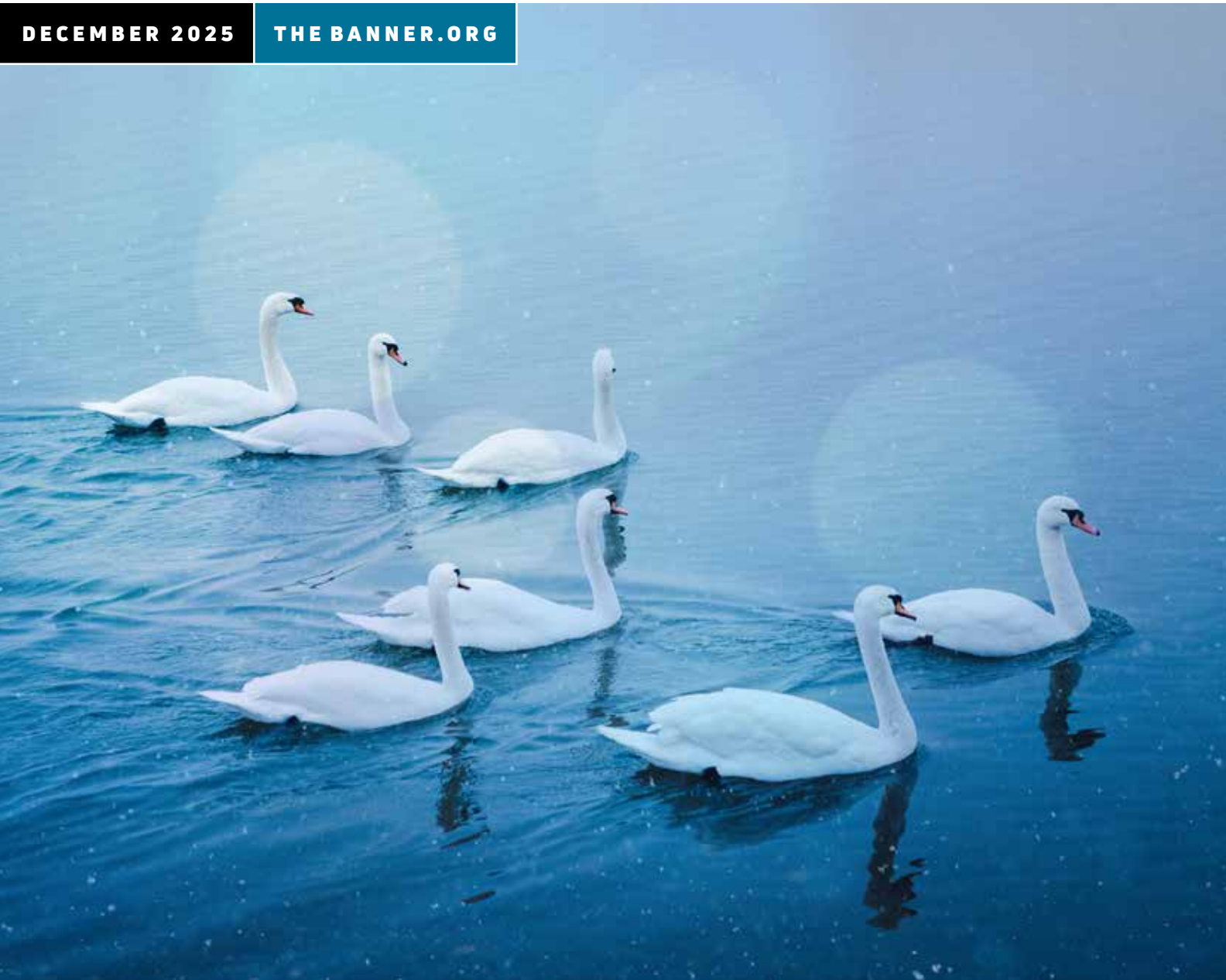


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BANNER

GIVING GUIDE

Looking for a specific ministry to support with your Christmas giving? Look no further.

Throughout this issue, *The Banner* has placed stars to highlight ministries you can donate to with your Christmas gift-giving.

Browse the Giving Guide for gift ideas that resonate with what is near and dear to you, your loved ones, or within your groups—including education, refugee care, diversity, faith formation, social justice, world missions, mental health, recovery and healing, estate planning, or where you feel it is needed most.

Join us in celebrating the upcoming Christmas season by sharing life-changing gifts that bring hope, love, peace, and joy! Merry Christmas, and a happy New Year!



BY THE NUMBERS

The Christian Reformed Church in North America is pursuing “a vision, plan, strategy, and financial proposal for church planting (in the CRCNA for the next decade,” as requested by Synod 2025 (*Agenda and Acts of Synod 2025*, p. 709). Here’s a snapshot of where we are now.

Prioritizing Planting

Current church plants by region compared to the number of classes in each region.

Central USA	classes 10	2 church plants
Canada East	7	3
Canada West	5	5
Great Lakes	12	7
Western USA	12	16
Eastern USA	4	22

Source: Church Planting Team at Resonate Global Mission

WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » News: Three Indiana Churches Re-start Sunday Evening Worship
- » Book: *Grandma Ruth Doesn't Go to Funerals*
- » Movie: *Ruth and Boaz*

FEATURES



10

The Books That Made Us

CRC members share books that helped shape their faith development.



34

Seven Swans a-Swimming: Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Dan Beyer // Swans—and the gifts of the Spirit—are beautiful and majestic.



37

Faith Matters: Slowing Down: Rediscovering the Sacred in a Hurried World

Youngkhill Lee // Scripture calls us to a different pace.



Cover: Seven swans match up with seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. May our readers be filled with the Spirit all year long. See page 34.

NEWS

16 Trinity Christian College Focused on Closing Well for Students

18 Community Christmas: Live Nativity, Parade, Treats & More

20 Classis Watch: 11 Newly Examined Ministers, 48 Departing

COLUMNS

7 Editorial: Mary's Birth Story

Sarah Heth Sundt // She took the time to treasure and ponder.

8 Reply All

9 Vantage Point: Sin: A Broken Relationship

Marguerite Ridder // It's not just about doing wrong.

14 Big Questions

What is the CRC stance on and Christian view of MAID?

33 Discover: What Stinks?

Amy Kinney // It's 200 pounds. It smells like a dead animal.

40 Mixed Media: Birds of the Earth Herald the Christ Child's Birth

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema // "Wake up, wake up, birds!" croaks Raven one December night. "A child is born!"

42 In My Shoes: A Prayer for Enough

Ethan Meyers // God's providence can look big or small.

43 Word Play

47 Still: Magnify the Lord

Gloria D. Kroeze // Thoughts on Mary's song.

OUR SHARED MINISTRY

Editor Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



Who's At Our Doorstep? Planting Churches with Newcomers

Cassie Marcionetti // God is diversifying the CRC.

29 The View From Here: Investing in The Few This Advent Season

Zachary King // Jesus often spent time teaching small groups.

BANNER

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Mary's Birth Story

I found that I, like Mary, could only sit and ponder and treasure it all up.



Sarah Heth Sundt is the associate editor of *The Banner*. She is a member of Calvary on 8th in Holland, Mich.

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

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

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

EVER SINCE my harrowing, whirlwind birth experience four and a half years ago, involving an emergency C-section that had me asleep on the table, my husband in another room, as a doctor I didn't know lifted my firstborn son from my womb, I have felt a strange kinship with Mary.

In the following hours and days as I recovered, gazed upon my healthy, beautiful baby, and tried to make sense of what had transpired, one phrase kept returning to me over and over again: "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). I found that I, like Mary, could only sit and ponder and treasure it all up.

Mary had her own unexpected whirlwind of a birth story. She likely was laboring as they went from home to home in Bethlehem, perhaps becoming more and more desperate as they tried to find a clean, warm place to rest. To land in an unfamiliar space surrounded by animals must have felt less than ideal even as she was grateful, yet she delivered a healthy, beautiful baby boy, her firstborn—the promised Messiah.

How can you try to make sense of it? When your heart is bursting and your body is exhausted, when the first big hurdle of motherhood is behind you but you don't know what the future holds, when all you can do is thank God for his providence and trust in him for whatever comes next, and when you look around with astonishment on where you have landed—there are no words to describe it. I picture Luke asking Mary years later, "What were you thinking after giving birth to the Son of God?" I picture her smiling and shaking her head. How can you explain? The fullness in your heart as your mind tries to make sense of it all? "I just treasured it all up and

pondered it in my heart." What else could she say?

Mary performed a task that was both herculean and completely ordinary: she gave birth. Childbearing is surely the embodiment of the words "living sacrifice." Then, not too long afterward, a host of dirty shepherds showed up wanting to see the baby and sharing a wondrous story of God's confirmation that she was not completely crazy (at least that's how I would have taken it). What a gift, to be reminded that God was with her in the dangerous world she was living in.

This peace in Mary's story is a comfort. It is the sign of a mentally healthy person that she took time to simply take it all in, soak it up, and ponder over it all.

I think Mary has a lesson to teach us at Christmas and beyond. As our noisy world tries to take away our hope and the circumstances of our lives feel overwhelming, may we get quiet, meditate on God's goodness, and ponder our place in God's world. May we listen for God's voice and watch for his reminders that he is with us.

When I look back on my own experience, I remember the whirlwind, the sense of loss and fullness, and I remember the quiet wonder afterward—the pondering and treasuring up. The world right now is not only frenetic and constantly moving, it's also terrifying—just as Mary's certainly was. Yet her story is a gentle reminder to take the time to stop, treasure up the beauty of life, and quietly ponder it all, resting on the promises of God even when the world is full of danger and heartbreak. **B**



REPLY ALL

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

A Master Weaver

We were so moved to see this recent article honoring the extraordinary life and legacy of Julia Jumbo (1928–2007)—a master weaver from Toadlena, N.M., and recipient of one of Southwestern Association for Indian Arts’ prestigious Lifetime Achievement Awards (“The Remarkable Life and Art of Julia Jumbo,” May 2025). A true matriarch and resilient force, Julia’s work transcended technique. Weaving at 120 threads per inch and creating her own loom as a child, she forged a path defined by beauty, strength, and quiet brilliance. Her weavings—often framed with her signature rosettes—are enduring testaments to both artistic mastery and cultural memory. We’re honored to count Julia among the many iconic Native artists who make Santa Fe Indian Market what it is. Thank you to *The Banner* and writer Ron Polinder for this thoughtful tribute to her life and legacy.
» Jamie Schulze and the Santa Fe (N.M.) Indian Market

Hospitality

The article “Fostering Hearts of Hospitality” (July/August 2025) says that hospitality plays a diminished role in our personal and congregational lives at present. It is not a diminished role, it is a big problem. As Christians, we should be missionaries in our church, greeting and meeting new people. After the service, look for them and tell them about where coffee is served (if the church has it).

Introduce them to others and invite them to come again. A lot of people looking for a church come in and leave without anyone talking to them, and never come again because they are looking for but not finding a welcoming church.
» Tena Wattez // Caledonia, Mich.

My Opa

Thank you, Frank DeVries, for your deeply moving article “My Opa” (*The Banner*, September 2025). All of us journey through life with regrets for things we did or did not do. But none of us, as your article testifies and confirms, need to stumble onward burdened by oppressive feelings of guilt. The Lord can indeed do anything. God forgives, as we forgive others and forgive ourselves. We can leave the past behind us and move on as forgiven sinners. Your article offers compelling reassurance.
» John Van Dyk // Marion, Ill.

Banner Changes

I read with deep regret the farewell of Shiao Chong in the July/August issue. This was the first article I read, followed by the letters to the editor. The thing I enjoyed most about *The Banner* was the wide range of opinions that opened my eyes to other people’s ideas whether they agreed with me or not. Seeing something from a fresh perspective was illuminating and insightful and certainly not threatening in the least. I read the article “The Banner’s Responsibilities Curtailed” and was shocked by what I read. I support Shiao Chong 100% and concur with his decision. He is a true Christian who, like Jesus, can listen and accept a person’s difference of opinion without ostracizing them. He humbly accepts he might not always be right. I would encourage synod to read his editorials.
» Susan Rafacz // Crown Point, Ind.

I was profoundly disappointed, even grieved, to read about Shiao Chong’s decision to resign as editor based on synod’s decision to limit *The Banner*’s contents to “a distinctly Reformed perspective” (July–August 2025). It is ironic that in the introduction of two new seminary professors in the same issue, Jessica Joustra noted, “I don’t think we have to be afraid of wrestling, because I have confidence in what we teach.” Apparently that confidence doesn’t extend to the majority of the synod membership. For the first time in my life, I am embarrassed about a synod decision, particularly as it occurs at a time of anti-intellectual sentiments and divisiveness within culture—church and secular society alike. Like Joustra’s position indicates and Chong has exemplified across his tenure, we need to both courageously declare our Reformed position and entertain, understand, even debate other perspectives as we mingle in what (I paraphrase) C.S. Lewis calls the great hall of Christianity with many doors opening to the various denominations. Sadly *The Banner* is shrinking back from this Christ-ordained important work.

» Michael B. Lubbers, Ph.D. // Prairie Village, Kans.

To the 131 Synod 2025 members who voted for *The Banner* to no longer provide diverse positions on issues: Like many CRC members, I have received *The Banner* for years. For the last many years I have eagerly read the editor’s page and the various articles representing various positions on polarizing issues. What a breath of fresh air. Regardless of my own stance, I valued the critical thinking that those voices encouraged. For a “distinctly Reformed perspective in line with the confessions and synodical decisions, representing the CRCNA” I need only to attend my local CRC. Lack of diverse thinking and insecurity, or maybe just indifference, on complex topics is one of the major reasons we, too, are “resigning” from CRC and looking for a new faith institution.
» Robin Koldenhoven // Durango, Colo.

Sin: A Broken Relationship

Our last *Banner* editor stated that his editorial mission statement was to be “in the middle of the discussion.” In this analogy, *The Banner* is a church bus that I feel has been in the left lane far too long with the window shades up. We want the *Banner* bus to actually do what they say they want to do: be in the middle of the road. *The Banner* community will follow the *Banner* magazine when the bus moves back to the center lane, rolls down its window shades and spends a lot more time visiting, talking, and discussing the concerns of the entire CRC community that lives outside of the *Banner* bus.

» Jake Buurma // San Jose, Calif.

TOO OFTEN, sin is reduced to a list of wrong actions—lying, cheating, stealing. But Scripture shows us that sin is far more than bad behavior. At its root, sin is a broken relationship: with God, with one another, and even with creation. It’s not just about doing wrong; it’s about turning away from love, trust, and communion. When Adam and Eve sinned, their first response was to hide. Their relationship with God—and with each other—was fractured.

Throughout the Bible, God’s desire is not just to correct human behavior but to restore relationship. Jesus didn’t come only to condemn sin but to reconcile us to God. His life and death show that God wants more than rule-followers; he wants children who live in trust, love, and surrender (John 3:17).

Seeing sin through the lens of relationship changes everything. It humbles us. It makes us less judgmental. It shifts the focus from pointing fingers to opening arms. When we reduce the Christian life to avoiding sin, we become self-focused—obsessed with our own standing before God and quick to judge others who stumble. But when we understand sin as a wound in relationship, we see the need for healing, reconciliation, and grace—not just for ourselves, but for the world.

This is especially important for younger generations to grasp. They long for authenticity, connection, and purpose. They are not just sinners to be corrected; they are co-workers in God’s mission to redeem the world. But for God to truly use us all—young and old—in this redemptive work, we must surrender fully. That means giving up control, letting go of pride, and offering our lives to be shaped and led by him.

Surrender is not weakness. It is the doorway to transformation. Only when we give our hearts, desires, and

It’s not just about
doing wrong; it’s
about turning away
from love, trust,
and communion.

futures to God can he work through us to heal what’s broken. Only then can we reflect Christ’s love, justice, and mercy in a hurting world.

Sin breaks. Jesus restores. And we—through surrendered lives—are invited to join him in that restoration. This is the gospel: not just a call to stop sinning, but a call to come home, to be changed, and to be sent out in his name. When we understand sin as a broken relationship, we stop asking, “How do I keep from sinning?” and start asking, “How can I help bring healing?” That’s the life God longs for us to live. **B**



Marguerite Ridder is a retired office manager with a love for reading and writing. She and her husband, John, are members of Water Street Christian Reformed Church in Guelph, Ont. They have three children, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

As I Was Saying

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

» Let's Stop Pretending Human Beings Are Dead When They Are Clearly Alive

» A Word for the Small Churches

The Books That Made Us

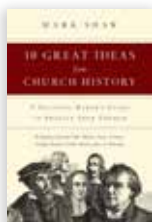
Compiled by Sarah Heth Sundt

The books we read, the stories we listen to, the worlds we spend time inhabiting—these are the things that make us. Proverbs 18:15 tells us, “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out.” Poet Ralph Waldo Emerson is quoted as saying, “I cannot remember the books I’ve read any more than the meals I have eaten; even so, they have made me.” Remembering books is not a problem among those quoted below, though they might agree with the second half of that line. *The Banner* asked several CRC members which books helped shape their faith development. Here’s what they said.

Jul Medenblik

10 Great Ideas from Church History

By Mark Shaw



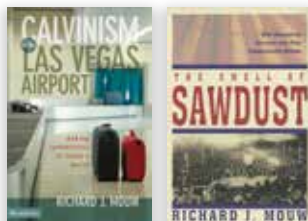
It was in my early days as a church planter in New Lenox, Ill. We had launched, and it looked like we were going to survive, but what kind of church would we be?

I still remember this question from the back jacket cover: “Tired of following the latest church-growth fad?” This book by a missionary teacher serving in Kenya was foundational for me to lean into the lessons of church history and those who have gone before. It is broken down into chapters featuring church leaders from history and what insights they can offer to us today.

I still refer to and recommend this book to church leaders.

Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport and The Smell of Sawdust

By Richard Mouw



How do you transmit and translate the good news of Jesus Christ?

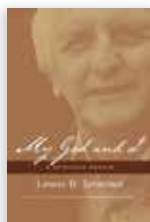
What does it mean to be confessional and contextual?

This pair of books have been my friends as Richard Mouw guided me through thinking deeply about what is at the center of Calvinism and also how to honor other Christian traditions such as what Mouw identifies as “our fundamentalist heritage.”

As a church leader, I have had to provide answers to questions such as, “What does it mean to be Reformed?” and, “I grew up Baptist. What are the differences and why?” Clarity, conviction, and civility mark the pathway Mouw illustrates and teaches us.

My God and I: A Spiritual Memoir

By Lewis Smedes



I got to know Lew Smedes in this spiritual memoir that is honest, humble, hopeful, and challenging. The life of a Christian has ups and downs. A tough beginning to life like Lew shares means that struggles are real, but also that with God you can find real joy.

Lew Smedes became a type of counselor to me about how to develop a relationship with God that was both head and heart and had space for the joys and sorrows of life.

Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional

By Jim Belcher



I am allergic to “either/or” thinking. I am more a “both/and” sort of person and leader. As I analyze why that is, I think one reason is this book.

As a church planter, I was exposed to new ways of thinking about church and church forms that some might even call radical. At the same time, I was aware that I was living in a certain tradition and desired to not only respect that tradition but also introduce people to the blessings of what it meant to be Christian Reformed.

In my past, I had experienced an orthodoxy that was traditional, but not necessarily living or connecting with others. Belcher had a similar journey, and his book is a great summary of highlighting “deep” aspects of church life and discipleship.

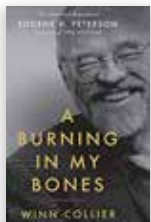


Rev. Jul Medenblik, J.D., is president of Calvin Theological Seminary and is a retired attorney and former church planter for New Life CRC in New Lenox, Ill. For him books are friends, not tools!

Colin Watson

A Burning in my Bones: The Authorized Biography of Eugene H. Peterson

By Winn Collier



Knowing Eugene Peterson as the author of *The Message* paraphrase of the Bible, I was intrigued and eager to learn about how God used his life in a way that culminated in such writing. Throughout the work, it became evident that Peterson stayed in constant contact with the word of God, he was faithfully and continually exercising the spiritual disciplines, and did not shy away from giving his perspectives on life issues even when they were unpopular. In particular, Peterson favored small congregations, journaling that “the working out of vocational holiness—*cannot be done in a large congregation. It requires a small community.*” Having served and worked in small congregations and small groups, it was energizing to read and reflect on this. Peterson was also a learner to his last day. He journaled that he wanted to be a saint and that it was a lifelong process of sanctification but well worth the journey.

The Prophetic Imagination,

By Walter Brueggemann



This book really resonated with me. *Prophetic Imagination* was born of deep biblical and spiritual reflection and invites readers into an atmosphere where we imagine that all of God’s people are treated as if they are made in the image of God, *Imago Dei*—which they are. He talks about the fact that prophetic imagination proceeds through three basic steps, which I summarize as *lament*, *story*, and *truth telling*, that imagines a just and loving society, and hopes for the possibility of an emancipated future. As an immigrant and an African American, I deeply

resonate with this perspective of how we collectively can engage all aspects of society deeply with the Word of God and with the presence of the Holy Spirit to create a beloved community as a precursor to God’s kingdom.

A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Edited by James M. Washington



This collection of many of the essential writings of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. includes his posthumously published essay of the same name. This book is an excellent summary of King’s belief that the struggle for Black dignity, decency, and recognition is a struggle for the overall dignity of all races. It is a biblical imperative and mandate that we recognize the God-made humanity of each person and treat everyone as such. If anyone is believed to be and is treated as part of a human hierarchy, this diminishes our understanding of the authority of Christ and how God has created us to be. King indicates that the Black revolution is much more than the struggle for the rights of Black people, and that without this embracing of mutual humanity we are turning our backs on Jesus’ command for the body of Christ to be unified, so that the world will know he has been sent by God. The reality of this struggle is something I wholeheartedly embrace.



Colin P. Watson Sr., Ph.D., is executive director emeritus and a commissioned pastor emeritus of the Christian Reformed Church. He is currently a pastoral advisor and elder at Madison Avenue CRC in Paterson, N.J.

Joyce Suh

Experiencing the Trinity

By Darrell W. Johnson



As the title suggests, this made the Trinity, which I had seen as a sort of theological puzzle, into something real and relevant. There is an invitation to join the divine maelstrom that continues to inspire me. If anyone needs to get out of one’s head, this would be a great book to read.

The Dark Night of the Soul

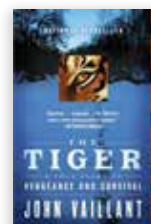
By Gerald G. May



This book lifts us out of the problem of pain as a conundrum and into the mystery of God’s work in our lives. The dark night of the soul is a place of the hidden work of God—where he takes us deeper with him, but in an entirely loving and protective way. It’s very authentic because of the author’s own experience.

The Tiger,

By John Vaillant



This book is the story of a man-eating Amur tiger. I like it because it brings science, cultural anthropology, history, and more into one story. We see a glimpse of post-perestroika Russia. We gain a picture of a geographical anomaly. We get into the mind of a creature. I think I’ve read the book three times.

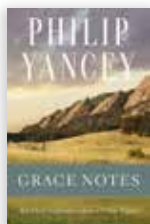


Joyce Suh and her husband Gil served as missionaries with Resonate Global Mission in Nigeria and Cambodia. She currently works for Resonate as program leader for intercultural gospel witness. She resides in San Jose, Calif.

Syd Hielema

Grace Notes

By Philip Yancey



A publishing trend I applaud is to comb the complete works of wise Christian writers and select 366 stand-alone excerpts for a year-long daily devotional book.

My wife and I have read this complete compilation several times at the dinner table and been blessed every time. Yancey grasps the breadth and depth of a kingdom vision and articulates it with fresh winsomeness. His corpus tackles the most difficult questions—suffering, injustice, doubt, self-righteousness, mystery—with clarity and grace illustrated by many everyday examples. I love using this book as a gift.

Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes

By E. Randolph Richards
and Brandon J. O'Brien



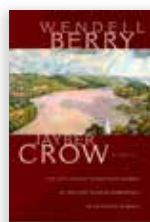
CRCNA prayer shepherd Rev. Jon Hoekema pointed me to this book several years ago, and since then I've read it with several small groups. I often hear people defend their bibli-

cal interpretations by saying, "God is the same yesterday, today, and forever," as if to say that ends all conversation. Richards and O'Brien, missionaries who have spent most of their adult lives

overseas, disagree. God might not change, but our Bible interpretation is very much shaped by our culture, and these authors explore nine everyday ways in which our western eyes distort our Bible reading. Its subtitle, "Removing cultural blinders to better understand the Bible," summarizes it well. It's written by conservative leaders for conservative laypersons, and it's perfect for CRC adult faith formation.

Jayber Crow

By Wendell Berry



I have read this novel eight times: once to follow the story and seven times as a devotional exercise. I've also read the entire novel out loud to my wife. It's long! The novel is a faith

formation autobiography of the fictional title character. We follow Jayber as his walk with the Lord is shaped through his callings (barber, gravedigger, and church custodian), community relationships, engaging with creation, and responding to historical developments. Jayber is beautifully honest about himself, growing in the fruit of the Spirit, a man without guile, an observant servant about the ups and downs of church and community life. As I follow the shaping of his faith, I find my own being shaped as well.



Syd Hielema lives in Ancaster, Ont. He is a retired ministry professor and director of CRC Faith Formation Ministries, currently serving as regional pastor for Classis Hamilton. He is a member of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC.

Carol Bremer-Bennett

The Speed of Trust

By Stephen M. R. Covey



This book came into my life when I was a younger leader, still learning how to build meaningful connections with my team. The central message—that trust is not merely a soft

virtue but a measurable, actionable asset—transformed how I approached leadership. It taught me that trust is foundational to every relationship and organizational success. More importantly, it challenged me to become a leader who is not only trustworthy but also generous in granting trust to others. This shift in mindset and behavior helped me foster deeper collaboration, accountability, and resilience within my team. Covey's insights continue to shape how I lead today, reminding me that trust accelerates everything—from decision-making to impact.

The Fearless Organization

By Amy C. Edmondson



Edmondson's research—rooted in hospital case studies—reveals how psychological safety enables teams to speak up, take risks, and learn from mistakes. As the leader of World Renew, I


saw immediate parallels. Her insights helped me reimagine the spaces where we gather, the tone of our conversations, and the depth of our engagement. I began to prioritize authenticity and honesty, recognizing that only in a culture of trust and openness can we truly grow. This book didn't just inform my leadership—it transformed it. It gave me language and tools to cultivate environments where people feel safe to be vulnerable, challenge ideas, and contribute fully.

Braiding Sweetgrass

By Robin Wall Kimmerer



This lyrical and profound book is a beautiful invitation into God's created world. Through Indigenous wisdom and scientific insight, Kimmerer draws us into ecosys-

tems where every being is interconnected and sacred. Her reflections on reciprocity and the strength of community echo the deepest values of World Renew's mission. I often recommend the audiobook, where Kimmerer's voice brings a gentle cadence that mirrors the rhythms of nature and storytelling. This book reshaped how I view community, the spaces we inhabit, and the relationships we nurture. It continues to inspire how I lead and live—with reverence, humility, and a deep commitment to shared flourishing. 



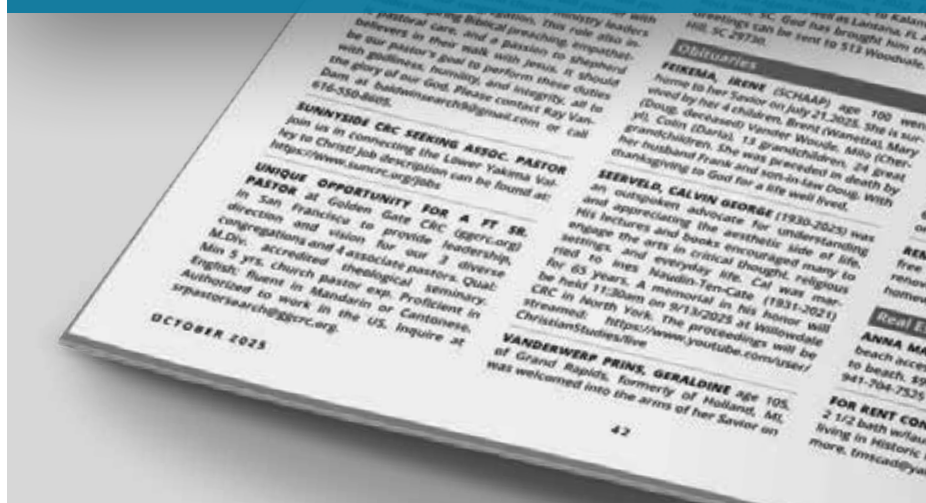
Carol Bremer-Bennett is World Renew's director of U.S. operations. She has an M.A. in educational leadership from Western New Mexico University in Gallup. She has served on the Calvin College Board of Trustees and served as a deacon.

"I am incredibly thankful for the opportunity to place ads in the *The Banner*. This publication has been a cherished read for my family for generations, and now that our ministry has gained from it, it holds even greater significance for us.

The number of Bibles collected for believers in Africa has reached such a magnitude that we've lost count!

Thank you for partnering with us to ensure faithful followers of Jesus have access to his Word!"

—Jess Sweitzer, founder and director, Project Bible Runners



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BIG QUESTIONS

Church/Bible/Doctrine

What is the CRC stance on and Christian view of MAID (Medically Assisted Induced Dying)?

The CRC has a strong word on this. Synod 2025 unanimously voted to approve this language: “that synod *deplore* the legalization and practice of medically assisted suicide as well as the efforts to expand it to include minors, and those suffering solely from psychological disabilities” (emphasis mine).

This language comes from discussion of the report of the Assisted Suicide Task Force, which spoke to both the specific piece of Canadian legislation that the question references, Medical Assistance in Dying, and the reality within the American context where medically assisted suicide is legal in some states. At least 650 Christian Reformed pastors and chaplains, the report notes, are “doing ministry in jurisdictions where medically assisted suicide is legal.”

This report gives us an emphatic and unambiguous “no!” to medically assisted suicide. That “no” is combined with deep pastoral and theological wisdom to address the loneliness, pain, hopelessness, and loss of meaning or autonomy that can drive one to consider medically assisted suicide. As Ewan Goligher, a Christian physician in Canada, writes in his book *How Should We Then Die?*, “Most patients (more than 90 percent) who seek assisted death say that the

main reason for ending their life is a loss of autonomy, the sense that they are no longer able to control their life or circumstances. ... They aren’t in control anymore, they can’t do what they want to do, they feel like a burden, they feel hopeless, and they find that an intolerable affront to their dignity.” The questions that medically assisted suicide bring aren’t simply physical, Goligher argues (as does the 2025 task force report); they are deeply theological, philosophical, and existential.

To the physical questions—that, while not typically at the forefront of this discussion, still are critically important—the report recommends “compassionate palliative care,” reminding us that with modern palliative care, “it is rare for one’s physical pain to be inadequately addressed.” To the perhaps even more pressing questions of despair, loneliness, and hopelessness, the report provides biblical wisdom, reminding us of the power of presence, God’s call to perseverance in suffering and to bear one another’s burdens, and the promise of the gospel.

There is perhaps no better word than that of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1 to the gut-wrenching situations we encounter when wondering about medically assisted suicide. In these, and in all of life, we have but one comfort. As the report says, “In life and in death we belong to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. We are not the masters of our own destinies but

beloved children, kept and cared for by our heavenly Father, who knows the number of our days and the hairs on our heads.”

Jessica Joustra, Ph.D., is associate professor of Religion and Theology and director of the Albert M. Wolters Centre for Christian Scholarship at Redeemer University (Hamilton, Ont). She and her family are members of Immanuel CRC in Hamilton, Ont.

Vocation

For years, my job has been related to child care (my own and others). As my children grow, I’m wondering how I can earn income in a different way and still be available for my children. Where do I start figuring out what’s next?

As you enter a new phase of life, it can be exciting and scary to wonder about what can and should change. Thankfully, the Spirit and others can help guide you. You could spend time reading the Bible or Christian books, spend more time in prayer or another spiritual discipline, or you could talk to a spiritual director. Furthermore, it’s good to find people who can encourage you, help you better understand your skills and passions, and connect you with others.

It is wise to speak with people doing jobs that you find appealing. While this might feel like something only younger people need to do, both your



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

interests and what jobs look like are likely to have shifted in the past 10-15 years. As you talk to people, see if you can imagine yourself doing that job and how hard it would be to become qualified. As you consider your experience and skills, don't forget the experience you might have from volunteering or all the organizational skills you will have built up through doing child care.

Including your family in this conversation about what's next can show that you value your children's growing independence and that you believe they have wisdom to share. Hopefully they can express any concerns they have about potential changes, including how you'll still be available to them when more of your time is going to help others and serve God in ways that might make them feel less central.

As this is a big change, it will likely take extra energy and feel challenging at times. If you can temporarily decrease how much you work and/or how much income you need, this could create more time to pray about this, talk through it with others, take a class, volunteer, and/or get other experience. Through the process, hopefully you will be filled with joyful anticipation as you wonder about how you might serve God and help others in ways that you are not currently able to do.

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

Digital Life

Why, despite all we know of the negative effects of social media, do so many of us continue to use it and allow our children and grandkids to use it?

I remember hearing the news years ago—around 2009, I think—that social media had eclipsed pornography in the number of online users. This was great news! Especially as social media was going to, as founder Mark Zuckerberg famously said, “make the world more open and connected.”

Instead, social media algorithms created “echo chambers” that feed users content that reinforces their existing biases—leading to political and social polarization and promoting an us-vs.-them mentality. And once all your buddies are in the same room, it's also easy to spread misinformation at an alarming speed.

With so much good research available on the dangers of social media, what is taking us so long to get our use under control?

Addictive behaviors or just pesky cultural problems like this often require a combination of things to solve: government regulation, education, media, social movements, and public opinion.

I think it's this last one, public opinion, that seems to be shifting. I've heard, “I'm not really on Facebook anymore” and “It's nearly impossible but I think I was finally able to uninstall my social media apps.” Studies suggest that the number of users is still increasing but

engagement is down. That is, people sign up for accounts but they use them less.

Churches can be slow to react—think about accessibility awareness and remedies—but I wonder if we should show by example that we know there's a problem and take a step or two to walk the talk. Does your church really need to be on Facebook? Is your youth group more effective because it has an Instagram presence? And a little closer to home: does your denominational magazine need to be on social media?

Governments can restrict access to minors and universities can publish undeniable research on the social media problem, but I fear this beast will only be constrained when all of us get tired of feeding it.

Dean Heetderks is director of CRC Ministry Support Services and art director of *The Banner*. Has your social media use decreased? Is your church thinking about getting off it? Tell him about it at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.



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

Trinity Christian College Focused on Closing Well for Students

NEWS

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

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Got a news tip?

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

The board of trustees at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill., announced Nov. 4 that the school will close at the end of this academic school year. The final convocation for the 66-year-old school will be May 8, 2026.

Board chair Ken Dryfhout and acting university president Jeanine Mozie, in a joint video message, relayed the news that they called “difficult to hear and to share.”

“The board has worked faithfully and tirelessly to consider every possible option in the face of significant and rapidly evolving financial challenges,” Mozie said.

“However, there is no sustainable path forward for our beloved institution.” She said the school’s “top priority in this transition is the wellbeing of our people,” and she laid out leadership’s “plans to ensure every student has a path toward graduating from Trinity this spring or completing their degree at another school.”

Students within reach of the credits they need to graduate can take an overload of classes in the spring semester, and Trinity has and is pursuing teach-out agreements with as many similarly equipped schools as possible so students have options.

“Trinity Christian College has been a mission-driven institution since our founding in 1959. We’ve remained committed to the transformational work of a Christian liberal arts education in the Reformed tradition and a whole-person development of our students as thinking, feeling, and believing people, and now we’re called to end well,” Mozie said.

Trinity employs 180 faculty and staff and has a current student body of about 750, 225 of whom are expected to graduate in May. The school’s ties to the Christian Reformed Church include having hosted the CRC synod, being a frequent host for tri-classis meetings in the Chicagoland area, graduating multiple alumni, and having in common as a senior leader

Steve Timmermans, who came to the CRC as executive director in 2014, after serving 10 years as Trinity’s president.

Students in good academic standing who choose to continue at a partnered teach-out school “are guaranteed automatic admission and credit transfers.” Calvin University, Olivet Nazarene University, and St. Xavier University had teach-out partnerships with Trinity at the time of the announcement, and Mozie told *The Banner* they “will continue to add more teach-out partners in the weeks to come.”

‘Above and beyond’ in support of students

Accredited colleges in the United States—Trinity is accredited through the Higher Learning Commission—have to meet certain obligations to students in the event of “substantive change” to their programming, up to and including ceasing operations. Mozie said the commission “is responsible for approving all teach-out agreements to ensure that students are well cared for through institutional closure.” In the case of Calvin, Olivet, and St. Xavier, Mozie said, “Each of these institutions agreed to the requirements of the HLC and went above and beyond those requirements in support of our students.”

“The agreement is entirely about providing teach-out pathways for students to complete programs on time and with similar costs at Calvin, given our strong missional and educational alignment (with Trinity),” said Laura DeHaan, dean of curriculum and assessment at Calvin University. “In all of this, we are focused on serving and caring for students well during and after their transition.”

Calvin will also serve as the primary record holder for Trinity Christian College upon closure. Mozie said, “With our shared history and roots in the Reformed tradition and the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin University has long been an important partner and



The administration building at Trinity Christian College. The 66-year-old liberal arts school in Palos Heights, Ill., will cease operations in May.

friend. Calvin has offered to come alongside the college during this transition in support of our students, faculty, and staff—both as a teach-out partner and as a primary record holder for our students in the future.”

DeHaan said Calvin has experience supporting students of a couple other closed institutions. It served as the primary teach-out institution for the Compass College of Film and Media, a Grand Rapids school that closed in 2023. “More recently, we welcomed transfer students from Siena Heights University and Finlandia University after their closures. These experiences give us the expertise and systems needed to support Trinity students effectively,” DeHaan said.

Challenges in higher ed

Calvin, Trinity, and Olivet are all members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, an association for higher education “dedicated to advancing faith and intellect for the common good.” CCCU president David Hoag acknowledged that “higher education in general is challenging right now,” and the smaller a school gets, whether Christian or not, the more difficult it becomes to be sustainable.

In an effort to triage a situation before it’s dire, CCCU has recently begun to offer a Sustainability Index check and conversation with school presidents and board chairs to “see how they are doing health-wise” and how interventions might improve their prospects. It’s almost like a blood test for cholesterol, Hoag said, considering a range of factors to indicate how at risk or healthy an institution might be.

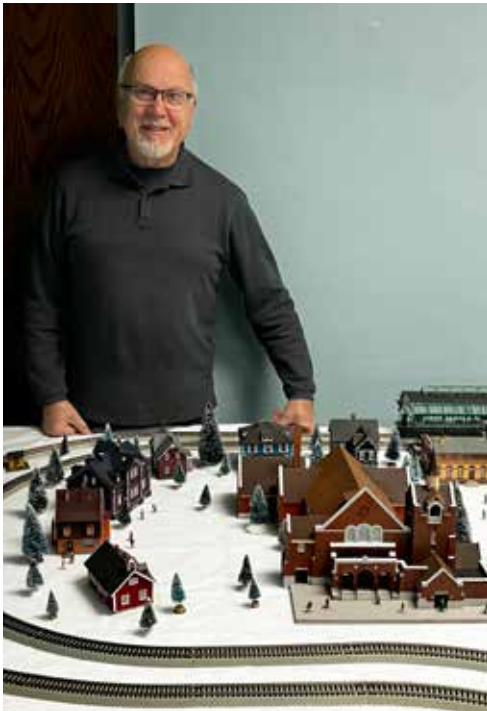
For example, geography matters, Hoag said. Having worked in Christian higher education his whole career, 20 years in Illinois and more recently in Florida, Hoag saw how state regulations and how and when funding is paid out affect being able to make things work financially.

Hoag suggests the index can identify areas of concern and then the CCCU can encourage solutions, such as “finding other schools to partner with collaboratively” including possibly sharing an online learning platform or other tools to cut costs but continue in their mission to students. “We’re doing everything we can to come alongside schools and support them in their calling,” Hoag said.

—Alissa Vernon

Church Replica Features in Model Train Display

Photo by Greg Chandler



Recreated from actual building blueprints, a scale model of Lee Street Christian Reformed Church (lower right) was part of model maker Dan Ensing's 2024 display.

Dan Ensing, a model train enthusiast and longtime member of Lee Street Christian Reformed Church in Wyoming, Mich., added a handmade replica of the church building as part of his Christmas display in 2024. He shared the set-up in the church that year and this Christmas, too.

A retired band instrument repair specialist, Ensing serves as leader of Lee Street CRC's praise band. He's built a holiday train display in his basement for years, recording virtual tours on YouTube. In 2024, after spending about four months meticulously crafting a scale replica of the church to include in his ever-expanding model,

Ensing found an available room at Lee Street CRC in which to set up the display for December. He's remounted it for December 2025.

The detailed replica includes the church's cornerstone depicting when it was built, and the church bell. "I got blueprints from the office and actually worked from the blueprints (in building the replica)," said Ensing.

Knowing that the display would be set up at the church, "It set the bar a lot higher, to make it as accurate as I possibly could," Ensing said.

Lee Street CRC was the host church for Synod 2024 and will celebrate its centennial in 2026.

Ensing has two HO-scale trains that circle the tracks of his display, one the Hogwarts Express from the Harry Potter children's books and the other the train featured in the animated movie *The Polar Express*.

The 116-square-foot (almost 11-square-meter) display also depicts scenes from the Harry Potter books, including castle replicas built by Ensing.

—Greg Chandler

Parade Viewing With Hot Chocolate at Washington Church

First Christian Reformed Church in Lynden, Wash., handed out hot chocolate and baked goods to over 100 people on its front steps as the town of Lynden hosted its lighted Christmas parade in 2024. The church is located along the annual parade's route.

Dennis and Jeanne Janzen, members of the fellowship ministry team, thought handing out hot drinks would be a welcoming gesture. Galen Laird, president of the elder board and chair of council at First CRC, said similar events had taken place in the past but paused in 2020 due to the pandemic. Laird said they pulled together an announcement handout less than a week before the 2024 parade.

Expecting to receive about 20 people in a warming station in the front foyer, Laird said they were excited that over 100 guests stopped by. "Dennis and Jeanne are so excited on how the turnout was—especially being a last-minute project. They look forward to next Christmas season," he said.

The Lynden congregation matched the Janzens' enthusiasm and more hosts volunteered to offer hospitality for the Dec. 6, 2025, parade.

—Kristen Parker



On the annual parade route, First CRC in Lynden, Wash., welcomed parade goers to its front steps in 2024 to watch the lighted floats pass.

South Dakota Church Hosts Fourth Live Nativity



Church members portray scenes from the biblical narrative of Christ's nativity at New Holland (S.D.) Christian Reformed Church.

"Nearly 20 centuries ago, the miracle of miracles occurred. A baby was born, but he was the Son of God. With a divine Father and a human mother, Jesus entered history—God in the flesh." These are the opening lines of New Holland (S.D.) Christian Reformed Church's live nativity program, an event portraying the biblical narrative of Jesus' birth with people and animals depicting six scenes around the rural church's property.

"Each scene has corresponding Scripture and narrative," said Sarah Baan Hofman, the event's main organizer. The scenes begin with Luke 1:30-33, the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary, and end with a tableau of a manger and a cross and the reminder, "Jesus came to earth as a baby to carry out the greatest mission of all time. ... His death was the ultimate sacrifice. His resurrection was a triumphant victory over death."

"Before we began the Living Nativity, our church didn't have any sort of event we planned for Christmas besides maybe a music request program some years, the Sunday School Christmas program or Christmas worship service," Baan Hofman said. "When I came up with the idea for the Living Nativity in 2021, our area was being hit with COVID. I wanted a way for people to be able to come to church to see the story of Christ's birth in the comfort of their own vehicle. Since then, I just want to make the story of Jesus' birth real to people of all ages, for it to not be just a story from the Bible, but something that actually happened, and that he came to earth for them."

Baan Hofman said a team of six or seven takes about five hours to set up the nativity display, with another 18-20 people acting in the scenes. After the two-night 2021 event, with 120 cars counted the first night (and no count for the second night), New Holland CRC cancelled the 2022 nativity because it was too cold, and welcomed about 160 vehicles in 2023 and 125 in 2024.

"After discussion with various people involved, we have decided to show the Living Nativity once again this year," Baan Hofman said in October 2025. "We plan to have it Sunday, December 14, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., weather permitting."

—Alissa Vernon

Neighbourhood Christmas Hosts Hundreds



Free pony rides are a fixture of Living Hope CRC's Neighbourhood Christmas.

Living Hope Christian Reformed Church in Abbotsford, B.C., has hosted an annual Neighbourhood Christmas since 2017, welcoming close to 400 people in 2024. Inviting the community for "a time of live music, warm drinks and cookies, kids' crafts, and free pony rides," the event aims to make celebrating together accessible.

"We wanted to find a way to connect and celebrate the joy of Christmas with people living in the neighborhood around our church, without inviting them to a formal Christmas service," said Sandra Ferguson, leader of the church's welcome team. "We see the event as our gift to our neighbors every Christmas."

In 2024 Living Hope included an indoor Christmas market hosted by Clayburn Collective, a group of women artisans who are members at Living Hope. "We did this with the hopes of bringing new faces into our Christmas event," Ferguson said.

But 2025's event is back to the basics. "We are not planning to do a Christmas Market this year. That will likely become a biennial event, maybe exchanged with a spring market every other year. This decision is due to a staff maternity leave, and the realization that combining the two events every year is a huge undertaking for church staff and volunteers, so biennially seems more attainable," said Ferguson.

—Kristen Parker

Classis Watch: Fall 2025

As regional groups of churches, or classes as we call them in the Christian Reformed Church, gathered for meetings this fall, there were heavy and celebratory things to note. (Reported items reflect minutes received as of Nov. 7.)

Ministers

Candidates **examined and approved for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** (Articles 6 and 10 of the Church Order): Jeremiah Bašurić, Kyle Beckrich, Rylan Brue, Melissa Burmaster, Raymond Evans, Masao Fujishima, Israel Ledee, Young Geol Lee, Daniel le Forestier, Caley Meza, and Matthew Sun.

Ministers welcomed **from other denominations** (Art. 8-c): Anel Becker-Ferreira, Jordan Helming (as of March 2024, minutes were delayed), Ken Labbé, and Chang R. Yoon.

Ministers released from ministry in a congregation (Art. 17-a): Revs. Laura de Jong from Community Christian Reformed Church in Kitchener, Ont.; John Moelker from Covenant CRC in Woodstock, Ont.; Chris Schievink from Kanata Community CRC in Ottawa, Ont.; and Kent Sanders from Lakeland Reformed Church of Vicksburg, Mich. (congregation of the Reformed Church

in America, serving as part of the regular exchange of ministers).

Eligible for call: de Jong, Sanders, and Schievink; and Luke Wynja (Art. 14-e).

Ministers retiring, granted emeritus status (Art. 18): Revs. Darwin Glassford, Eric Groot-Nibbelink, David Heilman, Patrick Hennen, Joseph K. Kwak, Jin Namkoong, John Poortenga, Vern Swierenga, Kevin teBrake, Harold Veldman, Bernard Haan (effective Jan. 4, 2026), Russell Kuiken (effective Jan. 17), Randy Raak (effective Jan. 31), and Joel Kok (effective Feb. 28).

Leaving Ministry in the CRC

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

Via Art. 14-b: Matthew Ackerman, Amanda Bakale, Craig Broek, Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning, Katherine Hirschberg, Marvin Hofman, Michael Hoozeboom, James Kim, Michelle Kool, Dale Melenberg, Michael Moore, Kyle Sandison, Norman Seenema, Mark Stephenson, Juli Stuelpnagel, David Vroege, and Aaron Walters were **honorably released**; D'Vante Rolle was **released**. **Via Art. 14-c:** Bailey Sarver Attema, Dan Brown, Jonathan Kim (Classis Northern Illinois), Derek Elmi-Buursma, William Roelofs, and Lugene Schemper were **honorably released**. **Via Art. 14-d:** James DeZeeuw was **released**. **Via Art. 17-c:** Woodrow Dixon, Marc Holland, Marcel Kuiper, Adam Stout, and Reese (Maurice) Vander Veen were **honorably released**.

Resigned as minister emeritus:

Roy Berkenbosch, Rolf Bouma, Arlo Compaan, Corky DeBoer, John De Boer, Mark Deckinga, John Groen, Pieter Heerema, Tim Hoekstra, Harry Kuperus, Allen Likkel, Lynn Likkel, Robert Price, David Sieplinga, Gordon Terpstra, Betty Vander Lann, Denis Vanderwekken, and Gerrit Veenstra.

Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors called to specific roles within their classes** (Art. 23): Scott Branderhorst (Lake Erie), Donald Dunne and John Park (Hanmi), Abigail Jallim and Nikita Abraham (Quinte), Micah Shin (Thornapple Valley), Janis Persenaire and Becky Visser (Holland), and *name withheld** (Iakota).

Ending service as commissioned

pastors (Art. 24-d): Raymond Evans, Rick Van Manen, and Karen Wilk (Alberta North), Joe Huizenga (Chicago South), Steven Perry (Lake Erie), and Mark Tiemersma (Iakota) were **honorably released**; Matt Atkins and Joel Kiekintveld (Pacific Northwest) and Luis Gomez and Felipe Cortes (Hackensack) were released; Glen McCarthy (Illiana) was **dismissed**. The resignations of Gary Hoeksema (Red Mesa) and Katie Roelofs (Hackensack) were recognized with no designation.

Granted **commissioned pastor emeritus status** (Art. 24-e): Rod Brandsen (Holland), Frank Engelage (Niagara), Cisco Gonzales (Grandville), and Chava Vang (Lake Erie).

New Ministries and Ministry Changes

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

Received **organized status**: Santa Maria (Calif.) New Vision Church.

Recognized as emerging: Living Waters in Ann Arbor, Mich.; Living Water Church in Sheldon, Iowa, and The Way in Aliquippa, Penn.

Disbanding or closed: Radical Grace (formerly Coit) CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., the emerging ministry J.A.M. in Wyoming, Mich., Trinity Hill Church in Chanhassen, Minn., and John Calvin CRC in Truro, N.S.

Merged: Bethel CRC in Zeeland, Mich., with Third CRC in Zeeland. (The first joint service was Oct. 26. The former entity of Bethel CRC expects to dissolve in February.)

Disaffiliated: Ann Arbor (Mich.) CRC; Bethany CRC in Gallup, N.M.; Center Grove CRC in Greenwood, Ind.; Christian Reformed Church of St. Albert, Alta.; Church of the Savior in South Bend, Ind.; Creston CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.; Hope CRC in Oak Forest, Ill.; Hope Fellowship CRC in Denver, Colo.; Jubilee Fellowship CRC in St. Catharines, Ont.; Kanata Community CRC in Ottawa, Ont.; Loop Church in Chicago, Ill.; Mosaic Church in Bellingham Wash.; Reclaim in Anchorage, Alaska; Reconciliation Church in South Holland, Ill. (*de facto*); Roseland CRC in Chicago, Ill.; The River Community CRC in Edmonton, Alta.; The Table CRC in Bellingham, Wash.; and The Table Community Church in Denver, Colo.

Affiliated: First Reformed Church in South Holland, Ill. (retains a dual affiliation with the Reformed Church in America).

Other Matters

Classis Lake Superior noted the (potentially temporary) closing of Amber Church in Winnipeg, an emerging congregation that had partnered with Covenant CRC in that city. Classis had agreed to contribute financially to Amber Church for three years but has now ceased that funding.

Synod

Classes may direct requests or communications to synod, according to the Rules for Synodical Procedure.

Classis Holland is asking Synod 2026 to adopt streamlined rules for how task forces and study committees report their work to synod. “The intent of this overture is to establish report writing parameters to ensure consistency, clarity, accessibility, and consideration of the primary issue(s) addressed in the report.” Classis Holland **wants future reports to not exceed 5,000 words (appendices excluded) and to follow a specified structure.**

Classis Holland is also requesting a revision of the rules for overtures (formal requests) to synod, saying the current process, which allows an overture to be considered by synod without the approval of a council and a classis, “devalues the council’s and classis’s role” and “places an undue burden on synod.” Holland notes, “In 2022, 28.5% of the overtures considered (by synod) were not approved by a council and/or classis. In

2023 this percentage rose to 34.2% and in 2024 the percentage of unapproved overtures was 29.4%.” **Classis Holland requests that overtures not approved by a council or a classis be accompanied by an appeal, of 500 words or less, to the next assembly, as to why the first assembly erred in its rejection and why the matter should be received by the next assembly.** Holland’s request recommends the appeal’s merits should be decided on first, before an unapproved overture is taken up.

—Kristen Parker

*Beginning with Synod 2019 some candidates for ministry were accepted without revealing their full names publicly “because they have been and will continue to be involved in ministry where the security of those to whom they minister requires that their names and photos not be made public.”

'Those Were My Very Happy Days'

Retired pastor and one-time home missionary serving Chinese churches in California, Peter S. Yang spoke with *The Banner* about the founding 60 years ago of Golden Gate Christian Reformed Church in San Francisco.

In those early days Golden Gate CRC served a small group of Mandarin-speakers in a classroom space above a YMCA. "That's how I began. The first worship service attended by only 18 people," Yang remembers. "Those were my very happy days." It was a unique moment in history that Yang's background met perfectly.

In the 1960s, Korea had expelled many Mandarin-speaking Chinese people who ended up in San Francisco. When San Francisco struck down a former law that restricted where Chinese people could buy property, they began moving across the city. Walnut Creek (Calif.) CRC helped Yang research and propose a new church to Classis Central California. "I am a Cantonese (speaker), but I opened up the first Mandarin church in the San Francisco Bay Area," Yang recalls. That was 1965.



Pastor Peter Yang returned to Golden Gate CRC Aug. 17, to enjoy the 60th anniversary celebration with the congregation.

the communist influx society, with the Christian faith; bridging between the Chinese culture and the Dutch culture and the Korean culture. And it's quite a challenge."

Today, "bridge" is one of the first words you'll notice on Golden Gate CRC's website.

Yang retired from Golden Gate in 2001, returning to China for evangelism. "I retired because I seek God's will in my ministry life, and I went on to do mission work," he said, starting four orphanages in four Chinese cities and later leading China International Mission trips in South America and South Africa.

Considering challenges for today's churches in a changed world, Yang still uses the word "bridge."

"My personal vision for a healthy and growing and transformed church must bridge God's gospel to this contemporary world," he says. "Abraham Kuyper's Reformed thinking, I think, is very good for people ... to learn and to follow ... using God-centeredness in confronting all the '-isms'" in society. "We must return to a solid gospel focus that is so much needed in this current world."

—Maaïke VanderMeer

Christian Courier Turns 80, New Co-editors Step In



Photos by Malik Dieleman Photography

At a handoff ceremony that was part of the 80th anniversary celebration of *Christian Courier*, editor-in-chief Angela Reitsma Bick (left) passed on her work to new co-editors Meghan Kort and Maaïke VanderMeer.

Independent Canadian monthly newspaper *Christian Courier* celebrated its 80th year of redemptive journalism in October with workshops, art, a panel of authors, and an editorial hand-off.

After 16 years at the helm, editor Angela Reitsma Bick spoke a farewell to the gathered guests and board, known formally as Reformed Faith Witness, as she prepared to step down, a transition planned in 2024.

Current assistant editor Meghan Kort and art and development manager Maaïke VanderMeer will co-edit the publication together after Reitsma Bick's departure this month.

"Our board is sad to lose Angela, who will consult with Meghan and Maaïke as needed. We are delighted and confident in our new editors. And how elegant it was to witness the transition of editors in a worshipful ceremony that brought lumps to more throats than mine among the 80-plus attendees at our anniversary," said Reformed Faith Witness chair Jim Dekker.

Started as a way to connect the expanding Dutch immigrant Christian community in Canada, the paper has evolved. Reitsma Bick said she was the first Canadian-born editor. The paper's slow graduation "in name and vision from *Calvinist Contact* to *Christian Courier*'... (recognized) that our paper is no longer an immigrant paper and no longer focuses on being a Christian Reformed paper," late former editor Bert Witvoet wrote, quoted in a historical timeline on the publication's website.

Reitsma Bick and her family attend Hope Fellowship CRC in Courtice, Ont., where she plays bass guitar in a praise band; Kort is a member of Terrace (B.C.) CRC where she has until recently served as part-time church administrator; and VanderMeer, who currently worships with an Anglican community, has contributed news stories to *The Banner* since 2018.

—Alissa Vernon

Summit Marks Transition from Toward CRC Canada to ‘Movement of Churches’

The group called Toward CRC Canada, formed in 2023 to promote an independent Canadian Christian Reformed Church distinct from the binational denomination it grew up in, hosted an All Canada Church Summit from Nov. 5 to 8. Everett Vander Horst, chair of the TCRCC steering committee and pastor of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster, Ont., said “well over 100” people from more than 45 different congregations, from New Brunswick to British Columbia, attended the full summit in Kitchener, Ont. There are 230 CRC congregations in Canada.

Vander Horst said it was a “culminating event” for TCRCC that to continue “needs to become a movement of churches.” An overture from Meadowlands Fellowship to Synod 2025 requesting that synod “envision the CRCNA as two distinct Christian Reformed Churches, one in Canada and one in the United States” was rejected (171 to 3) in June. The congregation has started a Church Order article 38-f process of disaffiliation from the CRCNA with Classis Hamilton.

Twelve Canadian churches have left or have started the process to leave the denomination since 2024. The wave of departures (not

every instance) is connected to synodical decisions of 2024 that required discipline to be enacted for churches speaking publicly or acting contrary to the church’s teaching that same-sex sexual relationships are unchaste and therefore sinful.

For summit participants from congregations not, or not



Toward CRC Canada steering committee Gordon Vlieg, Rita Klein-Geltink, Everett Vander Horst, and Ken Tigchelaar.

yet, formally disaffiliating, Vander Horst said, “what we’ve heard from a number of people is they’ve said, ‘we feel ourselves increasingly uncomfortable, for whatever reason, in the CRCNA, but we’re not looking to be homeless,’ so people in that category came to “listen in and get a sense of what God might be building.” And for those who, like volunteer keynote speaker-liaison Richard Bodini, are vocally still committed to being Christian Reformed, Vander Horst said he’s heard their participation described a little bit like “serving on a refugee committee in a church—I’m in a comfortable space, but I know others are hurting and in need of a home. We can be a part of creating something new in order that those people can land well.”

—Alissa Vernon

‘Stories of Struggles and Successes, Pain and Joy’ At General Council



The World Communion of Reformed Churches met Oct. 14-23 for its 27th General Council in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Zachary King, general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and Elly Boersma Sarkany, a commissioned pastor and member of the denomination’s Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations committee, attended on behalf of the CRCNA.

King noted, “There were opportunities to rejoice with some delegates for God’s faithfulness. There were times to lament and pray for those whose churches and ministries have been impacted by war, epidemics, natural disasters, persecutions, and unrest. To witness these aspects of God’s church is transformational for our faith and ministry.”

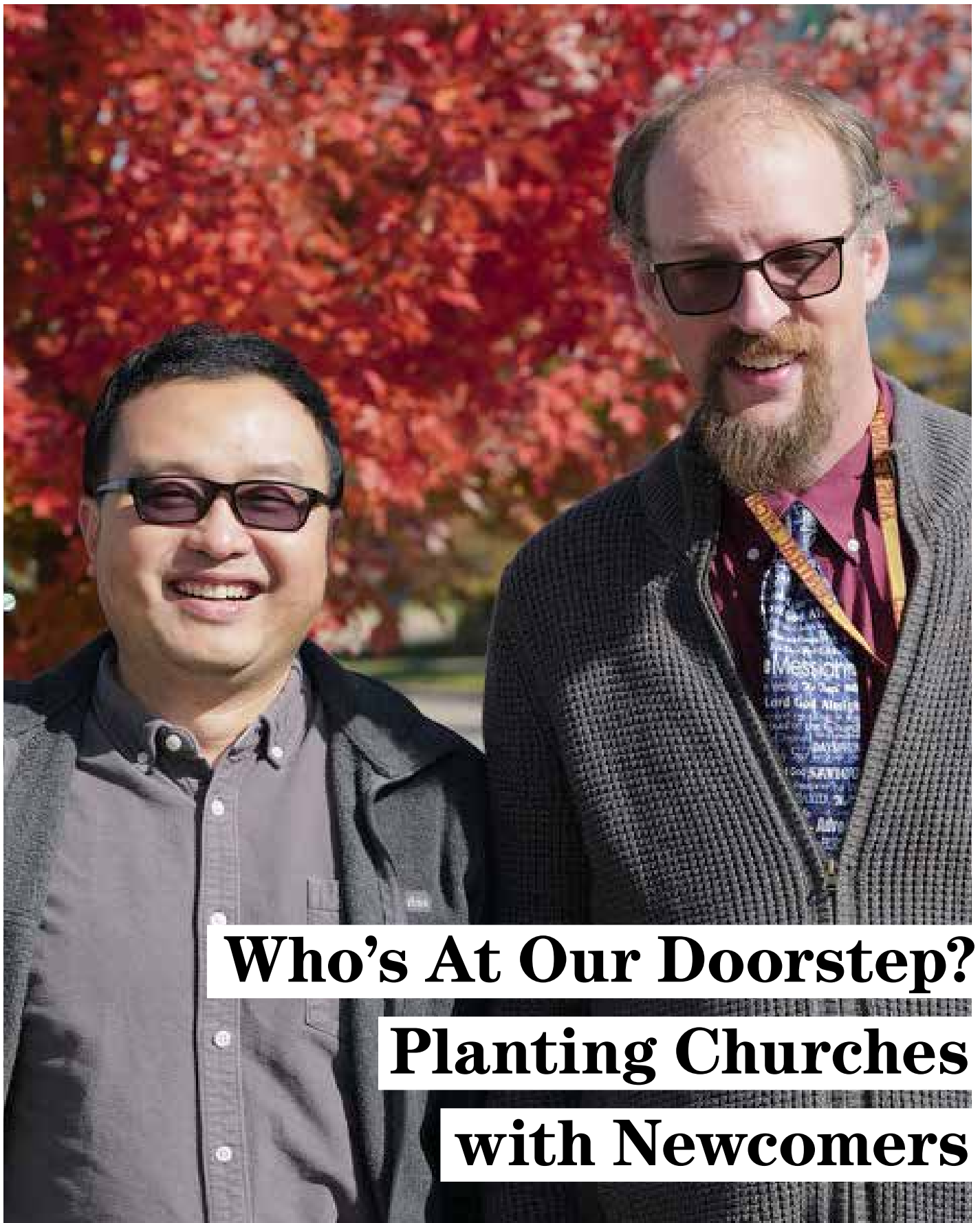
“With our ecumenical partners, we shared stories of struggles and successes, pain and joy, and were able to spend some intentional time in prayer for each other,” Boersma Sarkany said.

The meetings included leaders from the CRC in Myanmar, a “church in communion” with the CRCNA, and from the Reformed Church of Christ for Nations, one of the CRCNA’s three ecumenical partners from Nigeria.

King said he “was amazed how these two denominations” in the crises of an earthquake and civil war (Myanmar) and tribal conflict (Nigeria) “are supporting the needs of their displaced members and even planting new congregations among refugees in cities and even in neighboring countries.”

—Alissa Vernon

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Who's At Our Doorstep? Planting Churches with Newcomers

By Cassie Marcionetti, Resonate Global Mission

It was a chilly January morning in 2024 when Ada Christian Reformed Church, a predominantly white congregation of Dutch ancestry in Ada, Mich., welcomed a Chinese family. From that day on, Calvin Theological Seminary student Matthew Sun, his wife, and their four daughters found a warm and inviting home within the congregation.

The Suns' story is just one example of the many first- and second-generation Chinese immigrants in the area—and of newcomers from diverse backgrounds across Canada and the United States—searching for community. Some are looking for a faith community; others are simply looking for a place to belong. Churches can often be the answer.

Sun not only found community, but today he is working with Ada CRC, Resonate Global Mission, and the church's local classis to plant a new church that can reach the Chinese diaspora in the area. He's following in the footsteps of church planters, established congregations, and classes throughout the denomination who are stepping out to reach their neighbors by planting diverse churches that not only help meet pressing needs—but also bless the denomination by reflecting a bigger picture of God's story.

"God is diversifying the CRC like never before, and church planting in the CRC is leading the way—leading us into a diverse, intercultural future," said Tim Sheridan, Resonate's Church Planting Leader.

Reaching the Chinese Diaspora in Michigan

Many Chinese immigrants have been drawn to Ada, Mich., and the surrounding area for career opportunities and the community's school districts. That's the easy part; finding community has been more difficult.

"Many Chinese individuals in the area feel isolated due to language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of strong local community ties," Sun said. "Some are international students or accompanying family members who struggle to integrate into American life. Others are new to Christianity or have no religious background. I saw the need not only for practical support and friendship, but also for gospel-centered community and discipleship."

Since walking through Ada CRC's doors that first Sunday, Sun has come on staff at Ada CRC and has begun the process of starting a church to reach the Chinese diaspora.

Pastor Jacob Toman with Pastor Matthew Sun. Toman says that Sun is providing a much-needed connection between Ada CRC and its community.



Ada CRC celebrated Matthew Sun's successful candidacy for ministry.

Pastor Jacob Toman said that Sun is providing a much-needed connection for Ada CRC to their community.

"As is often common, and was also a frequent part of the story of the Dutch immigrants who formed many CRC churches in the mid-20th century, Chinese immigrants and visitors seek to find connection with others who have a deep connection to their country of origin," he said. "While English speakers have several hundred options ... for the Chinese speaker, the options are much more sparse."

With financial support, prayer, and coaching from Ada CRC, Classis Thornapple Valley, and Resonate, Sun has been building relationships in the community. While the church is just starting, Sun and Toman both see God at work.

"We've seen God open doors through small things—helping students move, sharing meals, celebrating cultural holidays, and organizing events such as Taekwondo classes and language workshops," said Sun. "These touchpoints have led to deep conversations, new friendships, and even a few individuals expressing interest in baptism or discipleship. God is using hospitality and presence to draw people into community."

Welcoming Spanish Speakers and Arabic Speakers in Ontario

In a similar way to Sun showing up at the doorstep of Ada CRC, a group of people speaking Spanish in Milton, Ont., showed up at a thrift store started by Crosstowne (Christian Reformed) Church.

With denominational guidance and support, John Bouwers planted Crosstowne Church in Milton back in 2012 to respond to the growing population. The town, nestled just



Crosstowne CRC in Milton, Ont. supports both an English-speaking and a Spanish-speaking congregation.

outside Toronto, has been and continues to be one of the fastest-growing towns in Canada, he said.

The church started as a multicultural English-speaking congregation, but when they started renting a space in town to expand their connections, God responded. In 2019, they started a thrift store that attracted a group of Spanish speakers who were drawn to the store's leader and Crosstown member, Jose Luna. They asked him if he would be their pastor.

Crosstowne saw an opportunity to meet the need, and today they support both an English-speaking and a Spanish-speaking congregation. Bouwers said he sees God moving in and through these intercultural connections. The two congregations come together often for outreach events and worship services—and now they're working on starting a third congregation of Arabic speakers.

Bouwers said that Crosstowne has grown through these intercultural relationships, noting that both their Spanish-speaking and Arabic-speaking friends have challenged their own faith: "One of the ways we see God working is ...

through the interchange of different cultures. For example, Middle Eastern believers have higher expectations that true faith will be expressed in relationship, sharing of resources and spending time with one another than typical North American believers," he said.

Inviting Punjabi Speakers into a California Home

When Eric Sarwar graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary and moved to California to work toward a Ph.D. at Fuller Theological Seminary, he searched for an Indian, Pakistani, or Punjabi church—any community where he and his family could worship in their language and culture. He couldn't find one. He connected with the Greater Los Angeles classis, and some of his friends there said they knew some Indian families in Artesia and asked if he'd like to meet them.

That's how Artesia City Church started—three people gathering in a home. With support from Classis Greater Los Angeles, established churches, and Resonate, the church is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year with more than 30 families and 70 attendees every week.

But God had more in store. When one of the families from the church moved to Fresno for work, they found themselves in a similar position to that of Sarwar just a few years earlier. They searched for a church where they could worship in their language and culture, but found nothing. They asked Sarwar to visit them.

"To my surprise, they invited their Hindu friends," he said. "That triggered me, and I wondered about the possibility of a church plant."

After connecting with the local classis and Resonate, Sarwar found that the largest population of Punjabi speakers in the United States lived in Central California, and there was not a single Punjabi church. Sarwar started visiting Fresno monthly, and along with leadership established at Artesia City Church, it wasn't long before he and his family moved to Fresno to start this new house church.

Fresno Punjabi Fellowship has become a home for Punjabi Christians, but it constantly surprises Sarwar that Hindus and Sikhs find belonging through this church as well. They have come for the relationships, food, and the worship in Punjabi, but some have found faith along the way. This past Easter, the church celebrated two baptisms.

"We are talking about global mission and reaching out to the nations—and India, the largest nation (by population), was in our neighborhood," said Sarwar.



This past Easter, Fresno Punjabi Fellowship celebrated two baptisms.

A Call to Plant More Churches

Back in Ontario, Bouwers shared that Crosstowne's outreach has been, more than anything, a "God coincidence"—God bringing people to their doorstep, and the church responding to that opportunity by welcoming them. That is a sentiment reflected in Sun and Sarwar's stories as well, and in many church plant stories.


From Ontario to California and beyond, newcomers are settling into neighborhoods across Canada and the United States. The movement comes with pressing needs for these growing diaspora communities, but also opportunities to share the gospel over a meal that reminds someone of home, through helping someone move, and through many other actions.

"At Resonate ... we long to see more new churches that will demonstrate the good news of the gospel as unified and diverse communities, as foreshadows of God's plan for a unified Church from every tribe and language and people and nation," said Resonate's Sheridan.

He added that a key element of the denomination's church-planting strategic plan over the next 10 years is growing support for diaspora and diverse leaders who are planting churches with the CRC.

"For the CRCNA to fully step into the Spirit-led opportunity that is unfolding before us," he said, "we will need strong support and greater consistency across all of our churches and classes to welcome, enfold, and develop the growing number of diaspora and diverse leaders who are seeking to church plant with our denomination."

Toman asks us to pray for Ada CRC's church-planting efforts, as well as for church planting across the denomination.

"Maybe it is time for your church to plant, but maybe it is time for your church to help support another church plant. Pray, use discernment, and then get moving," he said. "The Lord has promised to build his church, and we, by God's tremendous grace, get to be part of faith coming alive in the story. Pray the Lord continues to use us together as a denomination to serve his kingdom in calling many to faith in Christ." 

Church Planting Is a Denominational Effort

It takes a denomination for a church plant to thrive. Church plants lean on local congregations and classes for prayer and financial support. Resonate's holistic support model focuses on equipping the church planter with the tools, resources, and relationships they need, including the following:

- » assessments
- » coaching
- » community-building partnerships
- » leadership training

From Burma to Michigan: A Church Takes Root

FOUNDED BY DUTCH IMMIGRANTS

from the Netherlands, the Christian Reformed Church in North America has long welcomed immigrant and ethnic communities. That legacy continues today in places such as Chin Christian Church of Kentwood, Mich.

The seed of Chin Church was planted when three Burmese refugee families began searching for a church that would allow them to worship in their native language. The families were from the Chin State in Burma (now Myanmar), a predominantly Christian region in a largely Buddhist nation where minorities faced decades of political and religious persecution. Many Chin fled to Malaysia, where they lived without legal status until the United States began resettling Burmese refugees from Malaysia in 2006.

One of the young people shaped by this resettlement was Van Par Mi, who arrived in Grand Rapids with his family in 2007. At 18, Van spoke the dialect Chin Falam and Burmese. While attending local churches helped Van and other Burmese refugees learn English and adapt to American culture, they also longed to worship in their mother tongue. Rivertown Community Church, which already hosted a Hispanic congregation, responded. On April 8, 2008, three Chin families hosted their first Saturday evening gathering there. At the time, they had no pastor.

The partnership with Rivertown gave the budding church stability, and the growing congregation embraced the opportunity to support fellow refugees as they began their new life in America. As Chin Church's ministry expanded, it needed opportunities to gather during the week.

In 2011, Princeton CRC opened its doors to the Chin congregation,




Some members of Chin Christian Church in Kentwood, Mich.

providing Sunday worship time and space for weeknight gatherings. By then the Chin congregation numbered 70. Today, Chin Church uses Princeton's building from 1 to 4 p.m. on Sundays and several evenings during the week, hosting Sunday school classes, youth worship, women's gatherings, and prayer meetings.

Princeton was instrumental in fostering Chin's development as a church. In 2016, Chin's pastor, Kei Lian Mang, was installed as a CRCNA-ordained minister, and Chin Christian Church became a CRCNA organized church. Van, who arrived as a teenager, now serves as the youth pastor and leads the search for a permanent location. He said, "Chin is grateful for its partnership with Princeton, which provides space at no charge; Chin gives an annual thanks offering in return."

Since partnering with Princeton, Chin Church's numbers have doubled, with 140 people now attending. A couple of years ago, the congregation began looking for a home of their own. They were preapproved for a loan under

the CRC Loan Fund's First Church Building Loan Program and almost purchased a childcare building in Alto, Mich., but inspection revealed significant maintenance issues. Undeterred, they remain hopeful and have been in conversation with another CRC congregation about its church building.

Van underscored the congregation's longing for a permanent home, especially during the holidays when meals, worship, and fellowship extend throughout the day. Guided by faith and sustained by community, Chin Christian Church continues to grow and dream of a place to call its own—a space where generations can worship, celebrate, and build a lasting home together. As part of the CRCNA's long tradition of welcoming immigrants, Chin Christian Church embodies the enduring hope, resilience, and faith of a people building a home in a new land. 

—Layla Kuhl,
CRC Loan Fund

The View From Here

Investing in the Few This Advent Season

AS SUMMER TURNS TO FALL and fall to winter, some of us have spring on our minds. In particular, what kinds of flowers would we like to see next April or May? There are two approaches to that question. The first is to scatter wildflower seeds. Another is to intentionally plant seeds or bulbs such as daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, or crocuses.

Scripture speaks of both of these approaches when it comes to the gospel. For example, Jesus uses the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-8; Luke 8:4-8) to remind us that God scatters gospel seeds far and wide. Only those that land on good soil produce a crop. On the other hand, Jesus also talks about a single vine he nurtures until it bears fruit (John 15:1-8) or a single tree the gardener fertilizes (Luke 13:6-9).

When it comes to the question of scattering to the many or focusing on a few, the Advent story displays God's surprising preference for the latter. The charismatic leaders of Jesus' day filled coliseums, led armies, and captained armadas. In contrast, the eternal Son of God was born in obscurity with only his parents and several shepherds to witness. Jesus lived his entire life within a roughly 90-mile (140-km) corridor between Galilee and Jerusalem. Though he addressed large crowds from time to time, the


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vast majority of Jesus' ministry was spent privately teaching a small group of disciples. Behind Jesus' coming is God's election of Israel, a small nation, to be his chosen people and the channel of blessing to all people (Gen. 12:1-3).

What can we learn from God's Advent principle of "focusing on a few"? In the past few issues of *The Banner*, I've been sharing lessons of congregational renewal from the Gather Initiative—10 in-person gatherings of CRC leaders and members from all 49 of our classes (regional bodies). Visit crcna.org/Gather to learn more. A common theme I heard at Gather was that God is blessing focused efforts to develop leaders in our CRC congregations and classes.

But why does the Advent principle of "focusing on a few" bear fruit? When Christian leaders identify a few

mature believers and deeply invest in them, God surfaces gifts that bless many. These gifts include preaching, administration, community outreach, evangelism, and pastoral care. I'll admit, it's a bit counterintuitive. In the kingdom of God, the greatest effects often come from the most focused efforts.

In this December edition of *The Banner*, we bear witness to what God can do through the Advent principle of "focusing on a few." Each one of the leaders featured on these pages could tell a story about the investment a person or a few people made in them and how God used that effort to bless many. Though it's winter now, spring is coming. Let's invest in the leaders God is using, and will use, to renew our congregations. May you have a blessed Christmas and New Year! 



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

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

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

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

75 Years of *Today*: A Legacy Carried by Faithful Hands

AN OVERWHELMING SENSE of responsibility, accompanied by an equal amount of humility and a desire for anonymity, is what you get when asking Jan and Jim Jonker about their time as *Today* daily devotional delivery drivers for the past two decades.

Their story is rooted in family legacy. Jim's father, Jerry, played an important role in making ReFrame Ministries what it is today and impressing on his children the importance of the ministry, then known as *The Back to God Hour*. Jan and Jim are quick to point out that much of their own partnership with ReFrame grew out of Jerry's faithful example.

"Dad would invite ministry leaders over for dinner, and so we would get to know them gathered around the dinner table," Jim shared.

Even now, the Jonkers hesitate for their involvement to be shared. They don't see their work as something to be praised but rather as a calling to be faithfully fulfilled, and they prefer to share recognition with others. Speaking gently about passing the responsibility on to a new generation, they know the realities families face today differ from previous years.

"It's different now," Jan reflected. "So many people our age are helping their grown kids manage calendars, providing daycare, running grandkids to sports. And with most households having two parents working full-time, younger families aren't ready to take on these kinds of volunteer responsibilities. They're looking for some



Jim and Jan Jonker have served as *Today* daily devotional delivery drivers for the past two decades.

reprieve from all the other duties already on their plates."

But Jan and Jim see another generation wanting to step in and support. In fact, the two share about how their grandchildren sometimes ride along on delivery days, a reminder that responsibility and joy are passed down most naturally through example. "It's important to instill a sense of responsibility to share the gospel," Jim added, "but also to experience the joy that comes from working alongside others."

That joy is clear in the friendships they've formed. "The number of people we get to see on a five-hour delivery day is really quite something," Jim said, as Jan flipped through her delivery book. The couple said they did not begin the present delivery system for *Today* in West Michigan. That was started in the late 1970s by Bill Lubbers and Jerry Jonker, which Lubbers continued with his wife Wilma. It was augmented in the late

1990s by Bill and Gaye Hekman, with much help from Paul Breuker.

The *Today* distribution network in West Michigan alone relies on about 30 volunteers, some hauling large loads for sorting and others visiting locations where the publication is set out, free for the taking. Some places even require mid-week visits for restocking. "We never want those stands to be empty," Jim said.

For Jan and Jim, who make frequent restocking trips, they've come to know church staff, receptionists, and restaurant workers by name. "We've really gotten to know the people at our stops," Jan said. "Catching up with them is something we look forward to."

The fruit of this work often goes unseen, yet its reach is far wider than the Jonkers might imagine. Not long ago, ReFrame Ministries received a letter from a 13-year-old girl who discovered *Today* while on vacation in Holland, Mich., at a Russ' Restaurant. She asked if she could receive the devotional at her home in Wisconsin where, she explained, there are few Christians in her community.

This year we mark 75 years of the *Today* devotional. For over seven decades, God has used this small book to bring encouragement, hope, and truth into everyday life. And behind every copy, whether handed out at a church, placed on a restaurant counter, or mailed across the country, are the faithful volunteers who make it possible.

Volunteers such as Jan and Jim Jonker set an example for how the story of *Today* is not only about pages of daily devotions, but also about the people willing to carry God's words into their communities. **B**

—Tiffany Kraker,
ReFrame Ministries



‘Ten Ways’ Resource Series Now Available in Spanish and Korean

THRIVE’S RESOURCE SERIES, *Ten Ways*, has a new look—and is now available in Spanish and Korean. This expansion makes the series more accessible to congregations, communities, and leaders across the CRCNA.

“The growth of Spanish- and Korean-speaking congregations in the CRCNA is something to be celebrated and considered as Thrive seeks to ‘equip and encourage congregations,’” said Trudy Ash, Thrive’s connect team leader, referring to the ministry’s mission statement. “By translating *Ten Ways* into these languages, we hope to make practical ministry tools more accessible so that no leader feels left out of the conversation. This is one way Thrive can walk alongside the whole body of Christ in meaningful and inclusive ways.”

Ten Ways are practical, list-based resources that cover a wide variety of ministry topics. Each one-page hand-out shares 10 simple, practical ideas designed to spark conversation, guide training, and support planning around faith formation challenges.

In addition to the translations, the series has also received a refreshed look and format, making it easier to share and use. The goal is to make ministry support straightforward and useful for churches.

The translation of *Ten Ways* into Spanish and Korean marks an important milestone for Thrive. The CRCNA has seen significant growth in Spanish- and Korean-speaking congregations in recent years, and Thrive has been intentional about finding new ways to connect with these communities.



This initiative reflects Thrive’s commitment to reach all members of the denomination’s diverse family—and beyond.

So far, 11 Korean and 12 Spanish documents are available. These have been curated from a selection of the most popular *Ten Ways* documents. All *Ten Ways* resources are available at no cost on Thrive’s website. Churches are encouraged to explore the new translations and share them with people who might benefit within their congregations.

From its beginning, *Ten Ways* was designed to be practical and easily accessible. Now, with the addition of Spanish and Korean translations, that vision extends across multiple languages and cultures.

Visit the *Ten Ways* page at crcna.org/TenWays.

—Kennedy McDonald,
Thrive

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



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What Stinks?

IT'S 200 POUNDS. It's six feet tall. It smells incredibly horrible—like a dead animal.

Is it your great-uncle Fred? Surprisingly, no! It's the world's stinkiest plant: the corpse flower.

The corpse flower, or carrion flower, got its name because of the disgusting stench it emits when its flower blooms. It blooms only once every 7-10 years because of its immense size. It occasionally grows to 10 feet tall! That could be to your living room ceiling! The stink of its flower lasts only 48 hours.

Corpse flowers, also called corpse plants, are scientifically named titan arum (TY-ten AIR-oom) and, unless strategically cultivated, are found only in the wilds of the Sumatran rainforests of Indonesia.

While people might think that corpse flowers reek, pollinators love them! Our God, the master of creation, strategized this plan. Titan arum grows upward as a large stalk, and its flower, which is actually many small flowers, is at the base of that stalk with extremely large, floppy, lettuce-like petals to protect the fragile flowers.

The corpse flower has both female and male flowers close together on the same stalk on every plant. That is where the pollinators come in.

First the female flowers open and, within 1-2 days, the male flowers at the base of the stalk also open. Because the pollinators love the stench of rotting meat that comes from the corpse flower, they immediately swarm to pollinate the plant as they move from flower to flower. Now the plant can reproduce. God certainly thought of everything!

Arboretums worldwide have labored to cultivate these difficult plants. It's important work because corpse flowers' native environment is threatened by human encroachment.

When corpse flowers bloom at arboretums, thousands of people rush to see and smell these natural stinkbombs, especially at night when the corpse flowers' blooms are at their smelliest.

If you are lucky enough to see one of these rare corpse flower plants, you are not likely to forget it. If you get the chance to smell one, you will definitely think you are in the presence of decaying flesh, even though none is in sight!

Our Lord, the Creator of all, is full of surprises. Do you smell a stink? Is it your brother ... or a corpse flower?

Dig deeper: Corpse Flower for kids by Learn Bright: [youtube.com/watch?v=vtvpyhfxS3Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtvpyhfxS3Q).

Genesis 1:11-12: God commanded the earth to bring forth vegetation including seed-bearing plants and fruit trees according to its kind. **B**



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



Seven Swans a-Swimming: Gifts of the Holy Spirit

By Dan Beyer

In John 7:37-39, it says:
On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

This is an incredibly exciting announcement by Jesus. Those who believe in Jesus will have rivers of living water flowing out from within them by the power of the Holy Spirit! But what does this river look like? What comes flowing to us and through us by this river? And what does this have to do with Christmas? While I can't cover everything these questions

raise, I can begin to explore this river with you.

Most celebrations of Christmas include the beautiful tradition of giving and receiving gifts. As we explore this river of the Holy Spirit flowing from within us, I want you to shift your thinking from gifts wrapped up under the tree to the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Romans 12:4-8. To increase the Christmas fun, let's imagine those gifts as Seven Swans a-Swimming, flowing to us on the river of the Holy Spirit, alive and graceful. Swans are beautiful and majestic birds, and so are these gifts as they are expressed through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. This Romans passage mentions seven of them: prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, and mercy. It is to the beauty and expression of these gifts

that we will give the rest of our attention, and my hope is that each one will come alive in and through your life this Christmas season. Take a moment to read Romans 12:4-8, and then let's get started!

Swan 1: Prophecy

In 1 Corinthians 14:3, Paul says, "But anyone who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort." Do you know anyone who could use a word that strengthens, encourages, or comforts this holiday season? I am sure you do. The truth is, you can pick almost anyone around you. Though we see Christmas as a joyful season, researchers tell us over and over again that it is one often marked by loneliness and depression. All around us are people who need the gift of prophecy,

words that strengthen, encourage, and comfort.

And we have the most beautiful words of all! “God hasn’t forgotten you,” “God sees you in your need,” and “God has provided a way for you to come into his family through the gift of his Son, Jesus.”

Do you want to prophecy powerfully? Speak the words of Scripture and the promises of God to people who need hope. If the Holy Spirit gives you words for someone that are strengthening, encouraging, and comforting, let them fly! It doesn’t matter if you know the person or they are a stranger standing in line next to you. This gift is given to us that a river of hope might flow out from us to our neighbors and communities.

Swan 2: Serving

The gift of serving that flows from the Holy Spirit turns us from self-interest to the interests of others. Paul writes in Philippians 2:1-4, “Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.”

What a great season the holidays are for growing our service: family gatherings, friend gatherings, church gatherings, and the opportunity to serve hundreds of strangers around shopping malls or restaurants who might need a helping hand. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you this Christmas season about serving? Put it into action. You grow in this gift by being responsive to the leading of the Holy

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Spirit and your willingness to obey that prompting.

Swan 3: Teaching

Teaching is one of the most misconstrued gifts of the Spirit today because we continue to think it is about passing on information (often in a classroom setting) rather than bringing someone to maturity. We have been dominated by the view that if the information got passed on, then the teaching was successful. But I would argue that until that information is put into practice in a life-giving way to others, the teaching is woefully incomplete. Information that never moves into meaningful practice is like having a swan that never swims.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, Jesus shares about a wise man and a foolish man. There is only one difference between them. One put the teaching of Jesus into practice (maturity), the other didn’t. The gift of teaching is not only about information but calling/showing people how to put it into practice.

There is no better example than Jesus. Let’s take the gift of “serving” from before to show what good teaching looks like. In John 13, Jesus washes the disciples’ feet. His living example of what service to one another looks like

completely transforms the rest of the teaching that follows. “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

Each of us is teaching someone around us. Are you passing on information with a mentality to “do as I say but not as I do”? Or are your actions embodying the importance of the information you are sharing? Informal teaching in your family, friendships, and as a witness of God’s love to your community are often more powerful than the best-crafted Sunday sermon. How are you responding to the gifts of teaching you are receiving (formal and informal)? Are you logging the information or putting it into practice? How are you responding to the leading of the Holy Spirit this Christmas season in the moments where you are the teacher (the one helping someone to maturity)? Are you passing on information and setting the example? This swan wants to swim!

Swan 4: Encouragement

What keeps a swan on top of the water? Buoyancy. These birds were made to float! What keeps people afloat amidst the stresses, worries, and challenges of life? You guessed it: encouragement. The Bible teaches us that words can build people up or tear them down. The Holy Spirit gift of encouragement uses God’s words, promises, and the leading of the Holy Spirit to lift people up. Once again the Christmas season is primed for this gift to be expressed through us!

One time I heard Pastor John Maxwell say, “People will rise much faster to your encouragement than your inspection,” and I have never forgotten it. So when you see the parent with a kid melting down right in front of you, maybe offer a word of encouragement

or look of understanding rather than glaring and muttering that people should get their kids under control. When you see someone who looks down add a simple word of blessing that lifts them up.

The Holy Spirit wants to empower every one of us with this wonderful gift! Every day let's ask, "Lord, show me who You want me to encourage today." When we run into that person, continue the conversation by asking, "Holy Spirit, what word, action, or expression of love is needed to lift them up?" Be obedient to what the Holy Spirit says. There are too many people in this world barely keeping their heads above water. Use the beautiful swan of encouragement to give people buoyancy!

Swan 5: Giving

Romans 12:8 says that if your gift is "giving, then give generously." "Giving" as a gift of the Holy Spirit is best described by generosity. To be generous is to give beyond what is usual or expected and involves a heart change.

Many people talk about some day in the future when they hope to have enough to be generous. Those who do this will likely never cultivate the gift of giving. Generosity in giving doesn't begin with what you don't have, but with what you do have. It doesn't begin when you have enough but begins with sharing what you have right now.

Generosity reflects the heart of God and can be seen in the Christmas season where we celebrate the incredible gift of Jesus Christ to us, even when we didn't deserve him. How might the Holy Spirit be calling you to show God's character through generous giving to others, especially those who are less fortunate or seemingly undeserving? When done through the leading of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual gift of giving is like a swan gliding up

and down the river bringing necessary resources to the places God is directing. How is he directing you?

Swan 6: Leadership

Leadership can be measured in influence, and we all have some degree of it. But just because we have it doesn't mean that we use it effectively or for God's glory.

Imagine a small group talking about a gift inventory they have taken. One person who scored high on the gift of leadership quickly and proudly declares, "Well, I guess I am the leader!" If only it were that easy. One might ask that person, "Do you have the gift of leadership or do you just like to be the center of attention?" There is a big difference between strong leadership and a strong personality.

Just because a gift is given doesn't mean it has been developed or that it is producing good fruit. For instance, someone with the gift of leadership (influence) can lead people in the wrong direction as well as the right. A leader with bad character leads you to a very different place than a leader with good character. Someone with an immature gift of leadership can wreak havoc in a community.

Where is your leadership (influence) leading people this Christmas season? Is it leading them to the hope of Christ? Does it reflect God's heart and character? This precious swan shows people the way. If your gift is leadership, lead and lead well!

Swan 7: Showing Mercy


Isn't it interesting that when we have been wronged we want justice, but when we are in the wrong, we want mercy? Jesus said in Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." The gift of this swan

might be the most elegant of all. The love of God is seen in his mercy.

Ponder a moment in your life when you expected to get the hammer from someone but received mercy instead. I bet you can still feel the emotions of that moment. Ponder a moment when you desperately needed mercy but someone gave you the hammer. I bet you can remember the emotions of that moment too! The Holy Spirit wants to bring the gift of mercy to your life and then bring it into expression through your life.

Mercy gives people the opportunity to change. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17).

This Christmas season, remember that it is the kindness of God that leads people to repentance. The prophet Isaiah gives a picture of the promise of God's mercy and grace in 1:18: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow," or we might also say "as white as the most glorious, pure-white swan!"

Seven Swans a-Swimming. Seven beautiful gifts of the Holy Spirit. May these special gifts and graces given to us fill our lives and overflow into our communities. Merry Christmas! 



Dan Beyer is lead pastor of both Gun Lake Community Church and The Well - Byron Center (Mich.). A graduate of Fuller Seminary, he loves the global church and equipping everyday people for ministry.

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Slowing Down: Rediscovering the Sacred in a Hurried World

To slow down is to realign ourselves with the cadence of God's kingdom.

PASTOR JIM HAD ALWAYS prided himself on his tireless dedication to his congregation. But one evening, as he prepared yet another sermon late into the night, his young son walked into his study and climbed onto his lap. "Daddy, when do you rest?" the boy asked. Pastor Jim hesitated, realizing he had been preaching about Sabbath but never practicing it himself. That weekend, for the first time in years, he took a full day off—no emails, no meetings, just time with his family and in quiet prayer. He discovered that slowing down didn't weaken his ministry; it deepened it, allowing him to lead from a place of renewal rather than exhaustion.

In our age of relentless acceleration, the call to slow down might seem counterintuitive. Speed is celebrated, productivity is idolized, and busyness has become a badge of honor. Yet Scripture calls us to a different pace—one rooted in the rhythms of grace rather than the demands of culture. To slow down is to realign ourselves with the cadence of God's kingdom, where rest and restoration are not luxuries but divine mandates.

The Theology of Slowing Down

The act of slowing down is not merely practical; it is profoundly theological. It challenges the idols of our age—efficiency, control, and achievement—and reorients us toward the sovereignty of God. At its core, the practice of slowing down is an embodied act of trust. When we pause, we acknowledge that the world is upheld not by our striving but by the Creator's sustaining hand.

The creation account itself reveals God's intention for rest. After six days of creative work, God ceased and sanctified the seventh day, declaring it holy (Gen. 2:2-3). This Sabbath rhythm was not born out of necessity but God's divine generosity—a gift to humanity

to reflect, worship, and delight in the Creator. Yet how often do we reject this gift, driven by the false belief that rest is unproductive or indulgent?

In slowing down, we resist the world's lie that our worth is tied to what we produce. Instead, we return to the foundational truth of our identity: we are not human doings but human beings, created in the image of a God who works and rests.

The Cultural Cost of Speed

Our modern obsession with speed has deeply spiritual consequences. Theologian Marva Dawn describes it as living under the "tyranny of the urgent," where life becomes a series of tasks to accomplish rather than a gift to steward. This frenetic pace fractures our attention, diminishes our capacity for meaningful relationships, and numbs us to the presence of God.

Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

This invitation is not to a hurried faith but to a life shaped by Christ's gentleness and humility. The imagery of the yoke suggests not only guidance but also a shared pace. Jesus walks with us, not in a rush but in step with the Father's will.

Slowing Down as a Spiritual Discipline

Slowing down is not a passive withdrawal from the world but an active participation in God's sanctifying work. It is a spiritual discipline that cultivates attentiveness to God's presence in the ordinary. The Psalms repeatedly invite us to "wait on the Lord" (Ps. 27:14, Ps. 37:7). This waiting



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is not idle; it is a posture of expectant hope, trusting in God's timing rather than our own.

When we slow down, we open ourselves to the Spirit's transformative work. We begin to notice the sacredness of small moments—a kind word, the beauty of creation, the taste of bread and wine at the Lord's table. These moments, often overlooked in the rush of life, become windows into the kingdom of God.

A Prophetic Witness

To slow down is also to offer a prophetic witness in a culture enslaved to speed. It declares that the kingdom of God operates on a different economy—one not driven by scarcity but by abundance. The story of manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16) illustrates this truth. God provided daily sustenance for the Israelites, teaching them to trust his provision rather than hoard out of fear.

Similarly, slowing down is an act of resistance against the myth of scarcity. It proclaims that there is enough time,

enough grace, enough of God's presence for the day. It is a declaration that our hope is not in what we achieve but in who God is.

Practical Theology: Living at God's Pace

Slowing down requires intentional choices that align with God's rhythm. This might mean reclaiming the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, setting boundaries around technology, or practicing silence and solitude. It might involve rethinking our relationship with time—not as something to manage but as a gift to care for.

In her book *Sacred Rhythms*, Ruth Haley Barton writes, "We are starved for solitude because we are always trying to cram more and more into less and less time." Yet solitude is where we meet God and rediscover who we are in his sight. It is in the stillness that we hear his whisper (1 Kings 19:12).

A Call to the Church

As the body of Christ, the church has an opportunity to model this counter-cultural rhythm. Corporate worship itself is a slowing down—a communal


pause to re-center on God's story. By creating spaces for Sabbath, silence, and deep relational connection, the church can offer a foretaste of the eternal rest promised in Christ.

In a world driven by urgency, the church is called to be a people marked by patience, presence, and peace. This is not a call to disengagement but to a deeper engagement with God's work in and through us.

Conclusion: The Gift of Slowing Down

Slowing down is not merely a lifestyle adjustment; it is a theological declaration. It proclaims that our identity is found not in what we do but in who God is. It invites us to step off the treadmill of busyness and into the unforced rhythms of grace.

In a hurried world, slowing down is a radical act of faith—a testament to the sufficiency of God's grace and the abundance of his provision. It is an invitation to live fully present, deeply connected, and joyfully aligned with the Creator's design.

Let us, as followers of Christ, embody this rhythm of rest and restoration, bearing witness to a world in desperate need of the sacred gift of slowing down. 

1. How does our culture's obsession with speed and productivity affect our spiritual lives and relationship with God? In what ways have you experienced this personally?

2. What does it mean to trust in God's provision and timing when we choose to slow down? How does the story of manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16) challenge our modern mindset?

READ MORE **ONLINE**

Birds of the Earth Herald the Christ Child's Birth

AUTHOR OLIVIA ARMSTRONG, a professional storyteller of folktales, folklore, myths, and legends, draws on her expertise in these genres and her imagination to narrate *The Birds of Christmas*, a tale about the night of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem in which various birds bring their gifts and abilities to honor the Christ Child.

On a frosty December night when Raven stays out late and is flying over the sleeping town of Bethlehem, he is startled by "a glorious golden gleam spreading like honey." Suddenly, he hears a voice: "A child has been born. He is the Prince of Peace. Go now, Raven, and tell the other birds."

Raven obeys, waking up Wren and sharing the news. Wren immediately desires to bring a gift to the Christ Child and begins to weave leaves and moss into a soft blanket for the baby. When Raven awakens Nightingale, the bird offers to sing a sweet lullaby to the baby. Next, Rooster, already awake, proclaims at Raven's news, "Christus Natus Est!" The chickens listen with delight because Rooster has never spoken Latin before or declared, "Christ is born!"

Raven continues to announce the birth of the Christ Child, and suddenly "the sky filled with the flapping and



clapping of wings. From fields and forests, bushes and briars, reeds and rushes, rivers and lakes, in flew the birds" to the small stable where the Christ Child lay.

As each bird offers a gift to the baby, a tiny bird sits in the corner watching the display of generosity and thinks, "I have nothing to give." But, surprisingly, even the small fowl contributes to Mary and the Christ Child and is given an unexpected badge.

Illustrator Mira Miroslavova's charming, earthy artwork and author Olivia Armstrong's creative tale capture the wonder of the night of Jesus' birth and the delightful array of birds exalting the Lord as commanded in Psalm 148:1,10: "Praise the Lord from the earth ... flying birds." (Eerdmans Books for Young Readers) **B**



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



At Last She Stood: How Joey Guerrero Spied, Survived, and Fought for Freedom

By Erin Entrada Kelly

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Born into a devout Catholic community in 1917 in the Philippines, Joey grew up with a longing to be like Joan of Arc, a fighter.

When she was diagnosed with Hansen's disease—commonly called leprosy—she commenced a lifelong fight for rehabilitation and to end discrimination against people with leprosy. Ironically, Joey's disease made it easier for her to avoid capture when she served as a spy for Allied forces in the Philippines in WWII, completing dangerous missions and gathering sensitive military intelligence, which helped save countless lives.

The book is recommended for ages 8 to 12, but is better suited for 12 and older. Readers will discover in Joey Guerrero a worthy role model for following Jesus in a world fractured by sin, and being made new through his grace. (Greenwillow Books)



Out of My Mind

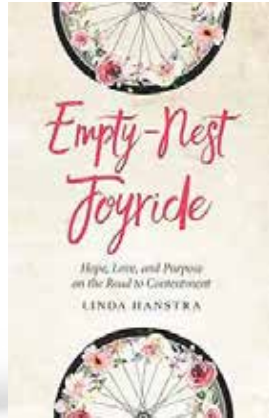
By Saundra
Dalton-Smith

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

Melody Brooks (Phoebe-Rae Taylor) is a sixth-grader with cerebral palsy. She has a quick wit and a sharp mind but is often dismissed by others because she's wheelchair-bound and nonverbal.

After receiving a Medi-talk device that gives Melody her voice (like Stephen Hawking), she is soon competing for a coveted spot on the Whiz Kid Trivia Team that has a chance to go to Washington, D.C., for the finals. Defeated at times, Melody learns to use her voice to speak her mind and take her rightful place in the classroom, gently but boldly confronting those who have underestimated her.

This movie will remind those watching that even though we might look different and navigate the world with different abilities, we are all made in the image of God. (Rated TV-PG, Disney+)



Empty-Nest Joyride: Hope, Love, and Purpose on the Road to Contentment

By Linda Hanstra

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

After 26 years of parenting children, Linda Hanstra and her husband were facing the empty nest—or was it the “mighty nest”?

“The saying goes ‘birds of a feather flock together,’” she writes. “But can two birds of different feathers build a *mighty nest* together?”

In this lovely, wisdom-filled book, she shares her own story of how her nest filled up once upon a time and emptied, one by one, as her four children took different paths to college and beyond. Anyone facing the empty-nest years will find Hanstra to be a gentle, winsome guide as they confront changing roles, parenting young adults, and, hopefully, reinventing a marriage and what it means to have a full house of two. Biking enthusiasts will love her stories based on the Hanstras' shared biking hobby. (MiWoods Press)



Hosea

By Rachel Willhelm

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

God asks the prophet Hosea to embark on a difficult life to paint a picture of God's relationship with his people, Israel, in the years before the Assyrian captivity. Singer/songwriter and worship leader Rachel Willhelm has created a wonderful album that walks us through the book of Hosea from chapter 1, “Marry a Whore (Hosea 1),” to chapter 14, “Orphan Israel (Hosea 14).”

Hosea is, simply, a Bible study. The music is acoustic-based Americana, and each song reflects another chapter or two of the biblical text. She wraps up the album with the only song not specifically from a chapter in Hosea: “I Love You.” In it she summarizes the uplifting part of God's message in Hosea: “I bought you with a price,” and “I will give you life.”

The Lowdown

The Myth of Good Christian Parenting:

This book exposes how the Christian parenting industry has sold families false promises for five decades, leaving a trail of religious trauma, damaged relationships, and lost faith in its wake. (Brazos Press)

Based on the Book:

Hamnet presents the imagined story of Agnes, the wife of William Shakespeare, as she grapples with the loss of her only son. (Dec. 12 in theaters, Focus Features)

Real Life Syrup Heist:

In *The Sticky*, Margo Martindale stars as a syrup farmer whose farm gets shut down by the government, forcing her to team up with a Boston mobster (Chris Diamantopoulos) and a French-Canadian security guard (Guillaume Cyr) to make ends meet by siphoning syrup from the country's national reserve. (Dec. 6, Prime Video)

The Time Hop Coffee

Shop: Phaedra Patrick (*The Year of What If*) writes a magical realism tale about Greta Perks, who receives magical coffee and wishes for the perfect life of her past, which could give her a second chance in the present. (Park Row)

A Prayer for Enough

The joy of those
dandelions buoyed
me through the
rest of that day
and into the next.



Ethan Meyers, 22, is from Holland, Mich., and currently lives in Washington, D.C. He is an editorial assistant at *Sojourners* magazine.

I'M USUALLY THE TYPE of person who likes to stay busy. In college I put effort into making new friends, joining on-campus activities, and taking classes outside my main field of study. I was usually able to balance all those things pretty well, but the extra logistics of graduation and a senior thesis to complete made my final semester feel like a marathon-length sprint to the finish line.

At the end of every day, my to-do list was longer than it had been that morning. I was sleeping far less than I should and eating fewer regular meals. By early April, the constant hustle of year-end preparations had me weary. I felt, to quote J.R.R. Tolkien's famous hobbit Bilbo in *The Lord of the Rings*, "like butter scraped over too much bread."

But there's a funny thing about spring. As winter draws to a close, everything looks fresh and green and as if it could sing.

One day this past April while on my way to class, I noticed a patch of grass full to bursting with dandelions that were opening to greet the day. Dandelions are nostalgic for me, reminding me of my grandparents' hometown and joyful parades in celebration of spring. Seeing the flowers made me stop in my tracks. Standing right there while cutting across a parking lot, those simple flowers made me let loose my first real laugh in days.

What did the flowers know about test stress, tuition payments, or plans after graduation? Nothing. They'd probably be cut away in a few days with the first mowing of the year, but for now they were beautiful.

I picked a few to breathe in their honey-sunshine smell, hoping to anchor myself to that moment. It worked. The joy of those dandelions buoyed me through the rest of that day and into the next.


Even though they did get mown down eventually, their brief few days lining my path to school gave me enough joy to take a few moments of rest. Recognizing that God provided those moments helped inspire a new prayer for my last days at college as well.

"God, whatever today brings, help me find enough joy and rest to get through it."

Enough. I didn't want or need extravagance, just a way to keep treading water, moving forward, and know I wasn't alone. Enough joy kept popping up. I kept finding enough moments to rest and refuel. In those chaotic last days of the semester, my prayers for enough made me think of the Israelites' journey through the wilderness in the book of Exodus (ch. 16). God, asking for radical trust from the Israelites, commands that they collect only enough manna to last until the next day.

I felt similar provision during the hectic weeks at the end of college. Just when I felt I could go no further, I'd stumble upon some small reminder that there was more to life than the next exam.

While the pace of my day-to-day life has calmed down somewhat, I've kept praying for enough. Being diligent in doing so has helped me frame regular life around God's gifts, which I used to see less often. Some days it's as simple as a turtle swimming under a bridge when I've been walking all day and need an excuse to stop, lean against a railing, and laugh. Sometimes it's a text out of the blue from someone I've lost touch with.

Whatever form these small pauses take in my daily rhythm, I'm glad that God used the busyness of my final semester in college to teach me to live slower, while intentionally seeking the joy and rest he shares with all of us. 

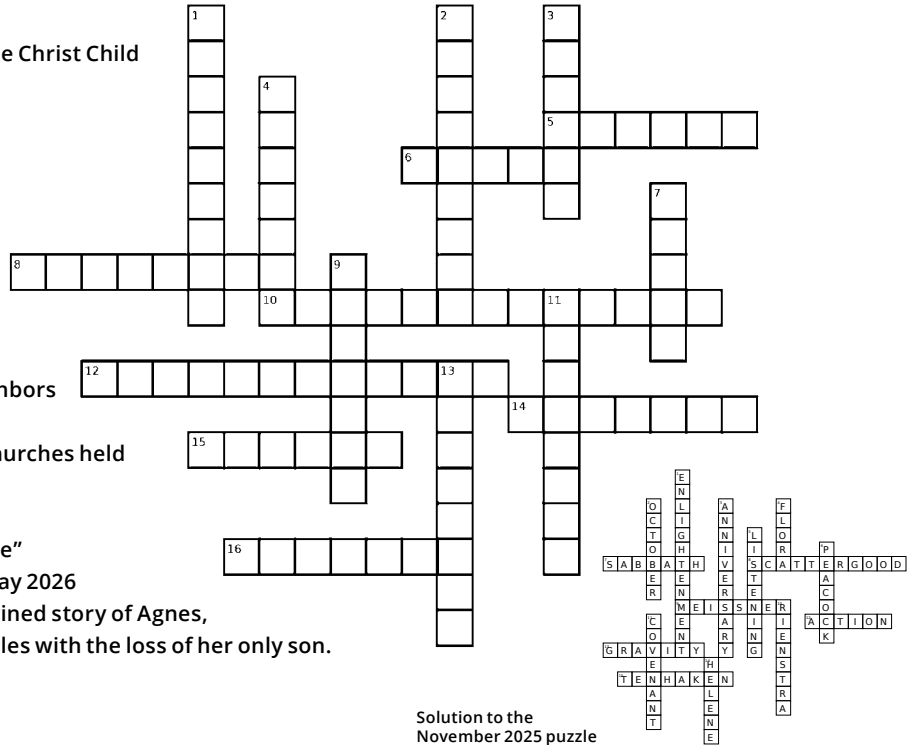
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle throughout this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions in the next print issue. (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

Down

1. *The Birds of _____*, a tale in which various birds bring their gifts and abilities to honor the Christ Child
2. The doorway to transformation
3. Smelly plants
4. *Empty Nest _____* is a book by Linda Hanstra
7. Majestic birds
9. "Like butter _____ over too much bread"
11. The designation for a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church
13. The scene of Jesus' birth

Across


5. Opportunity to share hot chocolate with neighbors
6. God works and _____
8. Where the World Communion of Reformed Churches held its General Council
10. What keeps people afloat
12. The embodiment of the words "living sacrifice"
14. Christian liberal arts college set to close in May 2026
15. Based on the book, _____ presents the imagined story of Agnes, the wife of William Shakespeare, as she grapples with the loss of her only son.
16. Fresno _____ Fellowship



The world is full of noise,

pushing in every direction. Find your way forward and prepare for a career while exploring what it means to reflect the love of Jesus Christ wherever you go, in whatever you do. Turn down the volume and listen closely.

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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 Van Dam at baldwinsearch9@gmail.com or call 616-550-8605.

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Congregational Announcements

MARANATHA CRC MESA, AZ Services for Maranatha CRC, AZ, start Jan. 4, through Mar. 29, 2026, at COTM Presbyterian Church, 6659 E University Dr, Mesa AZ at 10:45 AM.

Church Anniversary

75 YEARS

WITH THANKS TO GOD FOR HIS FAITHFULNESS, the First Christian Reformed Church of Barrie celebrated their 75th anniversary on

October 5, 2025. The service is available via live stream on YouTube (First CRC Barrie).

Wedding Anniversary

70 YEARS

DUYST, PETER C. AND JOHANNA of Grand Rapids (now residing on the Raybrook Campus) will celebrate 70 years of marriage on December 28th, 2025. Peter is a retired Christian school teacher. Jo is a retired Calvin librarian. Their two sons Daniel and David are deceased. Helping them celebrate are DIL Vicki Van Wingerden; grand children Heather, David Jr., Erica, Tiffany, and Tim; 9 great grand children and one great-great grand daughter. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Obituaries

DWARSHUIS, JOHN, 98, formerly of Berwyn, IL, went to his heavenly home on 23 August 2025. Family: Jeanne (deceased); Lynn and Bob Frens (Aaron (deceased), Micah and Mackenzie Frens (Caden, Madi), Noah Frens, Caleb and Jenn Frens (Jael-Jeanne, Noah-Lynn, & ?); Brian Dwarshuis (deceased); John and Diana Dwarshuis.



GORIS, ANNETTE MARIE, age 72, was welcomed in heaven on Tuesday, October 7, 2025.

Annette was a lover of music. She graduated from Calvin University and performed with the Alumni choir for many years. She enjoyed travel and found delight in her children and grandchildren. Bethany Christian Services was dear to her heart both professionally and personally where she focused on domestic adoption. She cherished many dear friends in Holland, Kalamazoo, Toronto, Florida, and beyond. She was loved and will be dearly missed.

She is survived by her daughter, Kristen and Mark Guirguis; son, Donald and Emilie Goris; daughter, Kathryn and Brian Kingsley; grandchildren, Claudia, Jonathan, Henry, Jasper, Hazel, Leland, Benjamin, Kaylee; brother, Peter and Shellie Kooy; brother, John and Tamora Kooy; sister, Gwendolyn and Ray Jendra; sister, Mary and Glenn Pniewski; nieces, nephews, extended family; and a large supportive friendship group.

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VAN ZWOL KRUIS, ANNETTE EUNICE (b. Dec. 15, 1925) passed peacefully into her Savior's presence Oct. 15, 2025, Central Point, OR. Active member of CRCs in several states, including many decades at First CRC, Everett, WA. Worked many years as nurse. Preceded by husband, Peter Kruis, daughter-in-law Linea Kruis, and son Phil Kruis. Survived by daughter Corliss (Jim) Mock, son Stan (Bessie) Kruis, daughter Pat (Mel) Tellinghusen, daughter-in-law Gail Kruis, 12 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren.

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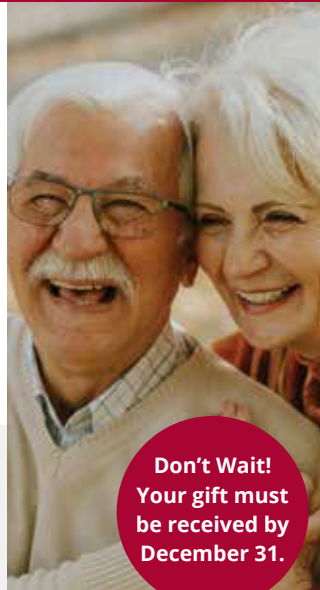
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Magnifying the Lord

We magnify God
by making him
greater in our
thoughts, in our
affections, in our
memories, in our
hopes, and in our
expectations.

*And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."
Luke 1:46-47*


WHEN MY HUSBAND and I lived in Mexico City, we would often go to the artisan park on Saturday mornings. Our favorite artist was a man who worked on his art while he sat in the park. He had a huge magnifying glass propped in front of him, and with it he sculpted. What did he sculpt? A toothpick! We would watch him take a normal toothpick from a box, mount it under his enormous magnifying glass, and with the finest, tiniest blade he would sculpt the toothpick. When he was done, he would paint his creation with a single, fine bristle from a paintbrush. The completed art piece was then secured on a wooden stand and protected with a small test tube.

We have several of his toothpick sculptures. My favorite is a man carrying a load of wood on his back. He is dressed in a white tunic and brown boots. He has a brown pouch hanging from his waist and is carrying a load of wood on his back. The load of wood is heavy, so he is leaning over from its weight. His right hand is grasping a staff, and with his left hand he is attempting to secure the load of wood. An orange cloth protects the wood.

I think of this toothpick sculpture at Advent when I consider Mary's words in her song of praise. The magnifying glass helps me appreciate the sculpture; it increases my ability to see its detail and appreciate its intricacies. The distinction is that the magnifying glass makes it appear bigger, but it does not increase the size of the toothpick sculpture.

When we join Mary in magnifying the Lord during Advent, we don't make God bigger. We cannot make God any greater than he is, but we can perceive

him as greater in our lives. We magnify God by making him greater in our thoughts, in our affections, in our memories, in our hopes, and in our expectations. We can increase his prominence in our lives. Mary was saying that she suddenly realized how great God was in a new way.

May each of us perceive God's greatness in a new way this Advent season. May our joyous ponderings reveal the intricacies of his love and the beauty of his person. May our heartfelt reflections cause us to exclaim this song of praise with Mary: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." 



Gloria Kroeze lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., and is a member of Woodlawn CRC. She is a retired pediatric chaplain having served in ministry at Helen DeVos Children's Hospital.



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