities either clash or connect with our own. I anticipate the college transition will feel quite different with each of



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

my children. The truth is, though, we as parents can sometimes become too emotionally enmeshed with our children as we age and they develop. We can idolize them and their achievements, and their identity becomes ours. As your role changes, you might want to consider that your adolescent might be filling a void in your life that might be better filled with intimacy with Christ and your spouse.

Raising our children to be confident enough to consider moving out of our house, much more, far away is a sure sign you have done a good job developing confidence and security in them. You should be proud of yourself that they want to be independent.

The college years shape and develop young adults in incredible ways. Be their prayer warrior, fill their pantry when you come visit, and remind them of how proud you are of them. See this as an opportunity to rearrange the roles you have in your home: take on new hobbies, spend special time with your spouse or your children left at home, and try to enjoy this new part of your journey.

Trust that God and his people will watch over them, just as you've always prayed and done.

Tara Boer, LISW, is a professor of social work at Dordt University and a licensed mental health therapist. She is a member of Hope Christian Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa. Website: drtaraboer.com

Faith Formation

When prayers are not answered the way we want, how do I help my child understand?

Children sometimes can think of prayer as a way to present God with a list of things they'd like God to do. This makes sense because, in Philippians 4:6 we read, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

The Bible is full of instances of people asking God for help. There are powerful examples of answered prayer from Abraham and Sarah praying for a son to Jonah praying in the belly of a big fish. But there are also instances where the requests were not granted, as in 2 Samuel 12, where David pleads for the life of his son, who subsequently dies.

How do we make sense of these varying stories? Here are two things that might help children understand prayer better. First, remind them that God does not promise us that things will

be easy or that things will go the way we want them to, but that, no matter what, God holds us firmly in his hand and will bring grace into brokenness. Think about the story of Joseph in the Old Testament. Many awful things happened to Joseph, but as Joseph later says, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20). Help children see how God is at work in difficult times.

Finally, teaching that prayer is more than just requests can be helpful. The ACTS acronym, for example, reminds us that adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication all belong in our prayers. Those words will likely need to be unpacked for children (perhaps as love, sorry, thank you, and please) but knowing that prayer is talking with God and not just asking for things is an important part of learning to pray.

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

Ethics

Are Christians obligated to observe Sunday as the Christian Sabbath?

Christians sometimes vigorously debate what is appropriate to do on Sundays. Is it permissible to go shopping or eat at a restaurant? To play sports? To do homework? To mow the lawn? Do I have to go to church?

Behind such questions is the assumption that Sunday is the Christian Sabbath and regulated by the Fourth Commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy... On it you shall not do any work” (Ex. 20:8-10). While the Fourth Commandment refers to the seventh day as the Sabbath, many Christians believe the New Testament changed it to the first day of the week. This belief goes back to the English Puritans, whose influential Westminster Confession of Faith explains, “from the resurrection of Christ, (the Sabbath day) was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord’s day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath” (WCF 21.7).

Reformed Christians are often surprised to discover that John Calvin and other early Reformed theologians did not view Sunday as the Sabbath. Their view appears in the Heidelberg Catechism, which explains that Christians experience the “eternal Sabbath” by resting in Christ “every day” and by worshipping with God’s people, “especially on the festive day of rest” (Q&A 103).

The “festive day of rest” was the Lord’s Day, the day Jesus rose from the dead and on which Christians have been meeting since New Testament times. And yet the Heidelberg Catechism avoids calling it the Sabbath, in part out of deference to the Apostle Paul’s warning in Colossians 2:16-17, “do not let anyone judge you ... with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”

Paul’s warning suggests that it is inappropriate for Christians to debate what is permissible to do on Sundays, as if Sundays were the Christian Sabbath regulated by Old Testament law. Rather, we should encourage one another to pursue our Sabbath rest in Christ, with special devotion to gathering together for worship on the Lord’s Day, following the example of the New Testament church: “not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).

Matthew J. Tuininga is professor of Christian ethics and the history of Christianity at Calvin Theological Seminary. He lives in Wyoming, Mich.



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

CRC Work Crews from Michigan Help With Post-hurricane Repair in N.C.

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A team of 12 volunteers from Messiah Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Mich., spent a week in western North Carolina in August, repairing homes that were significantly damaged when Hurricane Helene ravaged the region in September 2024. Two other Hudsonville congregations sent a team of 20 youth and 20 adults to the same region in June.

“We saw God’s hand working in ways that we didn’t think were possible,” said Kim Bosscher, who organized the Messiah CRC trip.

The team, whose members ranged in age from 13 to 67, traveled close to 750 miles (1,200 km) to Hendersonville, one of the communities hardest hit by Hurricane Helene.

Bosscher said she wanted to help in the region’s recovery after seeing news reports in February about the damage that remained months after the hurricane. After talking to the youth group leader at Messiah about what she wanted to do, Bosscher was asked if she would organize a trip.

She reached out to World Renew, the CRC agency that has conducted countless disaster relief missions over the years. World Renew connected Bosscher with Baptists On Mission, which was already on the ground in Hendersonville and other western North Carolina communities, helping residents rebuild.

The team from Messiah worked on one 102-year-old home during the week, repairing trim, painting, wiring outlets, building a deck, and installing new flooring.

Bosscher said the team felt warmly welcomed by both Hendersonville residents and Baptists on Mission. At the worship service the team attended at First Baptist Church in Hendersonville, “They couldn’t thank us enough for what we were there to do,” Bosscher said. “We



Eric Bolt from Messiah Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Mich., cuts trim at a work site in Hendersonville, N.C.

said you don’t need to thank us, because this is what the Lord wanted us to do.”

Bauer CRC and Immanuel CRC in Hudsonville worked with Adventures in Missions, another organization working in western North Carolina. Their combined team traveled to Asheville, N.C., about 25 miles (40 km) north of Hendersonville.

Bosscher said the communities need a lot of help and is making plans to have a team from Messiah CRC return to Hendersonville in 2026.

—Greg Chandler

Young Adult Conference Joins ‘Moving Forward in Faith’



Worship leaders at the 2023 Pursuit Conference at Zion CRC in Oshawa, Ont.

Pursuit Conference, which ran for two years in Oshawa, Ont., is teaming up with Resonate Global Mission and Diaconal Ministries Canada for 2025, connecting its vision “to help young adults in their pursuit of God and God’s pursuit of them” with the second annual Moving Forward in Faith conference. That conference aims to equip and empower attendees “as they consider God’s mission in their lives and communities.”

Martin Spoelstra, pastor of Discovery Church in Bowmanville, Ont., who helped to develop the Pursuit Conference in 2023, said combining the two seemed like a good idea. “This way,” he said, “the young adults will get exposure to the (Moving Forward in Faith) conference and some workshops, but also have a time of worship and (networking) of their own.” Combining efforts could also give each conference more exposure, he said.

Adam Hoogsteen, an elder and worship leader at Discovery Church, developed a love for organizing events and connecting people during his years growing up in the church’s active group of young people. Now married with young children and part of the congregational leadership, Hoogsteen discerned that there was very little focus on young adults who might be questioning their faith and their relationship with God. Sharing his concerns with Spoelstra, the two men prayed for opportunities to minister to young adults, and Pursuit Conference was the result.

Pursuit Conference’s six-person organizing team included members from four different congregations of Classis Quinte. In 2023 and 2024 the conference met at Zion Christian Reformed Church in Oshawa. Moving Forward in Faith in 2024 met in Burlington, Ont. The joint conference for 2025 is Nov. 14-15 in Oakville, Ont.

Steve Kooy, campus ministry chaplain at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ont., was the 2023 Pursuit Conference keynote speaker. This year he’s presenting a workshop with a panel of Queen’s University students on how to reach their generation with the gospel. Danielle Strickland, a Vancouver, B.C.-based author and podcaster with Right Side Up, is the keynote speaker for the 2025 Moving Forward in Faith conference.

—Ron Rupke and Alissa Vernon

Church Begun in Protest Celebrates 100 Years

Established in 1925 as a breakoff group from the Christian Reformed Church, what became known as Grace CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich., celebrated its past and continuing ministry on Sept. 4.

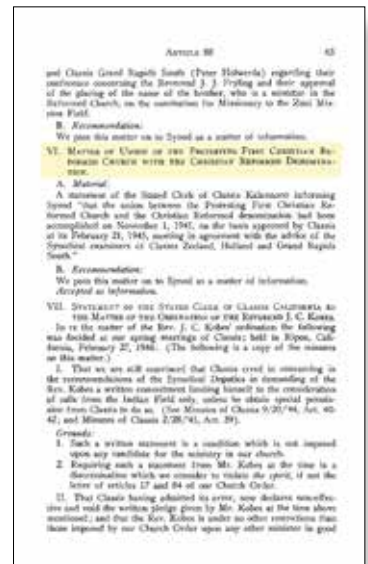
Originally called the Protesting First Christian Reformed Church, it was a breakaway from First CRC of Kalamazoo. First CRC pastor Henry Danhof contended that the Three Points of Common Grace adopted by the Christian Reformed Synod of 1924 were false doctrine and he continued to preach “that God’s grace was for His people alone,” according to a 2009 account of the history in *The Standard Bearer* (seventh installment, volume 86, issue 04).

Danhof was “deposed from office, illegally, by Classis Grand Rapids West ... (and) the same classis had appointed another minister to lead the worship services of the First CRC of Kalamazoo,” according to Andy Lanning’s account (sixth installment, *The Standard Bearer*, volume 85, issue 20). Danhof and a majority of the congregation formed the Protesting First Christian Reformed Church, which 20 years later rejoined the Christian Reformed denomination.

The congregation renamed itself “Grace” between 1946 and 1947. There have been nine pastors since Danhof, starting with George Gritter in 1947. Adam Eisenga joined Grace CRC as pastor in July 2023.

Eisenga said about 250 people attended the Sept. 4 celebration dinner, held at the Air Zoo Aerospace and Science Museum in Kalamazoo. Grace CRC’s typical attendance is about 175. The evening included playing recorded interviews by 15 church members who spoke about the impact the church has made on their lives.

—Sarah DeGraff



Synod 1946 acknowledged the “union between the Protesting First Christian Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed denomination.”

Chicago South Racial Reconciliation Committee Suspends Its Work

Citing “a perceived lack of support from classis,” members of the Chicago South Racial Reconciliation Committee declared the committee’s work suspended in a report to the fall meeting of Classis Chicago South. “Because classis has constituted this committee,” the committee noted, “it is up to classis to decide to reactivate or eliminate the committee.” At the Sept. 17 meeting, classis received the report for information.

The report detailed some of the committee’s history, attempts to fulfill its current mandate, and frustrations with lack of engagement.

“Over its term, a variety of congregations were represented on the committee and various activities have been organized. The committee appreciates those congregations that responded to its efforts by attending the unity services and by following the suggestion of a preaching series based on biblically founded synodical report ... ‘God’s Diverse and Unified Family.’ We are thankful that most pastors preached a series of sermons on the significance of ethnic diversity and harmony. We are disappointed that our unity services, and especially the February 2024 Racial Reconciliation Forum, that we thought were crucial, were sparsely attended,” the report reads. “It seems to the committee members that overall there has been little interest in and support of the work of the committee.”

The report notes particularly that the committee received only two responses to feedback it requested after a confessional liturgy it was mandated to write did not go over well at classis.

“In response to comments made at the February 2025 meeting of classis, the committee sent out a communication soliciting reactions and possible changes to the liturgical confession. ... Also, the committee emailed a questionnaire to the councils of classis to attempt to

understand the congregations’ expectations for the committee. Only two responses have been received from representatives of church councils in Classis Chicago South to either of those communications,” the report reads.

That is from a classis of 14 organized congregations, though three of them—Center Grove Church, Roseland Christian Ministries, and Hope Christian Reformed Church—have now disaffiliated from the CRCNA. Two more Chicago South churches are in the process of disaffiliation, one of which is Pullman CRC.

Tim Toeset, a member of Pullman CRC, chaired the Racial Reconciliation Committee until its suspension. He noted the committee has included members from a variety of congregations but became “somewhat heavily represented from Pullman” in recent years. “That’s not odd since the originating overture (in 2021 to form this committee) came from Pullman and the issues are ones that Pullman people care about deeply.” Other active members at the time of suspending the committee’s work were from Hope, Roseland, and Grace Community churches.

Earlier Reports to Classis

In reports included in the September 2024 and February 2025 meeting minutes of Classis Chicago South, the Racial Reconciliation Committee observed a potential disconnect with its work attempting to call out and repent of racially motivated sin.

The February 2025 committee report presented a Litany of Confession and requested “a response from the delegates to classis about holding another Unity Service.” The minutes note that “classis offered feedback,” but do not record what the feedback was. Stated clerk Cal Aardsma said it’s not unusual to leave such feedback out of classis minutes “because any single suggestion should not be viewed as a decision—or

even opinion—of the entire classis.” He recalls delegate responses to that committee question, including suggestions such as “alternate times, dates, locations, format, etc., to improve the attendance and effectiveness of such efforts at any future Unity Service.”

In its report in the September 2025 agenda for Classis Chicago South, the committee observed, “Declaration for imperative confessional adherence to another matter has gained prominence, denominationally and classically. It seems it is easier to call people to confessional obedience and demand discipline when the issue seems not to affect one personally. However, calling for confessional submission and discipline when it may involve a sin one is connected to, is far more difficult to deal with and easier to disregard. Given the duplicity involved in the current climate of confessional submission, the committee members have no desire to continue in this effort under the auspices of Classis Chicago South.”

Toeset said committee members “intended to communicate that we are not giving up on the concept of racial reconciliation. What shape that will take, we have not determined.”

Aardsma noted that because the majority of the Racial Reconciliation Committee members were part of churches that have or are in the process of disaffiliation, classis was left with a committee without members. Despite that being the case, Aardsma said the classis interim committee “is hopeful that Classis Chicago South will continue to find ways to pursue unity across the racial diversity within our region.”

—Alissa Vernon,
News Editor

Noteworthy

World Renew, the Christian Reformed Church's agency for global development and relief, announced Peter Timmerman as its new executive director for Canada this fall. Timmerman started in the role Oct. 27, succeeding chief marketing and philanthropy officer Mike White, who served as interim director since January. A former Southern Africa team leader with World Renew, Timmerman has more than 30 years of experience in international development, including with World Vision and CODE, a global literacy NGO. Timmerman is a member and pastoral elder at New Life CRC in Guelph, Ont. He will co-lead alongside World Renew U.S. director Carol Bremer-Bennett.



Philip Vinod Peacock will be the next general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, to begin in the role in February 2026. The WCRC announced the appointment Sept. 9. Peacock had been serving as the communion's executive secretary for justice and witness.



Aaron Kuecker, former president of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill., has stepped down from that position to serve as the CEO at Hope Chicago, a nonprofit scholarship venture. The school's board of trustees announced Sept. 4 that **Jeanine Mozie, executive vice president and chief operating officer, will serve as acting president.**



East Leonard CRC Marks 100 Years



East Leonard Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., welcomed the community to its picnic anniversary celebration.

East Leonard Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., marked its 100th anniversary in October with the theme, "We praise God for His Faithfulness."

The Oct. 18 and 19 celebrations included a community picnic with carnival games and other activities open to the congregation and the wider public. Some of East Leonard CRC's former pastors attended the Sunday worship service, including Terry Slachter (2002-2012) and Gerry Heyboer (2008-2021). Pastor Zach Olson (2013-2021) sent a video of congratulations and blessing from his current church in Florida.

An anniversary celebration committee chaired by Steve Oosterheert prepared an anniversary book with a historical account of the church and various articles and memories submitted by the congregation.

Paul Jeltema, 95, is East Leonard CRC's oldest lifelong member and is still attending worship, Pastor Ben Gandy said.

Over the next year the congregation looks forward to replacing the parking lot prayer tent with a permanent structure to host its ongoing prayer outreach, a fruitful ministry that has been blessing the community since 2020.

—Anita Ensing Beem

Appointments to Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry Committee, Other Actions

The Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, including eight new members and one just-appointed interim delegate, met Oct. 8-10 at Cascade Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

The Council is made up of delegates appointed by synod from each of the 49 classes (regional assemblies) of the CRC and up to 10 at-large members who serve up to two three-year terms. It meets three times a year to serve as the denomination's ecclesiastical governance body, acting on behalf of synod, the CRC's broadest assembly.

In May the Council approved forming a new advisory committee for Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry, hoping to "listen to the perspectives of CRCNA members and leaders of different ethnic cultural backgrounds about their engagement within our denomination's ecclesiastical system and advise the Council of Delegates and its committees on policies and activities that will increase participation."

This is the growing edge of the Christian Reformed Church, with 82.8% of emerging churches (yearbook data as of September 2025) identifying themselves as "multiethnic" (19.3%) or a specific ethnicity other than "Caucasian/Anglo." Those percentages flip for organized churches—75% of those identify as "Caucasian/Anglo" in the yearbook survey data; 10.2% multiethnic; 8.4% Korean; and the other 6.5% one of 11 different ethnic identity categories, including Native American/Indigenous, Hispanic/Latino, Chinese, African-American, and Filipino.

Andre Van Ryk, the Council of Delegates' vice president; Linda Van Sligtenhorst, from the Council's governance committee; Debra Jallim, from the Resonate Global Mission committee; Christian Pederson, from the ReFrame Ministries committee; Doug Fakkema, from the Thrive committee;



Nine new members joined the Council of Delegates at the October meeting. Pictured: Gregg Lawson, Canada-at-large; Felix Fernandez, Classis Southeast U.S. (interim until appointment by synod); Jeff Blamer, Classis Kalamazoo; Wendy Werkman, Classis Alberta North; Lee Himbeault, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan; Linda VanSligtenhorst, Canada-at-large; Mike Bekendam, Classis Hamilton; Bryan Dick, Classis North Cascades. Not pictured: Henry Lane, Classis Atlantic Northeast.

and Rachel Bouwkamp, from the synodical service committee, will all serve on the inaugural Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry committee, which is expected to meet at least twice in the 2025-26 ministry year. General secretary Zach King, who is an ex officio member of the committee, said they would try to convene within the next couple of months. According to what was decided in May, King is to invite a slate of up to six guests "from among the preceding year's synodical delegates who represent the diversity of the CRCNA from the United States and Canada" who will provide the needed feedback to the Diaspora and Ethnic Ministry committee.

The Council of Delegates revisited an updated report from its task force to address governance costs. At a special video conference meeting in September, the Council accepted two of the task force's three proposals to pass on to Synod 2026 for consideration.

The task force presented one revised recommendation at the October meeting, which the Council accepted. The task force was dismissed with thanks, and the **final report will be included in the Agenda for Synod 2026 with the following recommendations: "that synod meet on a biennial basis—every two years—beginning in 2027"** with specific provisions for changes "to the candidacy process, the process for approving key denominational leadership, and other matters that are currently handled by synod annually"; **that the Council of Delegates "draw attention to the costs of synod and Council of Delegates meetings—transportation, food, lodging, venue—and ... encourage classes to consider payments to the denomination as they are able to help offset those costs"; and that "synod establish a one-year task force, working in close coordination with the classes, to review the current classis structure and make recommendations to Synod**

Director of Partnership Administration Hired

2027 for classis consolidations and/or overall restructuring.”

The Council of Delegates also wants **synod to note: Thrive’s completion of materials to support congregations and classes navigating various aspects of ministerial release from service; a request to add a paragraph to the Guide for Conducting Church Visiting that identifies “church visitors’ role in situations where conflict is present”; the suspension of the published index of synodical decisions**—believing the ease of searching for and accessing past synodical decisions “can be accomplished today in (technological) ways that make better use of staff time and financial resources”; and a **request to ratify amended articles of incorporation for the CRC Loan Fund that permit lending not only to congregations but also “to CRC-related organizations.”** The Council accepted the amended articles “subject to the Loan Fund not closing a loan to a CRC-related organization until synodical approval.”

The Council **approved “Founded on God’s Faithfulness” as a guiding theme for prayer and worship for Synod 2026.**

In preparation of having a vision, strategy, and financial proposal for church planting ready for Synod 2026, the **Council of Delegates heard an update from Tim Sheridan, Resonate Global Mission’s director of church planting.** Noting that “church planting is often the fruit of discipleship,” Sheridan said they want to center the conversation on discipleship and multiplication. We want to look upstream from church planting and ask “what’s the plan to prepare and multiply leaders?” Sheridan said. Delegates contributed by working through reflection questions.

The Council’s next meeting is scheduled for Feb. 4-6, 2026, convening by video conference.

—Alissa Vernon,
News Editor



Roberta Vriesema is the new director of partnership administration for the Christian Reformed Church in North America, announced Oct. 10, after a successful interview with the Council of Delegates. Vriesema has been an at-large Canadian member of the Council since 2022.

Sharing about her background as a child of missionaries in Bangladesh who moved to Canada at age 14, Vriesema said she had an early dream of being called as a missionary, but learned that “it doesn’t matter what we do, we do it to the glory of God.” She said in all the positions she’s held in governance and administration, the longest with the Christian Labour Association of Canada, she valued and appreciated the development of relationships. “I

enjoy writing policy and getting into details, working with teams and holding the sanctity that we are all beloved children of God.”

The Council of Delegates approved the director of partnership administration job description in May and an eight-member hiring committee conducted its search process over the summer.

The role replaces that of chief administrative officer, filled by Shirley De Vries since November 2022. De Vries intends to retire in mid-January. Vriesema begins Nov. 10.

While CAO was an executive-level position, the director of partnership administration isn’t. Julie Cruickshank, director of human resources-Canada, said it’s common to reevaluate the needs of a role any time a vacancy is expected in a position. “That process resulted in the decision to change the job title to more accurately reflect the needs for the denomination going forward.”

The job description includes responsibility for coordinating synodical decisions to the agencies and institutions of the CRCNA; partnering “in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of the CRCNA Ministry Plan as well as the Ministry Shares program;” overseeing the budget of the Office of the General Secretary; and ensuring that “the joint ministry planning system advances the priorities in the CRCNA Ministry Plan through the relevant ministry agencies and partners in Canada and the United States.”

That’s an aspect that Vriesema is especially looking forward to. “I love the art of negotiation and mediation” she said, and sees working through the joint ministry and service agreements that govern the denomination’s binational ministry as tools to solidify “partnerships and build relationships so that we can do the work before us that God has called us to do.”

Michael TenHaken, Council of Delegates president, said Vriesema was “overwhelmingly approved by this body” to the role, which will be based in the CRCNA’s Burlington, Ont., office.

Vriesema’s home church is Community CRC in Dixon’s Corners, Ont. Her work as director of partnership administration will also take her to the Grand Rapids, Mich., ministry support center as often as monthly.

—Alissa Vernon,
News Editor

IN MEMORIAM

*Rev. Chung Choo Cho*

1936-2025

Rev. Chung Choo Cho was a devoted servant of the Lord's church. His life served as an example of dedication and integrity, inspiring countless individuals through his passion for the gospel. Though soft-spoken, his resolute character left an indelible mark on all who knew him.

In his almost 45 years of ministry, Rev. Cho's central pastorate was the Pilgrim Church in Las Vegas, Nev., where he faithfully served and oversaw the successful construction of the church building before retiring.

Following his retirement, Rev. Cho resided in New York with his oldest son, where he remained an active member of the East West Church of New York in Bayside Hills, N.Y. He served there for 23 years giving support to the church's pastoral counseling and care ministry.

Rev. Joseph Changguk Byun fondly remembers Rev. Cho for his dedication to Scripture, which brought him profound peace, gratitude, and inspiration. Rev. Cho also participated as an officer in regional gatherings of retired Korean pastors.

Rev. Cho was predeceased by a daughter, and he is survived by his wife, Cho So Soon; two sons; and 10 grandchildren.

—Jonathan Kim

Multiplication Network Expands

The Multiplication Network, started in 2000 by Christian Reformed missionary John Wagenveld, recently moved to a bigger Zeeland, Mich., office to accommodate expansion. Working in diverse locations including Spain, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Cambodia, the network's vision is "to see a healthy church representing the Kingdom of God in every community." It currently trains Christian leaders in 72 countries.

Multiplication Network dedicated its new office space on Aug. 18. "We outgrew our space, and we needed more space to handle the growth that we're experiencing globally," Wagenveld said. There is a local team of about 12, 23 total workers in the U.S., 100 around the world, and another 350 global partners. Because "we're in over 70 countries, the work is getting more and more complex. We're doing all this training out and all this reporting in, so we need to have a little bit more of an office culture to be able to sustain this amazing growth that's taken place the last few years."

Wagenveld, who is a member of Pillar Church in Holland, Mich., grew up in Argentina as the son of a missionary pastor with Resonate Global Mission, formerly known as Christian Reformed World Missions. He later became a Resonate missionary himself, serving in Puerto Rico for seven years. That's where the Multiplication Network got its start.

Wagenveld was teaching in a Reformed seminary and got a request to start doing church planting boot camps in different parts of Latin America. From there he was recruited to work at Bible League International, an 85-year-old institution making God's word accessible globally. Before long a group of four men from different denominations "put our strengths together to try to start these trainings on holistic church growth and on healthy church planting" in what was then a volunteer-based Multiplication Network. After about 10 years operating this way, Wagenveld said Resonate and Bible League of Canada provided grants, and the network was able to grow.

"We started with 200-300 church plants, and the next thing you know more people were



John Wagenveld, founder and president of Multiplication Network.

asking us for training. Then we had 500 church plants that got started, then 1,000, and then 2,000, and the Lord just grew it and grew it," Wagenveld said. In 2024, 14,531 new churches were globally planted in "verifiable ministry"—a category Multiplication Network uses to confirm a "church" is not just in name only but active with monthly reports and continued participation in the leadership training.

Multiplication Network uses a model-action-reflection style of training—a modular way of learning—to equip church leaders in 12 steps over the course of a year, allowing them to teach new church leaders in an incremental fashion.

"It's just been incredible. It's a lot of work but, also, we've seen God's blessing through it all," Wagenveld said. "Our vision for 2030 is to have 20,000 churches started each year."

—Kristen Parker

Classis-wide Worship Circle Focuses Generations on Fruits of the Spirit

Arek O'Connell, outreach and young adult pastor at Hillside Community Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., sees the monthly Worship Circle gatherings in Classis Grand Rapids South as a movement of the Spirit that has slowly matured into the central piece of ministry by the classis for emerging generations.

"Open to everyone who is seeking a moment to connect with God and others," the circles offer "a space for all who are longing for community and peace," the Grand Rapids South e-newsletter says. "Whether you're looking to find stillness or deepen relationships, these evenings are for you."

Funded by the classis's Emerging Generations Classical Committee, the Worship Circle gatherings are hosted by a different congregation each month (except December) on the second Sunday evening. Gatherings are led by O'Connell, whose gifts are teaching and preaching, and musician and worship coordinator Dave Jansen, on staff at inSpirit Church in Byron Center, Mich.

O'Connell said 11 of the classis's 16 churches have hosted so far. Each gathering has a similar structure. "There's always a band and there's always a theme" focused on one of the fruits of the Spirit, said O'Connell. They sing three songs, have a five- to 10-minute Scripture meditation reflecting on the question "What does God expect from us?" and then testimony time specific to the theme. "It's always the highlight of our night," O'Connell said of hearing from each other how God has revealed and worked through that gift of the Spirit—kindness, goodness, love, peace, patience, etc.—in their lives.

Worship Circle gatherings have used this pattern since September 2024, after O'Connell says Hillside Church sought to make the worship experiment they'd been testing for two years more sustainable. "We value accountability for the



From the early bare-bones days of Worship Circle at Hillside Community Church, February 2023.

long term, so that a project is not person-specific," O'Connell said.

Because he didn't have musical gifts to contribute, O'Connell worked for a year with a musically gifted Hillside intern and then another year "bare bones" with just a projector and YouTube videos to bring up songs participants requested. "That year was a pretty special year," O'Connell said of young people being vulnerable and learning together.

About that same time Classis Grand Rapids South was looking to do something different with its committee strategy. Noticing that the divisions of "established churches" and "new churches" might not fit where they now saw ministry opportunities, classis joined those committees to form one ministry to emerging generations. Under that committee, Worship Circle "is the cornerstone collaborative event in our classis," O'Connell said. It's accompanied by an evangelism training day four times a year.

O'Connell said they've seen Worship Circle attendance as high at 80, but an average of about 40 people attend each event. The August Worship Circle

at inSpirit Church had people from five different congregations. While they want to be open to spontaneous sharing and deeply emotional worship, O'Connell said planners and participants are mindful to "not get lost in emotional reaction." When he first did this at Hillside, they referenced a passage from 1 Chronicles 13—proper reverence and celebration over the Ark of the Covenant—as a foundational text for a bifocal approach to God: celebrating his faithfulness and revering his holiness.

Rachel Hansz, 26, who attends Hillside Community Church, described how the intimacy of the gatherings drew her back, even after she temporarily moved five hours away. "I keep coming back to Worship Circle because of the genuine love for God and connection I feel there," she said. "I moved out of the area to Ohio for about a year and a half and when I was able, I made the drive to come to Worship Circle. ... (It's) where I am with my family, my brothers and sisters in Christ. It allows me to grow closer with the Lord and truly feel his presence."

—Alissa Vernon



How Young People Are Shaping the Church

By Kristyn DeNooyer, Thrive

The future of the church is already being lived out in the lives of young people who are stepping into ministry, leadership, and service with fresh energy and vision. Across congregations, campuses, and mission fields, youth and young adults are reimagining what it means to be the church in today's world. Their stories reveal a common thread: a desire for authentic community, a passion for service, and a willingness to bridge generational divides in pursuit of a more faithful, welcoming body of Christ.

Faith on Campus

For Abby Lobert, the journey to leadership began in familiar spaces in her youth: family, church, and Christian schools. In her early 20s, she was also deeply connected to Act Five, a partner of Resonate Global Mission in Hamilton, Ont. Lobert now serves as the CRC campus minister at Mohawk College (also in Hamilton), and sees firsthand how pivotal young adulthood can be in shaping faith.

"I know some of the unique challenges and opportunities that come with young adulthood, especially during school," she explained. "It's a critical time when young people wrestle with their identity and their faith. I was in their position not too long ago, so I want to give back and create space for students to encounter Jesus in the context of Christian community."

Campus ministry happens at schools across the continent and is supported by local classes, churches, and Resonate Global Mission. Campus ministers are creatively supporting young people to be Christ's ambassadors in all fields of study and work. Campus ministry is uniquely positioned to keep the church outward-looking, Lobert said. "School campuses offer a fresh perspective on what is going on in the world, and paying attention to students in these environments can help to inform how the church uses its resources."

Her vision for the church is drawn from the words of Ephesians 3: that believers would be "rooted and established in love" and grasp the fullness of Christ's love. For Lobert, young people will be central in carrying that vision forward. "Young people have the creativity and passion to be part of this work of restoration," she said. "In order for these gifts to flourish, it is important for them to be part of small communities of meaning, where they can practice participating in

Abby Lobert was part of Act Five in her 20s and now serves as the CRC campus minister at Mohawk College so she can help young people shape their faith.



In her local church, Sierra Kruisselbrink serves as youth director, host team coordinator for SERVE projects, and on the worship team. She also traveled to Europe recently with Generation Spark.

the restoration of the land, neighborhoods, and places closest to them."

Building Relationships that Matter

While Lobert's ministry centers on campus discipleship, Sierra Kruisselbrink lives out her faith in her congregation, where she serves as youth director, host team coordinator for SERVE projects, and a member of the worship team. Recently, she also traveled to Europe on a leadership development trip to observe church plants with Generation Spark, a shared ministry of Thrive and the Reformed Church in America.

Generation Spark works to build authentic intergenerational relationships between 16- to 24-year-olds, such as Kruisselbrink, and spiritual mentors in their churches. For Kruisselbrink, the experience has been life changing. She said leadership has been less about titles and more about authenticity.

"Faith became more genuine when I started stepping into leadership roles and discovering how God was using me in ways I didn't expect," she reflected. "Leadership isn't about having all the answers, but about trusting God and being willing to embrace the uncomfortable challenges that come with being a Christian in today's world."

Her hope for the church echoes a theme that many young people return to: authentic relationships. "Genuine relationships are crucial before you can step into tough

conversations and wrestle with hard questions about faith," she said. She dreams of congregations that are safe and inviting, where people can come as they are and ask difficult questions without fear of judgment.

Young people, Kruisselbrink added, are especially equipped for this task. "They have the chance to invite friends, coworkers, and classmates into youth and young adult communities to have honest, grace-filled conversations. They can reflect Christ in the way they live out their faith and help shape the future of the church."

Hope for the Future

Following a recent World Renew discovery trip to Nicaragua, young participants spoke about how service shaped their understanding of God's kingdom and their hopes for the future of the church.

For Imani Richmond, from Grand Rapids, Mich., the trip was an extension of a spiritual legacy. She honors her late grandmother's memory by sharing the Word with others her age, even outside church walls. She sees a uniquely impactful faith formation role for her peers in the digital space, noting that "social media gives young people a powerful platform to share their voices, express their faith, and show others why they believe."

Sol Coupethwaite, a participant from Montreal, Que., recognized the significance of seemingly small acts of service: "I was struck by how small projects, when combined, can create a big impact." Coupethwaite hopes to see new members joining the church and believes young people will be vital in keeping the church alive by actively becoming part of it.

Cassidy Strangway, another trip participant from Ajax, Ont., discovered her gift for caring for children is a meaningful calling that allows her to invest in the next generation, and Jaimes Titterington, a participant based in Lake Stevens, Wash., expressed hope for more young people to join the church. "Young people will strengthen the church simply by being present in it," he reflected.

Zhaniya Robinson, from Grand Rapids, Mich., also hopes the church will continue to grow in size and impact while remaining a welcoming place. She expressed a desire for young people to be given opportunities to grapple with real-life issues and challenges in a faith environment. "Youth can play a role in the church by being taught more about giving, stewardship, and difficult or 'taboo' topics," she said. She appreciated when her pastors hosted a panel for young adults to discuss generational challenges and called it an



World Renew discovery tour participants from left: Cassidy Strangway, Ray Heeres (group leader), Sol Coupethwaite, Michelle Ehinlaiye (group leader), Imani Richmond, Zhaniya Robinson, and Jaimes Titterington. (Not pictured: Mia Forslof.)

important step for their congregation in bridging the gap between generations.

A Common Vision

Though their contexts vary, each of these young leaders shares a unifying vision for a church that is relational, inclusive, and rooted in authentic discipleship. They are shaping the church by showing up, serving faithfully, and envisioning what could be.

As Lobert reflected, the future of the church lies in communities fixing their eyes on Jesus and joining him in the work of restoration. Young people, she reiterates, are especially equipped to bring creativity and passion to that mission. And as Kruisselbrink noted, before you can wrestle with the hard questions about faith, you need genuine relationships.

The stories and insights of each of these young leaders remind us that God is not finished with his people. The church continues to be renewed day by day. **B**

Paving a Healthy Way for Future Generations

IN GUATEMALA, about 46% of all children under the age of 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition. Not only does this affect a child's physical and mental health in the short-term, but it can also have long-term cognitive, social, and physical effects. Talking about nutritional issues and raising awareness about the importance of pregnancy care and care in the early years of a child's life can help parents avoid these effects.

Maria Rufina Mantanic Ajqui, 25, is a housewife and mother of three children. She lives in the community of Chuaferro. This year, Maria's community began to receive training in maternal and child health from volunteers trained by World Renew.

Concerned about the well-being of her children, Mantanic Ajqui was excited to learn about the training and activities being promoted in her community and began to actively participate in each of the meetings.

"I heard that ladies with children under 2 years old were receiving instruction to help the health of their children," Mantanic Ajqui shared. "My baby gets sick a lot, and every time he gets sick, he loses a lot of weight. So I went, and I became very interested."

Mantic Ajqui has learned about nutrition and why early stimulation is very important. She also learned about full-time breastfeeding and more. Mantanic Ajqui says she is happy she got involved with this program.

"We have learned many new things about how to take care of our children. They teach us how certain activities can develop motor skills in our children. We talk about nutrition issues, hygiene issues, and many other topics. I hope to continue learning more because I have realized that there is a lot of information that I didn't have



Everyone in the household benefits from a healthy, delicious variety of ingredients at mealtime.

and that I could improve my children's healthcare in that way," she said.

The young mother added that before attending the classes, she did not know about the importance of prenatal care. "In none of my three pregnancies was I as careful as I should have been, and now I know the consequences that this has on my children's health," Mantanic Ajqui admitted.

"Now I have to take better care of them and, thanks to the workshops, now I know that food should be a priority for my children so they grow up healthy. I also pay more attention to food preparation and hygiene. My baby was very underweight, but at the last check-up, I could see how he has been improving."



Nutrition classes offered by World Renew Guatemala equip women to cook healthier meals.

Mantic Ajqui said she gives thanks to God for this new knowledge. "I pray a lot for the people involved in this project, for the pregnant women, and for the children in my community," she said. "I know that God is the one who has opened this space so that we can teach future generations." And those future generations offer hope for a healthier future. **B**

The View From Here

One Generation Discipling Another

A FEW MONTHS AGO I was sitting in church on a Sunday morning when the testimony of a young man, who was professing his faith, enthralled me. A critical part of the story he told about why he was drawn to become a confessing member was the relationship he had with an older Christian man in his workplace. God used the care and the conversations with this mentor to lead the young man into a deeper relationship with Jesus.

That moment reminded me of the famous discipleship trifecta in Acts. It all began with an obscure brother named Barnabas. We don't know much about Barnabas, other than he was a wealthy Jew from the Mediterranean island of Cyprus. In Acts 4, Barnabas was in Jerusalem providing for the material needs of the early church. In Acts 9, Barnabas took Saul, a former persecutor of the faithful and a recent convert, under his wing. After fruitful ministry in Jerusalem, Barnabas sent Saul back to his hometown of Tarsus.

Sometime later, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch to serve the growing and vibrant church there. Upon his arrival, Barnabas didn't waste any time before finding Saul in Tarsus and bringing him back to Antioch to support the work. From Antioch, the church sent Barnabas and Saul on a missionary voyage to Cyprus and Asia Minor (Acts 13:1-3). Having completed his discipleship of Saul, Barnabas then receded into the background as Luke's primary focus shifts towards Saul—now known as Paul—beginning in Acts 13.

In terms of making disciples, Paul was prolific. Timothy, however, held a special place in his heart. Paul encountered Timothy on his second missionary journey in Lystra. Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman and a Greek father. Timothy became Paul's



Photo by Ryan Stefan on Unsplash

What does discipling the generations look like in your local congregation?

constant traveling companion and is his co-author for six New Testament epistles. In 2 Timothy 4, near the end of his life, Paul offers Timothy a final instruction that has been an encouragement to pastors for the past 2,000 years: "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction."

What would have happened if Barnabas didn't respond to God's nudge to befriend and disciple Saul, the infamous Pharisee and enemy of the church? What would have happened if Paul would have focused exclusively on his evangelistic enterprise and not mentored Timothy (or Silas, Luke, Onesimus, John Mark, and others)?

At minimum, three generations of disciples would have been lost. Instead of growing, the early church could have stagnated and might not have spread to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The importance of robust discipleship across the generations is one of the critical lessons that came out of the Gather initiative, in which leaders and members of all 49 CRC classes across North America participated (see crcna.org/gather). The goal of Gather was to witness how God is renewing the congregations of the CRCNA—and witness we did.

In each of 10 events, CRCNA folks shared stories of how more mature believers disciplined newer believers in their congregations. The result of "discipling of the generations" was waves of healthy growth—evangelism, the development of new leaders, and fruitful connections between churches and communities locally and globally. In fact, discipleship is so important that it is the second milestone of the CRCNA's ministry plan (see crcna.org/OurJourney).

So what does discipling the generations look like in your local

'It Sounded Fun to Try'

congregation? Many of the historic discipleship practices used by CRCNA congregations make a positive impact: catechism instruction, profession of faith classes, youth groups, and mentoring programs, for example. These tend to pair younger believers with older adults and are an important part of congregational ministry.

However, through the Gather experience we learned that intentional relationships through regular, in-person conversation between believers at different faith stages is also necessary and effective. Through these kinds of relationships, Christian brothers and sisters literally “do life together,” applying Scripture and prayer to the daily joys, challenges, and temptations that are part of the Christian journey. Mutual growth is almost always the outcome!

I sometimes ask myself the question, “What lasting impact would God like me to have on his kingdom?” Would it be to leave behind good sermons, a compendium of leadership insights, or a rich addition to the church’s theology? No. If God wills it, I would like to leave behind brothers and sisters who have, by God’s mysterious grace, grown in faith because of the life we have shared together—one generation discipling another. 



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.

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WHEN GABE (age 11) sees the large microphones and the recording console, he is excited and determined to get to work. “I love how I am in a real studio, recording like a professional artist!” he said. His drama teacher recommended him, and his audition recording got him the job.

Kids Corner, a program of ReFrame Ministries, was making a new mobile app and needed child actors to record voices for the welcome tutorials. The app will give kids and families a fun space to practice daily devotions.

Acacia (age 11) joined the recording session at Calvin Seminary, Reframe’s temporary studio. The actors do the voices of the Casey’s Day comic strip characters. These characters appear each week in the Kids Corner’s weekly devotional and are the main characters in the app. Acacia plays Casey and Gabe plays Milo.

As she got started, Acacia’s bright and cheerful sense of humor began to show. “How can I say no to voice acting?” Acacia said, “It sounded fun to try. I have an interest in acting and thought it would be a good start for me.”

The following week, in Hamilton, Ont., Joy (age 10) played Sophia, and Claire (age 11) played Grace. “It’s cool doing this because kids everywhere learning about the Bible on this app will hear another kid like them,” Claire said.

“Doing voiceover work is as much about acting as if they were in front of a camera,” said Audio Editor Michael Earls. “Their enthusiasm, excitement, and professionalism made them a joy to work with. You can hear their excitement, and I think the kids on the app will appreciate the guidance from the kids.”

Kids Corner partnered with app developer Pageworks to build the app.



Gabe enjoyed having the opportunity to be a voice over artist for ReFrame’s Kids Corner app.

Reframe Ministries sees the devotions with the app as a way to encourage children’s daily devotion and prayer life, as well as a path toward growth in knowledge, wisdom, and a deeper relationship with God.

The app is almost finished and is now being tested by families. Reframe Ministries hopes to release the app in early 2026. “I hope it helps people become closer to God through the app,” Gabe added. “I would encourage anyone to give it a try!” 

—Ron VandenBurg,
ReFrame Ministries

Preparing Well

MIKE LIANG came to Calvin with a clear goal: to prepare to become a doctor.

One year in, his goal hasn't changed, but he says Calvin's liberal arts education is giving him a broader perspective with direct value-adding benefits to his career path.

"Calvin's approach to education is preparing me well. For example, my professors have recommended I step out of my comfort zone, which for me was science," said Liang. "Both of my pre-med advisers encouraged me to try a communication class because as a doctor I'll need to not only present evidence but also communicate with my patients well."

Out of Comfort, Into Opportunity

So Liang took a communication course in which he not only learned valuable skills, but he also wrote and delivered a speech that was nominated by his communication professor, Kathi Groenendyk, for the Norton Speaker's Prize. Liang's persuasive speech was on food waste, in which he tried to persuade his audience to take tangible actions to reduce the amount of food waste at Calvin's dining hall. While the judging continues, Norton asked Liang for permission to include his speech video in their collection of exemplary presentations.

"Since I've been at Calvin, this has not happened in an oral rhetoric class," said Groenendyk. "Most textbook publishers choose examples from much larger institutions. I believe this is a unique honor."

"I never thought a chemistry student would have his speech included in a textbook. I didn't see how those things fit together," said Liang.

Equipped with Skills that Enhance Any Career Path

But Liang is seeing how the soft skills he's learning through his liberal



Mike Liang is finding the liberal arts education he receives at Calvin University helpful in many ways toward his goal of becoming a medical doctor.

arts education directly apply to his field of study.

This past summer at the end of his internship at Van Andel Institute in downtown Grand Rapids where he did cancer research, Liang had to give an oral and a poster presentation.

"I was able to use the skills I learned in Comm 101 to clearly outline what I was going to talk about in a way that communicated science in simple language for those who are not as familiar with my field," said Liang. "I feel trained in how to talk to people well, to present clearly and concisely, and that will help me in the future."

Student Preparation Impresses Industry Professionals

The principal investigator for Liang's research project was impressed with his presentation and also with how well he was prepared coming in.

"I took an accelerated general chemistry class at Calvin my first semester, and that gave me a step ahead. And then I took analytical chemistry, which exposed me to a lot of different instruments and experimental methods

that were relevant to my research at Van Andel," said Liang. "Calvin's Phage Research program through the biology department taught me valuable lab skills and cultivated my ability to come up with a hypothesis and to design experiments. All of these experiences prepared me well to land the internship."

So, too, did Liang's proximity to his professors.

Surrounded by a Community That Cares

"I received two recommendation letters for my internship from professors who I took both a lab and lecture with. So they could speak to both my lab and scientific skills," said Liang. "I've been blown away by how professors care about us and how they are willing to engage in one-on-one dialogue with us about everything from faith to science to whatever subject."

Liang also found the Christ-centered community among his peers and professors to be particularly formative.

"The best thing about my experience so far has been living on the honors floor and the community that is here. I didn't expect my floor to be this vibrant and this engaged with challenging topics. We have discussions late at night," said Liang. "And I didn't expect the professors to be this vibrant, engaging, enthusiastic about what they are teaching."

"The communities I found at Calvin exceeded my expectations. Being at a Christian college is so important because you have such in-depth faith dialogues with your roommates, floormates, and profs," said Liang. "Students with such busy lives sit down and have meals together and talk about Jesus." 

—Matthew Kucinski,
Calvin University

Training The Next Generation of Ministry Leaders

"WHEN I WAS LOOKING for a seminary, I was looking for (one) that was pastorally relevant, academically rigorous, and community grounded," said Sam Ha, a student at Calvin Theological Seminary. "When I was considering Calvin, a cloud of witnesses told me their experiences. And all their stories led to those three things."

Ha is one of more than 300 students studying at Calvin Seminary this year. This includes residential, online-only, hybrid (who study mostly online but are present on campus for short periods of time), and certificate students. Each of these students feels called to ministry in some form, and their time at CTS is helping them figure out what that might look like.

"There is a lot about seminary that is challenging," said Evie Dykhouse, also a seminary student. "I really appreciate that at Calvin Seminary you get lots of environments to practice. To me, youth ministry is incredibly stretching, but I get to practice it. I get to try it out and see if that is something I have gifts in and passion for and, if not, I try something else."

And this vocational journey is supported by peers and faculty.

"We have a really awesome community here," student Leah Jolly said. "People are deeply caring and deeply loving." She added that the faculty "believe in what we are doing and what we students are here for."

Dykhouse said two classes that particularly stood out for her recently were on spiritual care in death and dying and providing Christian funerals. These are preparing her for pastoral ministry.

"There is so much hurt in the world and so much pain," she said. "I appreciate that those classes didn't try to skirt away from it. As ministry leaders and pastoral care givers, these are the types of things that we are going to see."



Sam Ha is a student at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Those two classes stand out to me for being tangible and real. They gave me the resources I am going to need to do the work I am called to do."

Jolly added that rigorous dialogue in and outside of class has not only been part of her community experience, but it has shaped her for ministry. "I am still deeply Reformed and anchored in Scripture, but I am also able to engage in viewpoints that are different from my own in a respectful and charitable way," she said. "Even if I don't agree with someone 100%, I am able to ask 'what can I still learn from you?' and how can that inform my faith, my development, and my journey?"

Ha said that he has grown a lot academically and theologically.

"My theological training has been wide and deep. I have come to know a depth of knowledge but also the breadth of it. I don't think any other place could have helped me that way," he said, adding that the training at Calvin Theological Seminary also emphasized the heart. "I was always encouraged to remember that I am giving my whole self to God, not just my head, not just my body, but the whole thing. That holistic approach will always be in my ministry wherever that may take place." 

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

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

TIME IS A FASCINATING TOPIC. On Earth we often think of it as simple and consistent—a straight timeline. For example, in 1776 the United States was founded. In 1876 we marked 100 years. In 1976, 200 years had passed. And next year, we'll celebrate 250 years. Time seems fixed, and we mark it with calendars and clocks.

But time is more complex than it appears. According to Einstein's theory of relativity, time can actually change depending on speed and gravity. It's not just a straight line—it can bend and stretch based on your perspective.

Einstein offered a simple way to picture this. Imagine bouncing a ball straight up and down one meter. If it takes one second to go up and down, it's moving at 2 meters per second. Now imagine doing the same thing while riding a train at 60 miles per hour. To someone on the train, the ball still moves straight up and down. But to someone standing at the train station, the ball travels in a V-shape because it moves forward with the train while bouncing. From their view, it covers more distance in the same amount of time.

Even though the ball's speed hasn't changed, our perspective of its motion has. On Earth we move too slowly to notice these differences. But in space, things get more complicated.

Take GPS satellites, for example. They orbit Earth and send signals with a timestamp. Your GPS compares its own clock to the satellite's and calculates how long the signal took to arrive. But since the satellites are moving quickly in space—and are farther from Earth's gravity—time actually passes more slowly for them. Scientists must adjust for this time difference (called time dilation) to ensure GPS works accurately.

Time dilation becomes even more dramatic at high speeds. If you traveled through space at three-quarters the speed of light for a year and returned, you would have aged two years—but over three years would have passed on Earth. The faster you go, the more time stretches.

So time is not fixed—it's flexible. That might sound unsettling, but for me it brings peace.

God exists outside of time. He sees everything—your first breath and your last—at once. While we're bound by moments, God is not. When life feels uncertain or confusing, I find comfort in knowing that God sees the full picture and is working everything according to his perfect plan.

So when time feels like it's moving too fast—or not fast enough—remember this: God is bigger than time.

Lean on God. He holds it all, even when, from our perspective, it doesn't make sense! 





Filling our Worry Boxes with Peace

By Linda Hanstra

I don't remember where we first heard of the concept of a "Worry Box," but it was an apt analogy for the worrying tendencies around our home. While I'm typically an optimist—always hopeful and looking on the bright side—my husband balances me out with his concern over things that could go wrong.

People who have a Worry Box become uncomfortable when it's empty. As soon as one concern is quelled, they'll find another to take its place. They often have many worries in their box at once, and things get rough—especially for the optimists they live with—when that box is overflowing.

The Worry Box became our light-hearted way of dealing with my husband's tendency to fret.

"Now that we've replaced the furnace, the next thing that's going to set us back is the roof," he'd say.

I'd smile. "Well, at least you have something to put in your Worry Box. You wouldn't want it to be empty!"

While on our way to a party, "Do you hear that noise coming from the back of the car? I think something is loose."

"Put it in your worry box," I'd say.

While I rib my husband about his Worry Box and call myself an optimist, I'm really no stranger to worry. However, the concerns that weigh on my mind differ from those of my husband. My worries are less about the responsibilities of home maintenance, mechanical issues, and finances, and more about regrets, fears, and my desire to control.

As I struggle to fall asleep at night, I replay conversations in my mind, wondering how I could have handled them more effectively. In recalling a meeting in which a decision didn't align with my wishes, I think, "What could I have said to make things go my way?" Or replaying a conversation with my neighbor, I recall how I was upset and raised my voice. And now, even though I've apologized, she won't speak to me. I wonder, "What else can I do?"

I also struggle with "what if" fears that typically involve injury or illness. What if I get hit by a car while riding my bike? What if I'm diagnosed with cancer, have a stroke, or contract an incurable disease? Or worse, what if my husband or one of my children becomes gravely ill or is injured in an accident?

The contents of my Worry Box might look different from my husband's, but I admit that my box is rarely empty.

Sometimes worrying helps us deal with daily concerns and situations. But if left unchecked, worrying can lead to anxiety—a general feeling of unease, loss of sleep, and other physical symptoms. While these tendencies often come with the responsibilities of adulthood, anxiety also plagues our youth.

Jonathan Haidt calls today's young adults "The Anxious Generation," largely because they are striving to live up to the pressures and false images they encounter on social media. Teens and 20-something adults are overly concerned with their appearance, experiences, worldly success, and how they measure up with others.

Add to that the constant barrage of information we receive on the world's problems—issues such as climate change, threats of war, sudden and extreme changes in governmental policies, or the uncertainty of how artificial intelligence will impact our lives. With so many global issues, it's no wonder that worry and anxiety are our constant companions.

Whether we're facing concerns over finances and home maintenance, regrets over past words or actions, fears of the "what-ifs," pressure from social influences, or dismay over national and global issues, it's not surprising that many of us have Worry Boxes filled to the brim.

Jesus said, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear... Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" (Matt 6: 25a, 27.) He continues, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as

Prayer should
always be our first
line of defense
against worry.

well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt 6: 33-34).

If Jesus were preaching to us today, he might also add, "Don't worry about the rattle in your car, your lack of control, the stain on your new shirt, or the acne on your face." But where do we draw the line between a healthy concern and a sinful worry? And what are Christians to do about worries that come so naturally to us?

Replacing Our Worries with Peace

The concept of a Worry Box can be comforting. It's a place to put our worries—to set them aside and maybe even close the lid on them from time to time. But wouldn't it be better to dump them out, filling our boxes and minds with peace instead? The Bible gives us several alternatives to worry, all of which can be difficult but when practiced, ultimately bring us PEACE.

P: Pray and be **Present**. The apostle Paul wrote these words of encouragement to the church in Philippi: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil 4:6). Prayer should always be our first line of defense against worry. When we

hand our lives—our everyday problems, fears, and regrets—over to God, we give control to him and, in doing so, loosen our grip on fixing whatever ails. Jesus himself reminded us to go to him with our needs: "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9).

Focusing on the present moment through mindfulness practices is another strategy that can work in tandem with prayer. Finding a quiet place allows us to listen for God's voice. Repeating a breath prayer or verse, such as "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10), grounds us, making us aware of God's presence. Rather than fret about the past or future, when we appreciate the present through our senses—what we hear, see, smell, taste, and feel—we will feel gratitude (more on that below) rather than angst. It will also tune us in to God's provision and our dependence on him in every corner of our lives.

E: Entrust your concerns to others by asking for help. We often think, "I can handle this problem by myself." Cultural norms make us believe that asking for help is a sign of weakness. We don't want to embarrass ourselves or put others out.

But over and over, the Bible paints a different picture—one in which God's people reach out for and receive help from others. One example is in Acts 9 where we read about Saul (later called Paul), who loses his sight after his conversion experience. After being blinded, the spirit of Jesus sends Saul to find Ananias, who has been prepared for this encounter in a vision. Jesus tells Ananias how he is to help Saul regain his sight.

Isn't it interesting that Jesus made Saul seek another man's help when Jesus had the power to heal Saul

himself? After all, it was Jesus who had blinded him! Perhaps the lesson here is that God wants us to seek help and advice from others when we have problems or concerns. God works through the people he's placed in our lives and expects us to rely on him through them.

A: Take Action. For many items in our Worry Box, there is a related action we can take to dampen or extinguish the worry. Every step toward a solution or prevention will bring a greater sense of calm.

Are you worried about the unusual sound coming from the rear of your car? Schedule an appointment with the mechanic. Having regrets over words said when you were upset? Apologize and make amends. To fight off fears of illness, schedule routine, preventative medical tests and get recommended vaccines. And to prevent serious injury, avoid risky activities and use safety gear.

Concerned about climate change? Do your part through sustainable living. Worried about the state of your nation? Call elected officials and voice your concerns, join a peaceful demonstration, or volunteer for organizations you are passionate about.

Other actions might be unrelated to the problem but simply relieve our stress. Activities that involve movement—such as walking, dancing, yoga, or kayaking—can be a great stress reducer. If creativity brings you joy, try painting, knitting, writing, or making music. Finally, the act of serving others through volunteer opportunities can help take your mind off your problems by drawing your attention toward those less fortunate.

When our worries seem to paralyze us—keeping us from taking action—we can remember where Paul, in all his struggles, found his strength: “I

can do all this through him who gives me strength” (Phil 4:13). Praying for Christ to give us the strength we need to carry on can bring us through.

C: Control your own narrative rather than letting it control you. Most worries stem from regrets about the past or concern for the future, neither of which we have control over. We can bring peace to our current situation by controlling the narrative we tell ourselves. Rather than ruminate over wrongs we've done or harsh words we've spoken, we can ask forgiveness from God and others. Receiving that forgiveness and reconciliation will help to put the past behind us.

But what about concerns for the future? Though we have little control over what will happen tomorrow, similar past situations might help us through. Did God provide for our needs in the past? Perhaps he supplied even more than we expected. God's care for us in the past can bring confidence about his provision for the future. In the words of Isaiah 41:10, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

We can't change the past or control the future, but we can control the narrative—the story of God's love for us—by focusing on this moment and the things God is doing in our lives today.

E: In Everything Give Thanks. As we focus on the present, we see that we have much to be thankful for in the here and now. Listen to Paul's words again: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil 4:6).

Why do you suppose Paul included the words “with thanksgiving” in his letter? It wasn't as though he had

much to be thankful for. He often wrote from prison or after being persecuted. And yet he said, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances” (Phil 4:11).

Even when our Worry Boxes are full, we can look for God's provision in our lives. If there is a rattle in our car, we can remind ourselves that we have a car. If we are worried about future illness and injury, we can give thanks for the health we enjoy today. When we've done or said things we regret, we can give thanks for the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

As we practice these habits and remember to pray and be present, entrust others with our concerns, take action, control our narrative, and in everything give thanks, we'll find our Worry Boxes are no longer full of worries. Instead, they are overflowing with peace.

Again, Paul's words to the Philippians remind us of this promise we can rely on: “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7). 



Linda Hanstra writes about her empty nest at lindahanstra.com and on Substack. The author of *Empty-Nest Joyride* and *Lent through the Little Things*, Linda and her husband, Tom, attend Church of the Savior in South Bend, Ind.

Livestreaming: More Than Just Convenience

Is this what
online ministry
has become: a
“convenient” way
to half-engage
the church of the
living God?



Nik Schatz is a lead pastor in Virginia Beach and adjunct professor at Lancaster Bible College. He and his wife have two children. He is a mediocre guitar player, avid chess player, and lover of Tex Mex food.

THE LANDSCAPE of corporate worship has shifted with the surge of livestreaming. Shortly after our church launched livestream services, I heard a comment that has haunted me: “I’m so glad our church started offering a livestream! Every Sunday I watch the service in my hot tub. It’s so convenient.” Is this what online ministry has become: a “convenient” way to half-engage the church of the living God?

I know I’m not alone in this frustration. Many volunteers share my exasperation. Every Sunday believers across the globe sleep in, roll out of their beds, and watch church online. Meanwhile, week after week, dedicated volunteers invest their time and energy, waking up early and spending hours on Sundays to create what some perceive as merely a convenient option.

But this is not the whole picture. I would like to share a different story.

Across the Atlantic, in Spain, someone began watching our worship services. A friend of hers had started attending our church. Because we offer an online option, this Spaniard started watching our worship services along with her friend who attended in person.

For almost a year she listened to our sermons and sang along with our worship team. But she now had questions. Eventually she mustered the courage to reach out and ask me a question about one of my sermons. Imagine the surprise of receiving an email from someone so geographically distant. I agreed to meet with her via Zoom.

We began meeting every couple of weeks to discuss theology and Christianity. Over the ensuing months, I walked her through the story of the Bible and the doctrines of revelation, sin, salvation, and sanctification. Then

one day, she made the decision to follow Jesus.

None of this would have been possible without our online ministry team.

Hey, audiovisual Team: you matter! You faithfully show up midweek for rehearsal. You arrive early on Sundays and set up, ensuring every note resonates. You artfully swivel the cameras, framing each shot to guide the experience. You navigate the complexities of software and remember numerous passwords. You work through connection issues with outdated equipment. You are the unsung heroes of an unassuming ministry.

And yes, all this effort provides an easy excuse for a few sleepy parishioners to “conveniently” watch from their hot tubs. But that is not the whole story.

You are the conduit that brings the church to those who cannot attend in person.

To the sick and injured, confined to their homes or beds but longing for connection.

To the outcasts, who will not walk in due to shame or embarrassment.

To the elderly, whose physical limitations no longer allow them the drive.

To the neurodivergent, who feel overstimulated in typical worship services.

To those suffering social anxiety, overwhelmed by the crowds at church.

To those traveling, who still want to participate with their church family.

To those without reliable transportation but longing to worship.

To those exploring faith, yet needing anonymity.

Your ministry reaches people who would never visit in person. And maybe even curious Europeans.

Take heart. Thank you for your ministry behind the scenes. 

Glory Stories

When we allow
the Holy Spirit to
lay the weight of
our neighbors'
glory on our
backs, we will
be changed.



Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer and a member of Covenant CRC in St. Catharines, Ontario.

ON EPIPHANY SUNDAY, offering baskets filled with slips of paper with a word and star on each were passed through the congregation. Our Pastor of Worship, Elly Boersma Sarkany, explained that a star gift, the word we received, might be used by God in the coming year to inspire us on our faith journey. We were encouraged to place the word where we'd see it every day and to be attentive to the Holy Spirit-ordained ways it showed up in our lives.

Because I had participated in planning the service, I was aware the star gifts were going to be distributed. I had prayed that God would lead me to the word he had chosen for me. So I was surprised when I read "glory." What? How would God speak to me through the word "glory," always a difficult concept for me to adequately pin down? How does one even define glory and capture all its nuances?

But wait! Stuck to the back of the paper was another one with "enlightenment" on it. Obviously my perplexity about the word glory and why God gave it to me required enlightenment—Holy Spirit illumination. Did I sense God's humor? Yes, I did! In a basket filled with numerous slips of paper, two slips with two closely connected words stuck together. And they were mine for the year!

So where did glory jump out at me throughout the year? How did the Holy Spirit enlighten me and whisper, "Here's God's glory! Open your eyes! Don't miss it!" to me? In too many ways to count! God enlightened me to his glory in the changing seasons, creation, songs, fiction, nonfiction, devotions, poetry, Bible studies, prayers, and sermons.

And God opened my eyes to his glory in one other way by drawing my attention to people I met on walks in my city.

What did those encounters have to do with my star gifts—glory and enlightenment? The psalmist David offers a hint when he declares that the glory of the Lord is revealed in people: "You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5).

God made me especially aware of people he has "crowned with glory and honor" and who are struggling to find their way, spiritually, emotionally, or financially. Take Gavin*, Dolores*, and Saagarika*, for example.

Gavin is a young man who moved with his mother to my neighborhood several years ago. During that time I'd had a few conversations with him and found him congenial and upbeat. Last summer, he was working outside, and I went to talk to him. It wasn't the first time I noticed the tattoo of ornate script on his arm, words I hadn't been able to decipher. I had never before asked him about it. That day I did.

"What's your tattoo say?" I asked.

"No God. No king. Only man," he answered.

"You don't believe in God?" I asked gently.

Gavin answered, "I look at it this way. I haven't been given the gift of faith yet."

An unexpected answer for sure! I replied, "Then I'll pray that you'll be given it."

Gavin smiled, but didn't say anything in response.

Reflecting on our conversation later, I thought, was that not the glory of the Lord being revealed on my street in a conversation with a spiritually seeking man? Yes, it was! God has crowned Gavin with glory and honor, even though he is most likely not aware of it, and God is seeking him so that one day he, too, may give glory to God.



In the fall I met Dolores as I regularly stopped on my morning walks at a public place. Dolores was always surrounded by bags filled with all her possessions, I presumed—a possible sign of homelessness. The first time I talked with her I asked if she had a place to live. She said she didn't. I asked if I could pray with her. She readily agreed. I prayed that God would provide for her.

As the weeks passed and I regularly met her, Dolores shared snippets of her story. She stayed with a friend every night but had to leave early in the morning when her friend went to work. She had immigrated to Canada when she was a young adult. She had two adult children living nearby, but residing long-term with them was not an option.

When we talked about our faith, Dolores's eyes often shimmered with tears. Once she told me she had been

at a laundromat the day before and found a piece of paper on the floor, possibly from a devotional, which stated that God would always take care of his children and provide all they needed. Despite her circumstances, she knew that was true. I told her I would continue to pray for her, and I asked her to pray for me.

I haven't seen Dolores for a while. Reflecting on my conversations with her I thought, was that not the glory of the Lord being revealed as two of his children met in a public place at his leading and talked about his goodness? Yes, it was! God has crowned Dolores with glory and honor, and she was aware of it even as each day was a struggle.

Gavin. Dolores. And then there was Saagarika, who was occasionally sitting on her porch as I walked past. In several conversations, I heard her story. She is a Christian living with

mental illness, plagued by oppressive voices, addicted to cigarettes, and longing for freedom. Reflecting on our conversations, I realized once again that the glory of the Lord was revealed as she shared her burdens with me. Whatever the outward circumstances, no matter her daily battles, Saagarika, too, is crowned with glory and honor as she calls on the Lord for healing and victory.

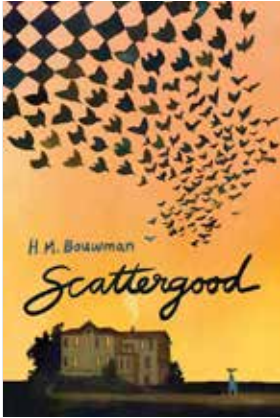
What are the implications for us that all the people with whom we live, work, worship, and meet in society are, by God's design, crowned with glory and honor? How will knowing that truth shape the way we interact with and listen to people like Gavin, Dolores, and Saagarika?

C. S. Lewis, the renowned Christian author and apologist, offers a refreshingly helpful insight. In his sermon *The Weight of Glory* he wrote, "It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken."

When we allow the Holy Spirit to lay the weight, or load, or burden of our neighbors' glory on our backs, we will be changed. As Lewis states, it is "a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken." May we be humble servants of Jesus, enlightened through the Holy Spirit to see our crowned-with-glory neighbors and to listen to their glory stories. 

(*Names have been changed.)

Hibernate This Winter With Some Hearty Reads



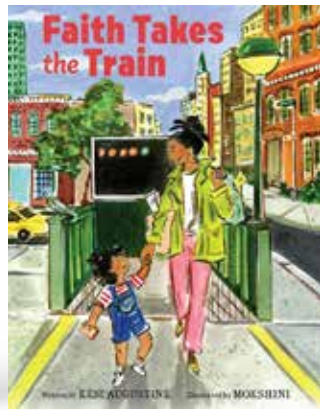
Scattergood

By H. M. Bouwman

Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

It's 1941, Iowa, and young teen Peggy grapples with the fact that the doctor has given her cousin Delia six months to live, so she sets out to try to fix what seems to be an unsolvable problem. At the same time she meets 16-year-old Gunther and a professor who are residing in Scattergood, a nearby Quaker hostel that has been reopened to host Jewish refugees from Europe. Peggy eventually learns the tragic stories about Gunther and the professor's missing family members, who are presumed dead.

Richly metaphorical and movingly emotional, this coming-of-age novel grapples with questions about family and community relationships, atrocities committed in times of war, God, prayer, and life after death. Though recommended for children ages 10-12, *Scattergood* is better suited for ages 13 and older. Includes some instances of profanity. (Neal Porter Books)



Faith Takes the Train

By Kesi Augustine.

*Illustrated
by Mokshini*

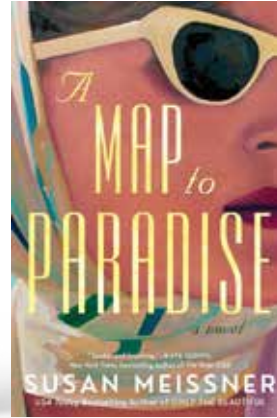
Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

In New York City, young Faith and her mother return home on the train from Grandma's house. Faith passes the time munching on a delicious sandwich, gooey with honey from Grandma's beehive.

Suddenly Isaiah, her former neighbor, calls out, "Good evening! My son and I have fallen on hard times. Could anyone please spare some change? ... A bite to eat?"

Before Faith and her mom leave the train station, she wonders if she will see Isaiah again and asks, "Can we bring an extra sandwich tomorrow?" Her mother agrees that it is a "delicious idea."

Illustrator Mokshini's buoyant, vivid rendering of life in New York City combines with Augustine's tender narrative to show how kindness changes the giver and the recipient. (HarperCollins)



A Map to Paradise

By Susan Meissner

Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

Susan Meissner, a Christian who writes for the mainstream adult fiction market, adds another timely, compelling novel to her collection.

With a backdrop of the 1950s Red Scare and the Cold War, Meissner introduces us to Melanie, a blacklisted actress; Eva, a displaced person who immigrated to California from Europe; and June, a woman who takes care of her agoraphobic brother-in-law, Elwood.

In 1956, the three women become acquainted on Paradise Circle in Malibu, Calif., an idyllic setting in which paradise seems, to the unsuspecting eye, attainable. In *A Map to Paradise*, which includes profanity, Meissner deftly poses the question: Is there a map to paradise? And, if not, how can a person find home and belonging when obstacles abound and some secrets are too brutal to share? (Berkley)



The Hunger Winter

By Johanna M. Selles

Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

In the fall of 1944, 22-year-old Ada, her 18-year-old sister Lina, and their father struggle to survive in Holland under the occupation of the Nazis.

Father is a historian who has been working in his home office behind closed doors. Since his wife died, Ada has been in charge of running the household.

When the sisters discover the truth about what Father was working on, they realize the danger they are in and their responsibility to keep Father's project out of the occupiers' hands.

Filled with suspense, heart-breaking moments of loss and terror, piercing scenes of love and sacrifice, and spiritual reflections about God and his presence during wartime, *The Hunger Winter* is a sobering, yet hopeful read as it reveals that "even the worst darkness had not overpowered the light." (Resource Publications)



The Blossoming Summer

*By Anna
Rose Johnson*

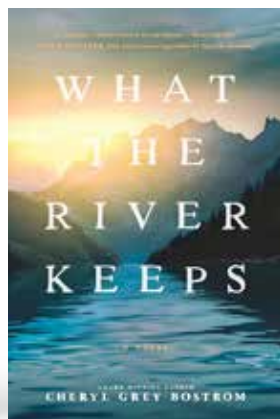
Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

In this novel for children ages 8-12, author Anna Rose Johnson masterfully melds her First Nations heritage and Christian faith.

In 1940 London, England, 13-year-old Rosemary Rivers is happy to be reunited with her grandmother from Wisconsin. But Rosemary's world is upended when Grandmother tells her the truth about her heritage. She isn't British, as Dad has led her to believe, but Anishinaabe.

Why did Dad hide their heritage? And why does he become angry when Grandmother begins to teach Rosemary the language and traditions of her ancestors?

This tender coming-of-age novel highlights the contributions of First Nations, the injustices they encountered, and a path forward as imagined by a girl growing up in difficult times. (Holiday House)



What the River Keeps

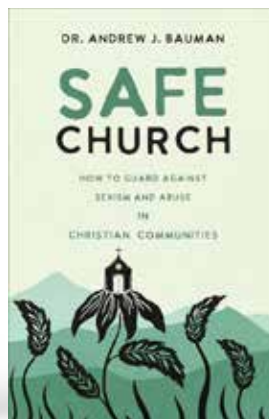
*By Cheryl
Grey Bostrom*

Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

Cheryl Grey Bostrom presents a stunning window into the history, Indigenous culture, and natural world of the Pacific Northwest. She tells a heart-wrenching story of the consequences of generational lies and strongholds and the transformative power of the Creator, who is always—always!—making things new.

Biologist Hildy Nybo and carpenter Luke Rimmer meet against the backdrop of preparations by the Lower Elwha Klallam tribe, scientists, and engineers to rewild the Elwha River by destroying two century-old dams.

What the River Keeps is permeated by the promise that Jesus will return and make all things new. Grey Bostrom is a master storyteller—look for some surprising plot twists!—and a sensitive observer of history, human relationships, spiritual realities, and the natural world. (Tyndale)



Safe Church

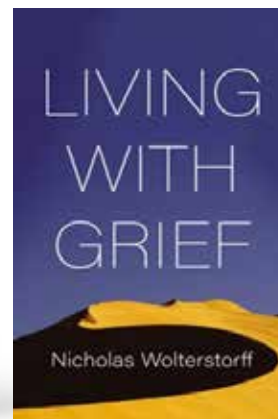
*By Andrew J.
Bauman*

Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

Counselor Dr. Andrew J. Bauman wants to “elevate the voices and stories of women who have been silenced within Christian communities, many of whom have been deeply harmed, abused, neglected, and disregarded within the church where they worked, volunteered, and in many ways dedicated their entire lives to serving.”

Bauman covers chapters from “Why We Must Listen to Women” and “Jesus’s Relationship with Women” to “Speaking Man to Man.”

Safe Church is Bauman’s seventh book. His other titles include grief book *A Brave Lament*, *The Psychology of Porn*, and *The Sexually Healthy Man*. (BakerBooks)



Living with Grief

*By Nicholas
Wolterstorff*

Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

When Dr. Nicolas Wolterstorff talks about grief, people listen. They should.

Wolterstorff has voiced illuminating insights about grief since the 1983 climbing accident that claimed the life of his 25-year-old son Eric. His 1987 *Lament for a Son* was, in his words, an “articulation of grief.”

In contrast, *Living with Grief* is “overtly (theological). The style would be different.”

Calvin Prison Initiative students persuaded him to publish *Living with Grief* after a friend taught it in class. This, too, is needed, the inmates said. The book is dedicated to these students.

Living with Grief contradicts notions of getting “around” a shattering experience. The title alone cues us thus. Instead, the title and content suggest this: our grief is our traveling companion. It ought to be. (Cascade)



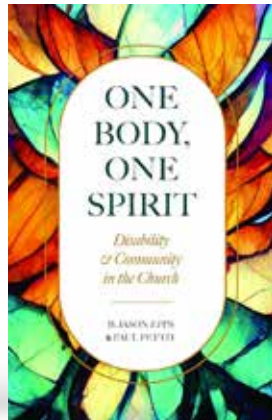
Being Fully Known: The Joyful Satisfaction of Beholding, Becoming, and Belonging

By Saundra Dalton-Smith

Reviewed by Amie Spriensma

This new book about trauma recovery by Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith is practical and challenging. If we're honest, we've all experienced trauma; we've all been harmed by others; we've all been led by lies rather than the truth. She inspires readers to view our lives and our beliefs through the dual lenses of God's Word and God's character. As we behold who God is and what he desires for us, our lives will be changed and transformed.

This book is not for the faint of heart. It's for those who want to grow and learn. It's for those who are willing to get out of their comfort zones and explore thoughts, promises, and concepts they might not have pondered or journeyed with. It's not an easy read, but it's a worthwhile one. (David C Cook)



One Body, One Spirit: Disability and Community in the Church

By Paul Pettit and B. Jason Epps

Reviewed by Amie Spriensma

When Jason Epps, who has a form of cerebral palsy, asked Paul Pettit, a pastor, why people with disabilities are not typically considered good candidates for church leadership positions, a series of discussions led both men to conclude that the Western church still has a problem when it comes to integrating people with disabilities and seeing them as people who can serve as assets and advocates to their faith communities.

Epps and Pettit highlight five basic principles for relationship building in connection with disability in the church: notice, engage, research, integrate, and advocate. They point out that there is no perfect system, no perfect people, and no perfect church.

Readers are reminded that each believer should base their identity and acceptance in Jesus Christ, regardless of whether they have a disability or not. (Kregel)



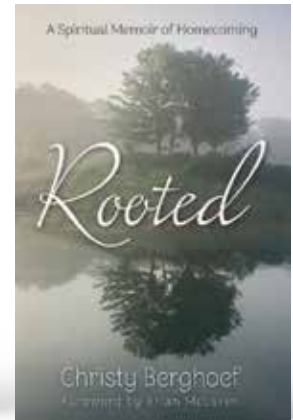
Finding Flora

By Elinor Florence

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Perfect for grown-up fans of *Little House on the Prairie*, *Finding Flora*, which shot to the top of Canadian best-seller lists, tells the fascinating story of Flora Craigie, who bravely homesteaded in the Alberta prairies of 1905 despite forbidding obstacles.

Escaping her abusive husband by jumping off a train, Flora finds a legal loophole to claim a homestead. "Proving it up," however, is a different story. With the help of her neighbors, also female homesteaders, Flora works her fingers to the bone, nearly starving and freezing to death as she presses on. Based on Elinor Florence's ancestors, who were Scottish and Métis, *Finding Flora* is an enthralling page-turner that inspires as it entertains. This book will definitely be at or near the top of my best reads of 2025. (Simon & Schuster)



Rooted: A Spiritual Memoir of Homecoming

By Christy Berghoef

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Christy Berghoef's return to her family's 40-acre flower farm near Holland, Mich., seems like a dream, but it comes with intense challenges. In this gorgeously written memoir, Berghoef details her homecoming, with family in tow, to a place of beauty and a rich heritage of faith and love. Yet she has changed tremendously since she last lived there, and not everyone is thrilled about her evolution.

Rooted is about one woman's journey to find her place in her childhood home, and how she creates a literal haven of flora and fauna to shelter her and her loved ones amid the grief of loss and the stresses of living in a polarized society. It will help readers reconsider their own roots and how they, too, might have changed over the years since they left home. (Reformed Journal Books)

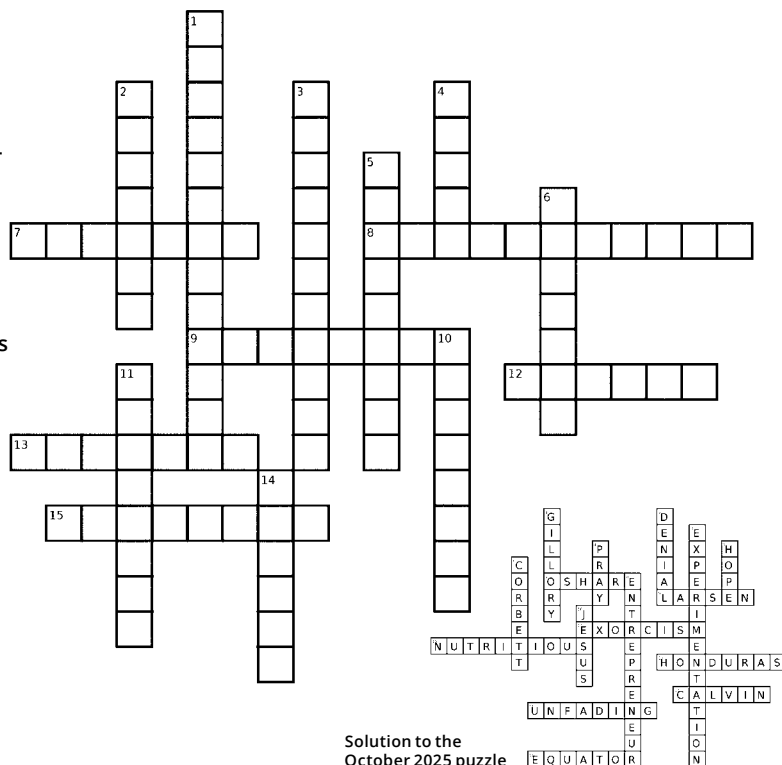
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle throughout this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions in the next print issue. (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

Down

1. A word on our author's "star gift"
2. Month of the Reformation
3. 40 Christian Reformed congregations celebrated a significant _____ in 2025
4. Fictional Flora Craigie bravely homesteaded in the Alberta prairies
5. Everyone is talking, but no one is _____
6. Rev. Philip Vinod _____ has been appointed next general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches
10. Troy _____ served 22 years in prison
11. Ark of the _____
14. Many North Carolina communities are still rebuilding a year after Hurricane _____

Across

7. Early Reformed theologians did not view Sunday as the _____
8. A novel for middle grade readers set in 1941 Iowa
9. Susan _____ is the author of *A Map to Paradise*
12. The "A" in PEACE
13. Time can change depending on speed and _____
15. Current president of the Council of Delegates



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DEADLINES: Ads for the December 2025 issue are due November 7, 2025; January/February: December 12, 2025.

Subject to availability. Details online at thebanner.org/classifieds, or for display ads see thebanner.org/ads. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

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

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

Church Positions Available

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

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.

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

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR A FT SR. PASTOR at Golden Gate CRC (ggcrc.org) in San Francisco to provide leadership, direction and vision for our 3 diverse congregations and 4 associate pastors. Qual: M.Div. accredited theological seminary. Min 5 yrs. church pastor exp. Proficient in English; fluent in Mandarin or Cantonese. Authorized to work in the US. Inquire at srpastorsearch@gggcrc.org.

Anniversary

70 YEARS



SPOELSTRA, LES AND FRAN (VAN WEELDEN) celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on August 31. We are thankful to God for our five children, 13 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren and counting; with spouses we number forty-

six. We give praise to God for His loving care all these years. They reside at 512 Fairway Drive in Redlands, CA 92373

Obituaries

LAMAIRE, ANNETTE (formerly Vilario, nee Buurstra), 97, of Bradenton, FL, passed away August 5, 2025. Predeceased by parents Luke and Stella Buurstra of South Holland, IL. Sister of the late Sybeline (Robert) Gross and baby sister Lois. Beloved wife of the late Rudy Vilario and second husband the late Martin LAMAIRE. Loving aunt and grandmother.

LUCASSE, CAROLYN RUTH (POEL), age 96, passed away on September 3, 2025. Carolyn was preceded in death by her husband, Philip R Lucasse. Carolyn was born in Muskegon, MI and baptized at First CRC. During college, Carolyn attended Fuller Ave Church and that remained her faith family for the rest of her life. Ann Arbor CRC was another dear family of Faith starting in their student days when Carolyn and Phil were charter members there. Carolyn is survived by her three daughters: Anne Lucasse (Mark Wiersma), Mary Lucasse (David Baker) and Susan Lu-

casse; four grandchildren; five great grandchildren; brother Dale (Carolyn) Poel; sisters-in-law: Mary Jo Poel, Carol Poel, Margaret Stakenas and Alice (Loren) Heun; brother-in-law John Lucasse; and many nieces and nephews.



ROOY, MAE HARRIET (VAN DYK), age 96, passed away September 1, 2025, at the Orange Park Hospital, Florida. She was born in North Haledon, New Jersey November 1, 1928. She attended Eastern Christian Schools prior to Calvin College,

where she met her future husband. She taught for two years prior to her marriage. Sid and Mae served the Midland Park, New Jersey CRC and then moved to the Netherlands, where Mae taught while Sid completed his doctoral studies and they lost their son David (8) to encephalitis. The Rooy's served as missionaries to Argentina from 1965 to 1991. Mae served on various committees, including her church council, ecumenical women's organizations and an interdenominational mission board. Her home was always open to whoever needed a meal, a bed, a listening ear or advice. Upon retirement Mae and Sid lived for 10 years in Costa Rica, where Mae taught music lessons and served the church. Since 2001 Mae and Sid have lived in Penney Farms, Florida, where Mae tutored at a local elementary school, corrected Crossroads Prison Ministries Bible lessons and wrote prisoners in Spanish, played the piano for weekly communion services and for the nursing homes and served the community in various capacities. During those years they lost their son Paul to a plane crash. Mae is survived by her husband, Sid, her brother, Wilbert (the late Elaine) Van Dyk, her sister, Grace (the late Hazen) Brummel, her daughters Dianne (Duane) Zandstra and Gayle (Ken) Ritsema, two sons-in-law, ten grandchildren and fourteen great grandchildren. We thank God for the many years of her life and for her example of faith in the midst of life's great challenges and blessings.

VAN DER WEELE, JOAN (VAN HAVEREN) age 90, was called to her Heavenly home on August 28, 2025. Joan was preceded in death by her husband, Donald and is survived by her 3 children and their spouses, 7 grandchildren with 3 spouses, and 5 great grandchildren. Her faith remained strong, and she will be missed by family and friends.

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VAN DYKEN, JOHN of Chicago passed away peacefully at the age of 85 with his family by his side on August 31, 2025. He is survived by his wife Sandra, children Tamara, Kara (Chad Getter), Steven (Jennifer), and Christopher (Nicole); grandchildren Annika, Benjamin, Brooklyn, Christopher, Jr., Chace, and Avery; siblings Gerard (Joanne), James (Anne), Ruth Van Dyke, and the late Paul (Pam) Van Dyken, in-laws Nancy (the late Daniel) Krueger, Judy (Stan) Sikkenga, Peggy (Dave) Poynter, George (JoAnn) Dornbos, and Sally (Doug) Scott; many nieces and nephews.



VAN SPRONSEN, ROBERT C. age 88, of Modesto, California, passed away peacefully into the arms of his Lord and Savior on Monday, September 1, 2025.

Beloved husband of Joan Van Spronsen, nee Hoogewind; loving father of David (Kathy) Van Spronsen, Sheri (Robert) Van Spronsen Leppink, and Thomas (Eden) Van Spronsen; devoted grandfather (Opa) of James (Gabrielle) Van Spronsen, Kimberly (Grant) Gambrall, Kelly (Brian) Scharbach, and Mark Van Spronsen, Chloe and Phoebe Leppink, Calera, Elisha, Andrew and Katelyn Van Spronsen. Loving great Opa of Katie, Adelaide, Evelyn Van Spronsen, Aurelia and Sienna Grambrall, and Karl and Audry Scharbach.

Fond brother of Betty Van Till, Gerald (Hendrina) Van Spronsen, and Norman (Nancy) Van Spronsen. He was a dearly loved uncle to his many nieces and nephews and will be remembered as a trusted friend and confidant to a wide circle of family, employees, and friends.

Predeceased by son Kenneth J. Van Spronsen, parents Arthur and Elizabeth (Betty) Van Spronsen, infant brother Richard, brother-in-law Howard Van Till, brother-in-law Edward Decker and sister-in-law Mary Jane Hoogewind.

A graduate of Calvin College, he met his wife, Joan, at Calvin, and they were married in Grand Rapids, MI, in 1961, celebrating 64 years this past June.

Bob will be deeply missed and remembered as a man whose life was a shining example of faith, love, and devotion—as a husband, father, grandfather, employer, and friend.

VANDER ARK, SARAMAE age 95 was taken by Jesus to heaven on August 16, 2025. She was the daughter of Rev and Mrs. Cornelius Witt. Graduating from Calvin College in 1951, she became an elementary teacher. Saramae was the devoted wife of Gordon for 72 years, who survives her, and the loving mother of 5 children: Kris and Ed Timmer, Steve, Dr Dave and

Theresa, Jill and David Martin, and Heidi and Rev Jeff Wenke, 15 grandchildren, 23 great-grandchildren. Saramae used her musical talents by being a church organist for 73 years and a piano teacher for 67 years. She taught Women's Bible Studies and was a Mentor for Crossroads Prison Ministries. A Celebration of Life was held at Covenant CRC in Cutlerville, of which she was a charter member.

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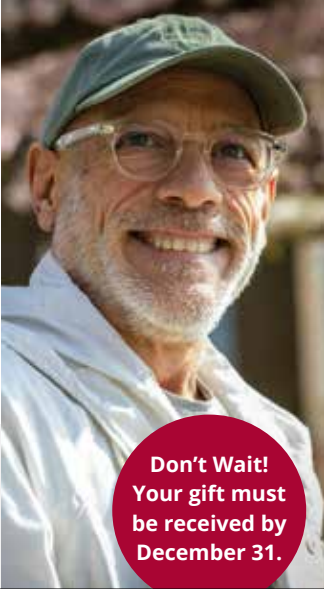


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Being Quiet in a Culture of Volume

Everyone is
talking, but
nobody is
listening.

"SHE'S A SMART AND GOOD STUDENT; her problem is that she never speaks in class." This was the comment I dreaded hearing from teachers each year growing up. While these comments probably came from a good place, they led me to believe there was something wrong with the way I was. I've always been a naturally quiet and more reserved person, especially in large group settings.

As I grew up, it never stopped being a topic of conversation so I wrestled with it often. One time I applied for my school's honor society and was denied for not being an outspoken leader. It was made clear to me in no uncertain terms that I was quiet and that was a bad thing.

After struggling deeply with this continual rejection, I went to college with the mission of changing. During my time as a student at Calvin University, I pushed myself to raise my hand, voice an opinion, and lead group projects no matter how unnatural it felt. I repeatedly put myself in uncomfortable situations to prove to myself that I was "getting better." I'm pretty sure I still maintained a reputation of being a quiet girl, but I never felt so loud in my life.



Jasmine Castelan grew up in Sioux Center, Iowa, and attended Faith CRC. After graduating from Calvin University and the University of Iowa College of Law, she moved to Rochester, N.Y., and is a public defender.

In our current culture, volume seems to be the ultimate winner. Being outspoken, outgoing, and leading verbally are especially prized attributes. Everyone is talking, but nobody is listening.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 says, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work."

It is wonderful to acknowledge the wide variety of gifts and skills the Spirit gives us. This is what helps us

as individuals join together to become the unified body of Christ. There is nothing wrong with being an eloquent speaker or a person who can lead a group or congregation, and there is nothing wrong with being a listener, a discerner, or a person who loves to serve quietly. All are important; but often only one is prized.

The Bible makes clear that listening is a desirable attribute for everyone. Proverbs 18:13 highlights this point: "To answer before listening—that is folly and shame." Additionally, James 1:19 says, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak."

I encourage members of the church to consider each gift of equal value. Instead of thinking about ways people can be changed and molded to fit a particular spiritual gift, consider ways a person can be encouraged to grow the gifts they already have. Creating spaces and roles for listeners to serve is one way to achieve this. Some examples are serving as a mentor to someone who needs a listening ear, taking detailed notes and summarizing sermons or congregational meetings, and interceding in prayer for others. As a church, if we come together we can create a place for everyone at the table.

Today, I am a public defender. My job is literally to speak on behalf of others. I have never once been thanked for how well I argued a motion or cross-examined a witness. However, I am routinely thanked by my clients for simply listening to them when no one else would. Being able to use my gift in that quiet, often unseen and forgotten, way is the most fulfilling thing of all. 

A Jury of Peers

None of us
were peers of
each other, let
alone peers of a
22-year-old who
threatened to blow
up a school.



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.

I WAS ONE OF NINE jurors selected to decide a case brought against a young man accused of making terrorist threats against a high school he had attended. It's a daunting task to determine the fate of someone you've never met and of whom you know nothing. You listen carefully to the lawyers, the judge, and the instructions and evidence, and eventually you find yourself seated in a jury room with your peers.

Yet while we were all members of the defendant's community, I'm not sure anyone would describe any member of that jury as a peer of the accused. There was the kind-hearted psychiatric nurse from the Veterans Hospital. There was a young data analyst who became our technology expert when we wanted to review electronic evidence. Our foreperson was a retired trucking business owner whose wife had died less than a year ago.

The quiet guy with a long, bushy black beard studies philosophy at the university and needed a note to present to a professor whose test he missed. Other than that, he never spoke. The blond-haired lady did accounting. She asked several good questions during the trial and admitted, smiling, that she was thrilled to not have to go to the office during tax season. She suggested that either the business owner or I should be the foreperson since we both had experience on juries, and I quickly agreed the other guy would be perfect.

There was a young man who did sound system design for a company he co-owned. He had great hearing and deciphered some of the garbled evidence for us. One lady was declared an alternate juror and sent home. She was thrilled because her sixth-grade son had forgotten his soccer uniform and was stranded at school since he wasn't permitted to play without it.

During breaks she'd been frantically trying to find someone to pick him up, and now she could go herself. "The Lord moves in mysterious ways," she muttered as she was leaving, "and he better move to save my son from his momma's wrath." We all chuckled.

Then there was the loud-mouthed retiree who knew everything about everything and wasn't shy about sharing his opinions with everyone, whether we wanted to hear them or not. He had wanted to be the foreperson and suggested a secret ballot vote. The businessman got seven votes. He got one—probably his own.

None of us were peers of each other, let alone peers of a 22-year-old who played video games all night long, hung a torn, badly burned gay pride flag on the wall above the couch where he slept in a friend's apartment, and threatened to blow up a school and kill all the LGBTQ+ students he could. None of us would have ever drawn a map of a campus with the ideal areas to place bombs carefully marked in red, or would have posted a picture of the pipe bomb we had constructed on Instagram. We wouldn't have thought to use VPN and a voice modulator to make scary phone calls. We're not peers.

But we were called on to judge him as his peers and come to a verdict. We did. Guilty as charged.

On the way home I wept for him. So very sad. A life ruined by hate. From where does such evil arise?

It dawned on me as I turned on to my street that, short of God's profound mercy, I truly am his peer. **B**

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