

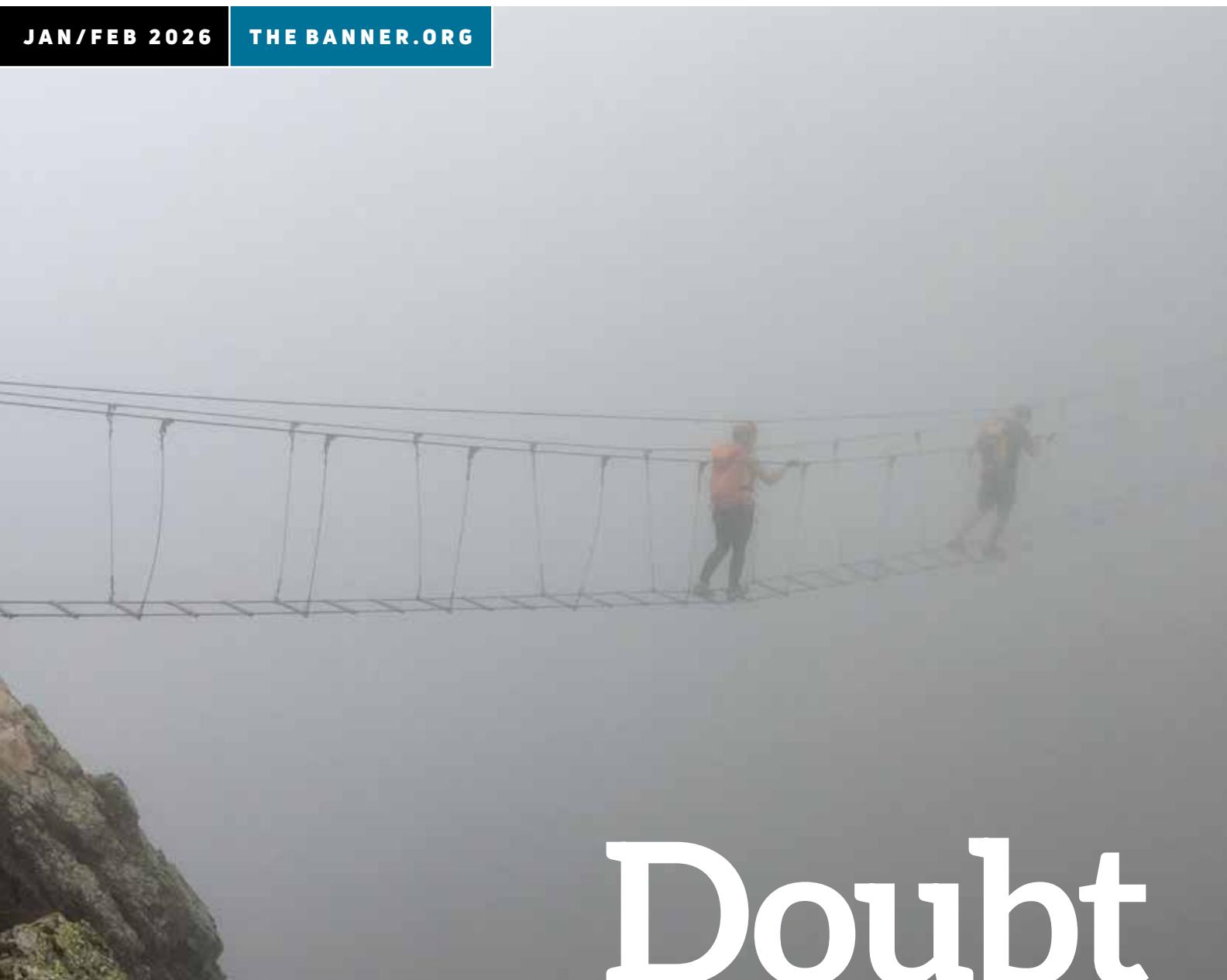
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BANNER

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Doubt

BANNER

BY THE NUMBERS

Here are 10 of our most-read 2025 articles on *TheBanner.org*, two per category, between January and December 2025. For links and 15 more of our most-read articles from the past year, visit TheBanner.org/2025-top-25.



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News

- » *Banner's* Editor-in-Chief Resigns 'In Protest'
- » *The Banner's* Mandate Curtailed

Features

- » A Pastor, Disconnected
- » Ending Well: How Hope Christian Reformed Church Disbanded

Editorial

- » Farewell
- » Being Your Denominational Magazine

Columns

- » The Danger of Political Idolatry (Faith Matters)
- » Celebration and Grief (In My Shoes)

Mixed Media

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- » Recovering from Purity Culture (Book)



Cover: When you have doubts, it can feel like crossing a bridge in the fog. See page 36.

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- » Television: *Sullivan's Crossing*
- » Book: *The Murrason's Barn*
- » Music: *Table Songs* by The Porter's Gate

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BANNER

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

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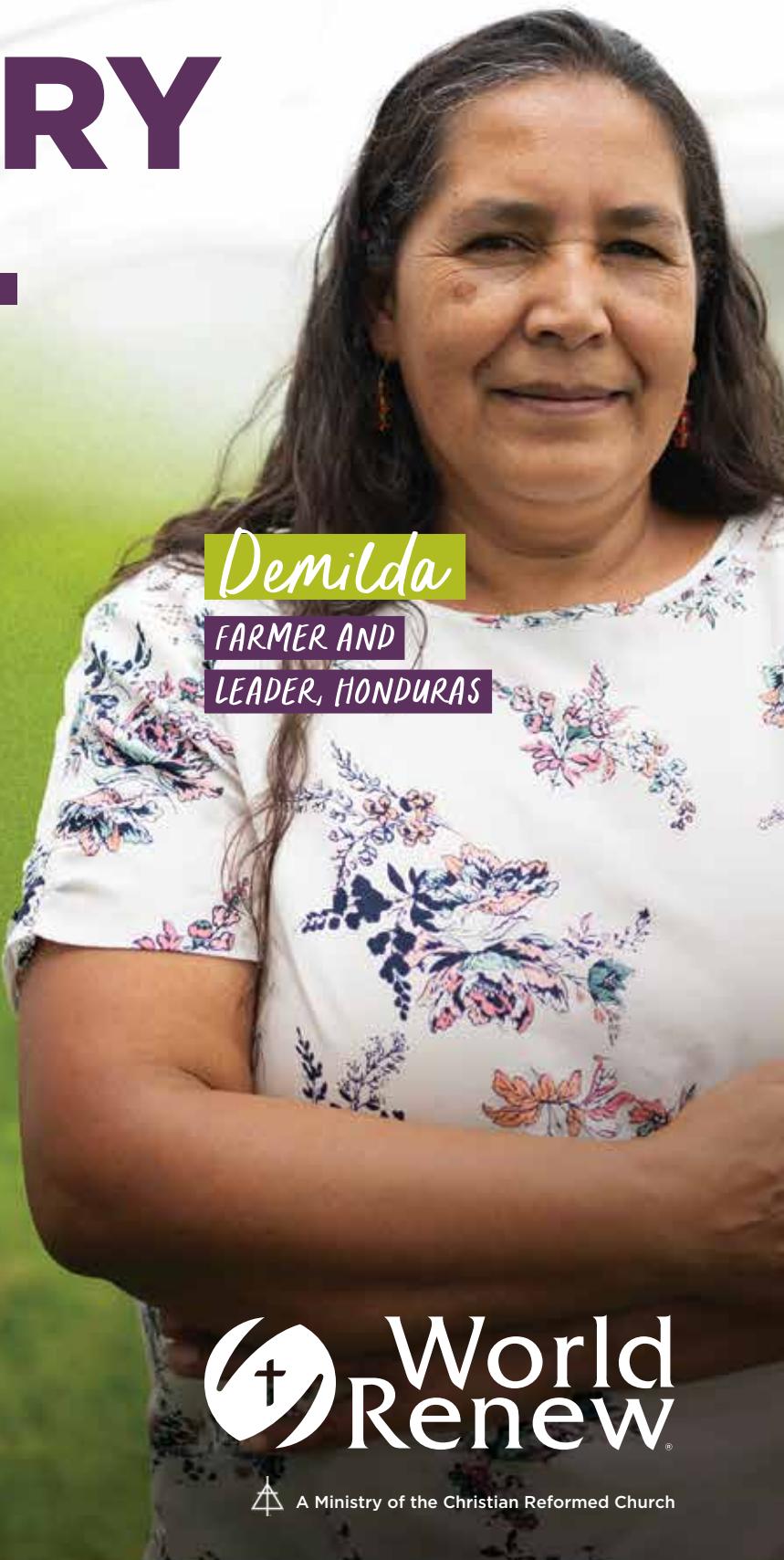
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A Ministry of the Christian Reformed Church

Lifted Eyes

My heart is ignited over these gospel signs and the future Jesus is preparing.



Lora Copley is interim editor for *The Banner*. She serves as director of Areopagus, a Christian Reformed ministry at Iowa State University. She and her husband, Joel, have four children and worship at Trinity CRC in Ames, Iowa.

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.

WEEKLY ON “Banner day,” my grandma sat by the window watching for the mail. Besides the *Lyon County Reporter*, *The Banner* was about her only outside news. Today, I get *The Banner* instantly, along with many competing publications. The only windows involved are the Microsoft kind.

Yet Grandma and I—and eight generations of *Banner* readers (160 years!)—share two things: a call to be a peculiar people and a banner lifting our eyes.

Christian Reformed poet Stanley Wiersma wrote of peculiarity in his 1982 poem “Obedience.” He tells how his dad let a storm destroy the oats, rather than harvest on Sunday. Decades later, when Stan’s dad wondered why Stan hadn’t joined the infamous “white flight,” Stan reminded him of that Sabbath. His dad instantly understood. It’s about an obedient peculiarity—lived out, as Wiersma put it, by “*muddlers like us*.”

It’s true: we are muddlers, all. But we are also, as I memorized it, “a peculiar people that we may declare his praises” (1 Pet. 2:9, KJV). Throughout CRCNA churches, I see Jesus-honoring peculiarity. Here are a few examples:

Grace Community Chapel CRC (N.J.) began in 2005 with a dozen people. Now it has 1,000 worshipers, and they’re planting churches in New York, Australia, Japan, and Thailand.

Classis Southeast U.S. passed its decade goal by raising 46 church leaders; now they’re aiming to classically examine 260 new leaders by 2035.

Churches such as New Westminster CRC (B.C.) or CrossPointe CRC (Ont.) bring together distinct cultures. Latino Christian Reformed churches in Texas are partnering with churches in Iowa for church planting.

Sunlight CRC’s (Fla.) congregants are memorizing the Psalms by setting

them to modern music. North Blendon (Mich.) CRC is marinating in 150 sermons on 150 Psalms. And intentional prayer for renewal abounds. One binational prayer group finds CRC-ers from Langley to Toronto, Edmonton to Houston, interceding weekly.

My heart is ignited over these gospel signs and the future Jesus is preparing.

That’s not to say this is easy. The gospel, and the obedience it calls forth, is unnatural. It proclaims a Savior over self, forgiveness over resentment, obscurity over fame, faithfulness over success, courage over comfort, holiness over hurriedness, and meekness over might. All of that can feel costly. Peculiarity is a hard place to be. And so, peculiar people are regularly in bowshot of discouragement’s arrows.

Psalm 60:4 says, “*But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow.*”

What is a banner, if not a lifting of the eyes in a troubled place?

What is a banner, if not a word of courage in a place of discouragement?

Jesus is always the ultimate banner. He’s the rallying point, the eye-lifter, the Word that gives courage. And in the time of trial, like at the banqueting table, his banner over his bride is love.

From 1866 to 2026, from moveable type to mobile apps, let’s keep our eyes on him.

May our denominational *Banner* continue to point to the ultimate banner of Jesus Christ, helping “*muddlers like us*” live as his peculiar people.

That is worth waiting by the window for—in Grandma’s day and in our day, too. 



REPLY ALL

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

The Banner Saves

Last week my wife and I were visiting family in Seattle. Our son's car was vandalized and my wife's purse was stolen several hours before our scheduled return flight. Getting through TSA without valid ID is tricky but I was confident that the photo of my wife's passport on my phone would get us through. All the digital evidence of her identity that we could show, was refused. I finally remembered that I had a copy of *The Banner* in my backpack with my wife's name on it. This made the TSA agent happy and we were able to catch our flight. We were literally saved by *The Banner*.

» Theo D. Beels // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Banner Changes

It's a crying shame for Shiao Chong to resign as editor of *The Banner* ("Farewell," July/August 2025). His poignant analysis of two sides of issues was all because of Jesus's compassion for mankind. Thanks for your thoughtful writing.

» R. Kok // St. Catharines, Ont.

My wife and I have been *Banner* readers for the 66+ years of our marriage. ... We have been loyal supporters of *The Banner* and its mission. However, we do not support this most recent decision of our 2025 Synod ("The Banner's Responsibilities Curtailed," July/August 2025). So how do we protest this change? Shiao Chong very understandably chose to resign in protest. We will not support *The Banner* financially as our protest this year. It is our hope that *The Banner* will once again be a place for discussion, dialogue, and debate, not just a mouthpiece for the denominational positions.

» Calvin Hulstein // South Windsor, Conn.

In my graduate work on the Reformation, I studied John Calvin and Ignatius Loyola, the main architects of the 16th-century Protestant and Catholic reformations respectively. Both men believed strongly in the need for a well-educated clergy. Calvin said this was important so that they would be able to determine whether the teachings of the church are true. Loyola insisted that education should serve to show that the teachings of the church are true. Thus, the 13th rule of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* expects his students to profess: "I will believe that the white object I see is black if that should be the decision of the hierarchical Church." Loyola would have been much happier than Calvin at synod's clamping down on those who have questions about its pronouncements and at the revision of *The Banner's* mandate limiting the content of all future editions to teach us the approved teachings of the CRC.

» Gary Duthler // Edmonton, Alta.

I do not agree with the direction synod is taking *The Banner*. I have always enjoyed hearing and reading varied opinions. I think we need to always keep learning and growing. Stifling conversation seems like a slippery slope, and our faith is not so weak that reading a differing opinion will shake it. I looked forward to Shiao Chong's editorials. His gentle, thoughtful words always calmed my soul and renewed my faith in God and my fellow humans.

» Karen Thompson // Calgary, Alta.

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

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

A Postscript to Pastor Appreciation Month

Corrections

» In "Classis Watch: Fall 2025" (December 2025, p. 21), Hope Fellowship CRC in Denver, Colo., was prematurely included in the list of "disaffiliated" churches. The church has made a disaffiliation request but it has not been ratified.

I ADMIT TO BEING a Scrooge when it comes to special days. Those who know me will attest to the fact that I chafe at the idea of celebrating at certain times when it is expected of me. You might find me on Valentine's Day proclaiming that "every day is Valentine's Day at my house." This is my way of resisting the pressure to show extra special love to my wife on cue, which I find less than genuine. Similarly, I consider every Sunday to be a resurrection celebration and find Easter songs appropriate all year long.

October was Pastor Appreciation Month. I find myself with a similar reaction to Pastor Appreciation Month as I do to Valentine's Day. Oh, now I should appreciate my pastor, you say? But I will rein in my inner Scrooge and avoid impugning the idea of Pastor Appreciation Month, recognizing that the impulse behind it is good and proper.

Instead, what I hope to do is urge us to not wait for a particular month or until we are prompted to express appreciation for our pastors. Pastoral work is challenging—very challenging. As an elder, my term ends at some point and I am afforded a break from the spiritual work. Pastors carry spiritual burdens they don't get to lay aside or have a break from. Yes, pastors are specifically called to that work and are remunerated for it. But that does not lessen the reality of spiritual warfare that pastors are immersed in on a day-in, day-out basis.

Hebrews 13:17 speaks broadly of church leaders with words that are particularly applicable for our pastors: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

What I hope to do
is urge us to not
wait for a particular
month or until we
are prompted to
express appreciation
for our pastors.

This passage speaks specifically about obedience and submission leading to joy in the work of leadership, but I would offer that it needn't stop there and should extend to regular expressions of appreciation. Sometimes I think the opposite comes easier for us. While we have perhaps moved past the historic "roast the preacher" after-church practices that some might recall, we can still have a tendency to spend more time judging our pastors than we do appreciating them.

So yes, by all means, let's flood our pastors with love and appreciation during October. But just like we don't wait until once a year to tell our spouses we love them, let's also not forget to act unprompted to offer words of appreciation and encouragement for our pastors throughout the year. B

As I Was Saying

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

- » For Some on the American Right, Judeo-Christian Values Are Out, Christian Nationalism Is In
- » Coming Near in The Face of Loss
- » Tolkien, Lewis and the Problem of 'Christian' Art



Eric Van Dyken is a member of First Christian Reformed Church of Prinsburg, Minn. He is Kandiyohi County Zoning Administrator.



Why You Should Be Happy Your Pastor Preaches Things You Don't Like

By Brandon Haan

The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

— 2 Timothy 4:3-4

As a pastor, I know how to build a big church.

I know how to pack a sanctuary, fill it with people, and keep filling it with people every Sunday, too.

It's honestly not that hard.

All you do, at least as a pastor, is pick a few culturally sensitive topics; take

a strong, polarizing stand on them; and then preach it over and over, finding ways to worm it into every text and sermon you preach. Throw in a few tweaks to the worship style (for instance, dim the lights, add a fog machine or two, and get a worship director with an affinity for ripped jeans), and you can build a pretty good-sized church. You can get people in the door. And you can get 'em to keep coming in the door, too.

Again, it's not some secret formula. It's something some megachurches around the world do every Sunday.

And that's because, like everything else in our consumeristic culture, to build a big church all you've got to do is give people what they want, what

they like, and what they already think and believe.

To put it the way the Apostle Paul does in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, you've just got to give them "what their itching ears want to hear."

Giving People What They Want

That's what some churches do these days.

Not all. In fact, I don't think it's the majority.

But certainly there are some pastors, preachers, and churches that do exactly what Paul warns about in that passage. They preach to people's "itching" ears, give them what they like rather than what they need, which

(like it is for all of us) is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You Should Be Happy that Your Pastor Makes You Unhappy

The truth, though, is that you should be happy if your pastor occasionally preaches things that your itching ears don't want to hear, that you don't like, and that maybe even make you unhappy, angry, or frustrated.

You should be happy if your pastor does that because that means he's preaching the full Word of God to you; she's preaching the whole counsel of Scripture. They aren't just preaching the parts of the Bible that you (or they) like, but rather the whole Bible and the whole gospel, as inconvenient as it sometimes is for us fallible, sinful people.

The Bible and Politics

I'll give you an example.

I grew up in a politically conservative area in the south suburbs of Chicago, Ill. I was raised in a politically conservative family. I attended a politically conservative church. And I went to a pair of politically conservative Christian schools. As a result, I spent the first half of my life as a political conservative myself.

That changed, however, when I started reading the Bible. During my first year in seminary, the church I attended at the time challenged our congregation to do a read-the-Bible-in-a-year plan. While I'd been a Christian all my life and had "read" the Bible (at least here and there) for years, I'd never read it all the way through. So I decided to do it. I read the Bible cover to cover. And as I read, I started realizing there were some inconsistencies between what the Bible said and what I'd grown up hearing and believing.

First, I realized there was a lot in the Bible that my home community

If the Bible is truly what we say it is, then how could it not at times offend us?

had never talked about or taught me. Second, I realized there was a lot that wasn't in the Bible that my home community had talked about and taught me. Third, I realized there were some things in the Bible that directly contradicted what my home community had talked about and taught me. And finally, I realized that many of those differences seemed to be due to the fact that the Bible didn't always line up with my home community's preferred conservative political perspective.

Now, it's not that the Bible is liberal (and neither am I, by the way; I'm one of those politically homeless people who can't stand either major American political party anymore). It's just that it's not the sort of black-and-white conservative textbook I grew up believing it was.

That's because the Bible and the gospel it teaches, the true gospel, cut both ways. There will be times in a gospel-centered church when political conservatives will be happy. That's because they're going to be hearing what their "itching ears" want to hear. But there also should be times when they won't be happy, and when their itching ears aren't going to hear what they want to hear. And the same is true for liberals. The same is true for independents. And the same is true for every other

category or classification we could put ourselves in.

The gospel cuts both ways. At times it soothes and scratches the itch for one group. At times it soothes and scratches the itch for another. At times it soothes and scratches the itch for both. And, at times, it soothes and scratches the itch for neither.

The Word of God

How could it not?

After all, if the Bible is truly what we say it is (the divinely inspired, infallible, authoritative Word of God himself), then how could it not at times offend us?

I'll be honest: that's what it's done for me. Put simply, there are all sorts of things that I used to believe, used to think, and used to hitch my wagon to that I no longer do. And it's because of the Bible. It's because the Bible says something different, pushes back on what I believe as a fallible human being, and has forced me to come to terms with the fact that as much as I might want to think or believe one thing, God says different.

So you should be happy when your pastor occasionally preaches things you don't like. You should be happy, because it means your pastor is doing his or her job, not just preaching the things you like or agree with, but rather the full Word of God.

If that offends you, just know that they've probably been offended by the Bible too. I know I have. But that's the Word of God doing its work in me. B



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

BIG QUESTIONS

Ethics

Should Christians watch MA-rated TV shows or R-rated movies?

It is said that we are living in the golden age of television. Never before have TV shows been so well made and so readily accessible. Even movies, while perhaps struggling at the box office, are just a few clicks away on our smart TVs. At the same time, never before has there been so much immorality on screen, whether blasphemy, violence, sexual immorality, or a host of other vices. All of which begs the question: What should we watch? And what should we let our kids watch?

There are, of course, many factors that should influence how we answer these questions, not the least of which include artistic, educational, and entertainment value. One might also consider the reason for the rating. But here I'm interested in the narrowly moral aspect of the question.

On the one hand, to watch something is not in and of itself wrong. It is not what goes into a person that defiles them, Jesus said, but what comes out. "For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony,



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohórquez

slander" (Matt. 15:19). On the other hand, because of our sinful hearts, what we watch often tempts us to sin, and we are responsible for that. Thus, Jesus warns that if our eyes cause us to sin, we should pluck them out, "for it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go to hell" (Matt. 5:30).

We must, therefore, be careful about this. Paul exhorts believers, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is" (Rom. 12:2). He goes on to provide us with a good rule of thumb: "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9).

In other words, when I watch a TV show, do I find myself enjoying the immorality? Does it attract me, or even desensitize me, to what is sinful and undermine my love for what is good? Sometimes it is not so much a question of what we watch, but how we watch it. Do I watch in a way that renews my mind and makes me more like Christ or in a way that encourages the evil thoughts in my heart?

It is crucial that we answer these questions honestly. After all, we were made to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength—even when we watch TV.

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

Faith Formation

If forgiving others is a heavy cross to bear for many, should forgiveness be preached sternly?

Forgiveness can present a significant challenge in the life of a Christian.

When we are hurt by others, our initial response is often to focus on the pain we are feeling or to express anger toward the person or people who harmed us. As a result, it can be difficult for us to extend forgiveness.

Jesus recognized this reality and had a lot to say about forgiveness. In Matthew 18, Peter approaches Jesus and asks him for a numerical limit on the number of times he is required to forgive a person. Some rabbis taught that the total was three, so Peter might have believed that his suggestion of seven seemed generous. Jesus, however, gave him a total that seemed immeasurable and well beyond the amount Peter had offered.

When teaching on prayer, Jesus incorporated forgiveness into what we know as The Lord's Prayer. In Matthew 6, Jesus assumes that his followers will seek God's forgiveness only after they have forgiven those who have sinned against them. Luke's gospel also records Jesus telling his disciples that offering forgiveness to others is a necessary first step in asking God to forgive our sins and shortcomings.

Jesus didn't tell his followers to forgive others only if their total number of offenses was below a specific number or if the person who offended them demonstrated an appropriate amount of remorse. Jesus' teachings recognize that if left to ourselves our inclination might often be to withhold forgiveness, so he makes it a command.

This teaching, however, should not be received as a rigid or repressive requirement. Instead, Jesus' command is meant to provide healing and hope for us when we are hurt by others. How can that be? The reality is that through offering forgiveness to others, we become more aware of our own need to be forgiven by others. In following Christ's command, we become more aware of the grace God has extended to us.

When viewed in this light, rather than presenting forgiveness in a stern or authoritative manner, Christians can experience Jesus' teaching as a life-giving, grace-filled opportunity for the person offering and the person receiving forgiveness.

Rick Zomer has worked with young adults for over 30 years and currently serves as a faith formation consultant for the CRCNA. He lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., and attends Fifth Church.

Relationships

My spouse runs to her parents when we have problems. Does she think their opinion is more important than mine? It's causing trouble.

"That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."

—Genesis 2:24

I remember the first time we got into a big argument. My husband and I had been married for about five months, we had just moved 1,500 miles away to central Florida, and I was still navigating being an adult and dealing with my temper tantrums. I slammed the house door, got in my car, drove to a nearby church parking lot, and cried.

When I was finished exchanging words with God and dried up my tears, I went home and said I was sorry to my husband.

And I was.

I didn't have anyone else, and we had to figure this out together. I have since found that having only God and my husband during that time was one of the healthiest things we could have done for our marriage.

It's common, and often expected, that after children get married, they should live nearby to support the farm, business, or simply maintain the intertwined life from their upbringing. In some ways, it's an incredible testament to God's faithfulness to our families that we draw near to each other after big changes. There's no doubt that there is beautiful potential for families to establish a solid support system for each other. But as a therapist, I've seen these adult relationships become unhealthy when the command to "leave our father and mother and cleave to our spouses"

(KJV) is not prioritized. Cleave can be defined as "cling, stick, hold fast; to be strong and loyal."

Adult children and their spouses should feel permission and freedom to be obedient to Christ by choosing their own family traditions, careers, geographic location, places to educate their children, and a place to worship without feeling like they are disappointing their parents. Parents also benefit by inviting, not expecting, their children to participate in extended family life through family gatherings and celebrations.

Offering support to their child's growing family and loving them well during hard times are beautiful ways to come alongside them. But neither parents nor their adult children should feel guilt or shame in choosing to keep their lives moving forward in their separate households, however they choose to do that. These boundaries are healthy and tend to allow the two homes to live obediently and in a united way. What a blessing it is to see God demonstrate his faithfulness through the unique lives and callings God gives to each of us and our children!

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

●

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

Michigan Dad Builds Nonprofit Eating Disorder Clinic

NEWS

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Photo by Finding Freedom Ranch

The Lodge at Finding Freedom Ranch, Moline, Mich.

Founded to provide residential treatment not currently available in Michigan, Finding Freedom Ranch seeks to help young women "find peace with God, peace with themselves, and peace with food." It's one of only a few Christian-focused eating disorder clinics in the United States.

Ryan Burgess, a member at First Christian Reformed Church in Byron Center, Mich., started the nonprofit in 2021 after he, his wife Kim, and their family lived through the grief and healing of an eating disorder with their daughter, Maci. Kim Burgess, who is the prayer coordinator at Finding Freedom Ranch, said there was a spiritual piece missing at the clinics where they first tried to find help for Maci. This led the family out of state for in-patient treatment, and it was there that Maci found more well-rounded support than just the clinical aspect of healing from an eating disorder.

"It wasn't all about me," Maci said, liking that she didn't have to talk about the problem all the time at the faith-based treatment clinic. She learned that she's more than the eating disorder, and that God can work through these experiences for good. Ryan Burgess said that because of this experience, God put it on his heart

to build a Christ-centered eating disorder recovery program.

"We are firmly convinced that through God we can provide a place of great comfort and healing," Burgess said.

In June 2023, they broke ground on eight acres of land in Moline, Mich., where the first of three phases for the property—The Lodge—is now in place.

Hosting transformation-focused Bible studies and creative craft nights as a start, The Lodge will also be the base of programs and clinical operations, aspects for which Finding Freedom Ranch is still hiring.

Phase two, The Stables, a facility that will house horses for equine therapy, is expected to begin sometime in 2026. The residential portion, The Bunkhouse, will provide full in-patient care for 12 adolescent girls. This final phase is expected to begin after the outpatient treatment phase is fully established.

"I feel so strongly about incorporating faith into recovery," said Jennifer Smith Lane, a recovery coach who works with Finding Freedom. "That's the missing piece, and that's what makes me excited about Finding Freedom Ranch."

—Callie Feyen

Interim Banner Editor Appointed

Lora Copley, a minister of the Word in the Christian Reformed Church since 2006, joined *The Banner* as interim editor-in-chief on Dec. 1.

The executive committee of the Council of Delegates ratified the appointment Nov. 18. The publication had been without an editor-in-chief since Shiao Chong resigned the position in June 2025.

Copley has served the CRC in various ways including on the candidacy committee, on the Council of Delegates, and at two synods. Most recently she's been working as a campus pastor with Areopagus Campus Ministry at Iowa State University. Copley will continue at Areopagus in a pared-down role while serving as interim editor, a half-time position.

Copley has a Master of Divinity from Calvin Theological Seminary and a Bachelor of Arts in Theology from Dordt University. Her writing includes *Teach Us to Pray: Scripture-Centered Family Worship through the Year*, co-authored with Elizabeth VanderHaagen, and articles for the Center for Excellence in Preaching, *Reformed Worship*, and the Abide Project.

Having lived in Illinois; Texas; Mount Vernon, Wash.; Grand Rapids, Mich.; Florida; Rehoboth, N.M.; and now in central Iowa, Copley says she's grateful "because God has taught me, in each of those settings, different skills and different postures."

"My primary posture is one of encouragement" and staying as "faithful as I can to God's good Word," said Copley. She wants to encourage the denomination forward. "Weariness is not a place from which we can move forward into a new chapter. We have to really be energized by what God is doing. ... I want to contribute in ways that build up this body of Christ for fidelity."

Dean Heetderks, *The Banner*'s art director who had been managing the team and production in the absence of an



Lora Copley was a delegate from Northcentral Iowa at Synod 2024.

editor-in-chief, was the hiring manager for the interim appointment. "I was amazed at the number and quality of interested parties in the interim position," Heetderks said. "Clearly, these people were invested in the CRC and wanted to do their part to support the ministry of *The Banner*—despite the attention its mandate (change) received at Synod 2025."

Synod, in response to two overtures (formal requests), altered *The Banner*'s guidelines and mandate so that it would "represent the denomination publicly to the broader Christian church and to the world at large by speaking from a distinctly Reformed perspective in line with our confessions and synodical decisions, representing the CRCNA as its official publication."

Copley said, "I see the mandate as given with a positive intent in good faith to build trust, and I resonate with that desire." She said she hopes "to bear good fruit toward that end," doing her best "to honor the many diverse peoples that are serving the denomination faithfully, from the general secretary and our university

presidents, all the way up to the Sunday school teachers and the prayer warriors who are on their knees."

Heetderks led a hiring committee of six, including two members of the Council of Delegates, which reviewed applicants and interviewed candidates for the position, welcoming general secretary Zachary King into the final interviews. King made the appointment with the hiring team's recommendation, and it was ratified by the executive committee of the Council of Delegates, the ecclesiastical board for the CRC which acts on behalf of synod in between meetings of synod.

The appointment of a long-term *Banner* editor is done by synod, receiving a recommendation from the Council of Delegates. Heetderks said that process will be initiated in hopes of presenting a candidate to Synod 2026.

—Alissa Vernon

Building Church Planting Momentum With Multiply

"I was at the Multiply Conference, and I cannot remember the last time when I was as energized over the future of the Christian Reformed Church as I am right now."

"It was so exciting to be a part of this event. To be at the beginning of what could be one of the most significant 10-year journeys for the CRC."

Those are quotes from two different pastors—Lora Copley, talking to *The Banner* at the time of her appointment as the magazine's interim editor-in-chief (see story, p. 13); and Martin Spoelstra, a church planter in Ontario who wrote to *The Banner*'s news tip line.

What they were excited about was a Nov. 8-11 conference hosted in Port St. Lucie, Fla., described by co-host Classis Southeast U.S. as a way to "help catalyze a denomination-wide 10-year strategic plan for church planting (with) hopes to build momentum across the CRCNA." Resonate Global Mission was the conference's other partner.

A catalyst, in chemistry, is a substance that increases the rate of a chemical reaction. The metaphor could be extended in the case of Classis Southeast U.S. to label the regional group of churches as the "initiator" and a "catalyst" in the current church-planting transformation in the CRC.

The classis sparked conversation and a resolution at Synod 2025 with its request "to prioritize church planting within the denominational budget." Synod encouraged churches to "take an extra step to



Photo by Sunlight Ministries

Participants of the 2025 Multiply Conference pray in a circle during worship. Conference contributor Scott Vander Ploeg is in a red T-shirt in the center.

connect with Resonate in order to build support for church planting," "check with their (connected) church planter(s) to find out if they have raised enough support," and "encourage their classes to develop a church planting strategy or strengthen their current strategy in partnership with Resonate."

Further, at the prompting of Classis Southeast U.S. delegate Scott Vander Ploeg, synod instructed "the Office of General Secretary to coordinate with agencies and the classes to develop a vision, plan, strategy, and financial proposal for church planting for the CRCNA for the next decade ... and set this plan before the churches by the time of next year's synod." Having set the vision in motion, Classis Southeast U.S. launched the conference to keep the momentum going.

Spoelstra recalled that Vander Ploeg was already talking about a next-step conference before Synod 2025 was even over. "When he talked about trying something

like a conference as a catalyst for the conversations about putting this vision together, I was really intrigued about that, and when we chatted during break times, we seemed to connect on a lot of levels," Spoelstra said. "Then, when the conference came up, he asked if I would consider being part of the team that was putting together communication to get the word out."

Multiply, with the theme "Multiply Disciples, Leaders and Churches," hosted participants from 100 Christian Reformed congregations, representing 38 of the 49 classes, and featured workshops on specific disciple-making tools, stories of disciple-making and renewal across the denomination, sessions on gospel-centered identity, and a call to urgency and hope.

"I'm incredibly enthusiastic about the grassroots nature of this," said Jonathan

Spronk, an Iowa pastor who attended from Classis Central Plains. "This (mutual support of church planting) is happening through organic conversations, and I'm excited to see how we can develop these ties better."

Two months before Multiply convened, the classis of Central Plains committed \$55,000 in funding over three years for church planting in Classis Rocky Mountain, more than 900 miles away. Pastor Christian Sebastia, who was a presenter at the conference, has been working with networks of new Latino churches there, establishing "more than 35 congregations including four in Texas in the last seven years," the conference program said. Several of them were affected by the loss of direct grants from Resonate announced in the spring of 2025.

Eric Kamp, a co-pastor with Spronk at First CRC in Oskaloosa, Iowa, who serves on the denomination's Council of Delegates, said the effect of those losses prompted him to think about possible solutions. "It seemed to make sense that, at least for a transition period, we (Classis Central Plains) might support these churches" saying, "'We can support you and your ministry there, but you guys have vision, you have energy, and you have a model that is showing success; can we learn from you in the process as well?'"

Central Plains decided at its September meeting to arrange for Sebastia to "help facilitate a similar vision/plan locally in our area, encourage local congregations to add some of these church plants/pastors to their regular offering schedule and perhaps create relationships with this budding ministry."

Classis B.C. Northwest also, at its October meeting, received requests to "reprioritize church planting and church plant support." They're earlier in the process

than Central Plains, but the classis agreed to form an ad hoc committee to work on a classis "vision, plan, and strategy for planting a specific number of churches over the next decade" and to "develop the details for a financial framework" including seed money from classis reserves, "special offerings, congregational donations, and mission-aligned partners."

Three members of Classis B.C. Northwest attended Multiply. "The idea of bringing together leaders in the denomination was already something I had felt and wanted to see happen," said Pastor Andrew Beunk. That, and the emphasis on discipleship, were two reasons Beunk was excited about attending. "A lot of what I was blessed by was some of the stories that were shared, but also meeting different people and networking, reconnecting with people and feeling in my conversations with a variety of people, that there's hope for the next chapter of ministry in the CRCNA."

In Classis Quinte, Spoelstra's classis, a grant will help launch a regional training network using Timothy Leadership Training, a model used for decades in more than 40 countries including Guyana, Cambodia, and Guatemala. Certified trainers Mark and Deborah Jallim from Living Hope Community Church in Whitby, Ont., are helping prepare the first base-level trainers, including Spoelstra and other leaders from Discovery Church where Spoelstra pastors in Bowmanville, Ont. After that training process is complete, they'll start with training others in the spring.

All of these represent the kind of momentum that Vander Ploeg wants to see continue up to and after the renewed

vision and strategy for church planting is presented at Synod 2026.

"There has to be some concrete action steps that lead from the conference to some new day," Vander Ploeg said in a pre-conference episode of his Disciple Standard podcast. "One is that we want to commit ourselves to raising up 2,000 leaders in the next decade. And another is that our church (the CRCNA) of 1,000 churches wants to commit itself to planting 1,000 congregations in the next decade. These are massive ideas, and we're going to have to take massive, imperfect, gospel-sized action to accomplish these kinds of things."

That starts, he posited, with every classis responding to the challenge, saying, "'Hey, we think we can do 50 leaders in the next decade,' and the next classis is going to say, 'We think we can do 25,' and then other classes may pick more and other classes may pick less, but then a real number, not just a round number like '2,000,' will emerge that'll become our pressing vision for the next decade together."

—Alissa Vernon

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. James Jungkyu Park

1932-2025

Born in Korea, trained in theology in the United States, and with missionary service in Japan and Europe, Rev. James Jungkyu Park spread the love, hope, and inspiration of Jesus Christ worldwide. He died Oct. 29, 2025, at age 92.

Rev. Park studied law at Central University in Seoul, Korea, and attended Full Gospel Theological Seminary in Anaheim, Calif. (now called Bethesda Christian University), before immigrating to the U.S. in 1973 with his family. He graduated from Young Nak Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Los Angeles, Calif., and was ordained in that denomination in 1985. From 1986 to 1990 he served as a missionary to the U.S. Air Base in Misawa, Japan.

In 1990 he joined the Christian Reformed Church and was sent by the denomination's World Missions Committee (now part of Resonate Global Mission) to serve Japanese churches in Aomori and Tokyo. He left a lasting impact on the communities he touched.

After retirement in 1999, Rev. Park continued missionary work in Europe, pastoring Japanese expat churches there until 2014.

Rev. Park is survived by his wife, Young M. Park, whom he married in 1958, two sons, one daughter, seven grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

—Jonathan Kim

Noteworthy



Katie Day Good, associate professor of communication at Calvin University, was announced as the 2025 Emerging Public Intellectual by Redeemer University in

October. She is delivering the lecture "The Digital Hearth: On Sharing Screens and Stories in a Fragmented Age" on Feb. 2 at Redeemer's Albert M. Wolters Centre for Christian Scholarship.



Shirley De Vries, former chief administrative officer in the Christian Reformed Church's Office of General Secretary, will retire Jan. 16 after 40 years of service in various capacities.

In October, Council of Delegates chair Michael Ten Haken thanked De Vries for her contributions to denominational leadership. The Council interviewed and appointed Roberta Vriesema as director of partnership administration at the same October meeting. That position, assumed by Vriesema on Nov. 10, replaces the role of CAO.

At its meeting Oct. 21-23, the **board of directors for the Alliance of Reformed Churches, a network of formerly Reformed Church in America congregations, voted to recognize church in communion status with the Christian Reformed Church in North America.** That designation is the closest form of ecumenical relationship the CRCNA has with partner churches. The CRCNA's Synod 2025 approved the designation, awaiting a response from the Alliance.

"This step helps to recognize ordination (of pastors) between our organizations as well as reflects (that) we share a common commitment of understanding in our calling in God's Kingdom," said Jami Alferink, executive and communications assistant for the Alliance.



Joel H. Nederhood, who served the Christian Reformed Church's radio and television ministry The Back to God Hour (now ReFrame Ministries) for 35 years, died Dec. 2 at age 94.

When he retired in 1996, the ministry noted in its report to synod that the name Joel Nederhood, who'd served as a radio minister, host of the daily *Faith 20* television program, and director of ministries, "has been synonymous with The Back to God Hour."

A summary of his farewell speech to that year's synod noted Nederhood expressed "concerns about the culture and the need for the church to address those concerns from the Reformed perspective. He reminds the assembly how important it is for a Reformed church to be always reforming."

Youth-led Worship Nights Bring Ontario Groups Together



Youth and leaders from three different youth groups attended Sunday evening worship at Living Hope CRC in Sarnia, Ont., on Oct. 19.

For three years a trio of Southwest Ontario churches have hosted each other for fall youth-led worship services, encouraging each other with connection.

Dresden (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church, Wyoming (Ont.) CRC, and Living Hope CRC in Sarnia, Ont., meet once a month on Sunday evenings in September, October, and November—the months least likely to be disrupted by summer schedules or inclement traveling weather.

"We had good memories of these types of events in the past and restarted this to worship and fellowship together and remind youth that there are other youth in different churches, attending different high schools, who also love Jesus," said Andrew Zomerman, pastor of Dresden CRC.

Margi Sipkens, Zomerman's cousin and a youth group leader at Wyoming CRC, helped get it started, saying they wanted to start something "to encourage unity, connection, and a sense of belonging among Christian Reformed youth in the area," Sipkens said.

Zomerman said just over 50 young people attended the September service at Dresden CRC and about 40 were at the Oct. 19 event at Living Hope. Sipkens said about the same number, between 40 and 50, attended Wyoming CRC's service on Nov. 16.

Zomerman said the hosting church provides the speaker and the praise team. Renee

Bouma, youth leader at Living Hope, where the youth group includes about a dozen from the congregation and double that with their friends, said it's "very much a youth-led service," which she thinks "has been great for our youth." She added, "Youth felt more comfortable together, as this is our third year."

When Dresden CRC hosts, Zomerman preaches along the regular track he uses for the congregation's weekly evening service, and the rest of the congregation, typically 30-50 people for that service, attends as usual. Afterward the visiting young people share a meal together, play mingling games, and fellowship.

Church elders have been encouraged to the point of sharing about the youth events at classis, a regional assembly of Christian Reformed congregations. The Sept. 23 minutes of Classis Ontario Southwest note: "Fred Smids (elder delegate, Dresden) encouraged us, reporting that they are thankful that as a small church, they hosted a youth service this past Sunday with 52 young people attending."

Zomerman said the Dresden CRC youth group has about 10 students from the church and another 6-10 from outside the church. Sipkens said the Wyoming group has "16-20 teens who attend regularly, and we're looking forward to welcoming others from surrounding churches as well."

—Alissa Vernon

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Wilbert M. (Bill)

Van Dyk

1930-2025

A cherished pastor, excellent preacher, and an academic highly respected by his peers, Bill Van Dyk died Nov. 15, 2025, at age 95.

He felt God's call to ministry at age 16 on his way home from a youth convention. "I knew deep down that God, at that moment, was calling me to prepare for ministry. I never looked back, and I've never been sorry," he reflected in 2024, when receiving Calvin Theological Seminary's Distinguished Alumni Award.

After graduating from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary he was ordained in 1955. He pastored Fourth Roseland Christian Reformed Church, Chicago, Ill.; Lake Worth (Fla.) CRC (now called Sunlight Community Church-Lake Worth); and Plymouth Heights CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich. In 1986, Bill was appointed as the seminary's academic dean and associate professor of preaching. He retired in 1995.

Bill wrote two books, served on many denominational boards, was delegate to synod several times, and continued in retirement to preach and teach at home and abroad, including in Australia, eastern Africa, and Mexico.

Predeceased in 2009 by Elaine, his wife of 56 years, Bill is survived by their five children, 11 grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Listening and Seeing God at Work Through Hope Mobility



Photo by Hope Mobility International

Judy Kupsik (left, kneeling) with Hope Mobility team members at African Inland Church in Kijabe, Kenya in October 2025, fitting a wheelchair for a young client and his family.

dence when a young man named Meshach showed up at a distribution clinic with his nephew Morgan. Meshach had traveled from Nairobi because his nephew needed a wheelchair. Kupsik learned that Meshach is taking care of his nephew and niece because their mother, Meshach's sister, was killed in a flood that swept through Nairobi in April 2024.

Since their encounter—where Kupsik shared both the gospel and the Daniel 3 story of the Babylonian-era Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego surviving being thrown in a fire—she communicates with Meshach daily via an online app to help him grow in Christ. “Because I know that when we put Jesus first, everything else falls into place,” Kupsik said. Morgan continues to complain about leg pain, but they are waiting to follow up at the African Inland Church hospital in Kijabe.

Since its beginning in 2018, Hope Mobility has helped close to 13,000 people with mobility aids, living its mission of “Sharing God’s hope and love; restoring dignity through mobility.” As Kupsik saw, the agency and its volunteers bless and minister to people whose needs go beyond the physical.

She started volunteering with Hope Mobility in 2018 when the organization’s founder Michael Panther, who is from South Sudan and is a wheelchair user, invited Faith Church Highland to participate. Panther reached out because he’d heard about Faith Highland’s strong disability ministry, called Reflectors, and he encouraged the church to share their gifts with people with physical disabilities in Africa.

—Callie Feyen

Joint CRC-Alliance Congregation Shares New Building



Photo by Harrison (S.D.) Community Church

The dually-affiliated Harrison (S.D.) Community Church dedicated its new building in September 2024.

Harrison (S.D.) Community Church, pastored by Gary Maas, has lived into its name, building community between what had been one Christian Reformed congregation and Harrison Reformed Church, originally a Reformed Church in America congregation, over the past 60 years. Starting with sharing special services such as Ascension Day and summer Vacation Bible School, they later shared evening services, shared one pastor between the two congregations, and eventually merged. In September 2024, they solidified their union status with the dedication of a new building constructed just south of the former congregations’ older buildings, which have since been sold.

“Being in it for a year has been good. It seems to be a joyous place to worship,” said Maas. He believes their congregation is the first with dual affiliation in the Christian Reformed Church of North America and the Alliance of Reformed Churches, a denomination formed in 2021 with departing churches from the RCA (See “Noteworthy,” p. 16).

Maas doesn’t see a lot of difference with the new designation. “We were a union church when it was the RCA, and it’s stayed the same,” he said. “The only thing that’s changed is we go to classis meetings of both, and now (the Alliance regional meeting) is called a network meeting instead of ‘classis.’”

—Alissa Vernon

READ MORE ONLINE

Churches 'Courageously Loving' and Developing Hospitality

In September Ivanrest Christian Reformed Church in Grandville, Mich., piloted a Biblically Faithful, Courageously Loving workshop to equip its council members to lead in a "posture of radical hospitality" within biblically faithful guidelines in terms of human sexuality. It plans to remount the workshop in April, opening it beyond their classis to anyone who wants to attend in the greater Grand Rapids area.

"Our congregation has a real heart for living into the pastoral piece of care toward LGBTQ people—how we can be radically hospitable and welcoming to people while calling them to live in line with our biblical convictions," said Ivanrest pastor Brandon Haan.

Haan said following Synod 2022 when the CRC's general assembly reaffirmed its position that same-sex sexual relationships are incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Scripture, his congregation hosted several "listening circles" to work through the material in the human sexuality report.

He said two key pieces of feedback came from those discussions: the church needed more instruction on how to live into these convictions well, and the church's leaders—deacons and elders—needed to be equipped to lead from a loving posture. "We had the position—what we believe," said Haan. "We needed help with how to lovingly live that out."

A similar need was expressed in Classis Alberta North where pastor Lisa Vander Leek was serving on the classis interim committee in the fall of 2023. They proposed learning together in a cohort, similar to one that had run earlier that year in Classis Toronto.

They received funding from Thrive through its Thriving Practices cohort program, an initiative made possible through a Thriving Congregations grant received in 2020 and recently extended and expanded. Eight churches and



one unofficial participant from a ninth congregation got started in January 2025 and they expect to conclude in February with a report to classis in March.

Vander Leek said she hopes the report and the work of the cohort will encourage other churches to also stretch toward hospitality and to understand that this learning was "meant to help us put the principles in the human sexuality report into practice, and to acknowledge the ways in which we, as churches, have not cared well for our LGBTQ2S+ members, and have sometimes used position, especially the confessional status position, as a way of ignoring or not ministering to LGBTQ2S+ persons."

Participating cohort teams were expected to develop at least two projects, or "experiments" as Vander Leek called them, consisting "of ways in which they could increase hospitality in their community, and then learn from them, and share that with the larger group."

"Digging more into the theology of hospitality was good to get more of the scriptural foundation for it," Vander Leek said. "It doesn't mean that everything goes, but it may mean that you have to create more space than what you were comfortable with before. ... And sometimes what you think is hospitable actually

isn't, so having those conversations with churches as a cohort, to wrestle through some of that, has been really, really good."

At Ivanrest, about 40 people attended the Sept 13, 2025, workshop with presenters David Beelen, a retired CRC pastor who served Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids, and Laurie Kreig, an author and speaker with a calling to bridge the gap between LGBTQ+ people and the church.

"A main goal of the council when they asked for this was to care for people pastorally and compassionately, to relate to LGBTQ people in our congregation and in their families," Haan said. When they noticed other congregations in Classis Grandville also expressing a need, they decided to offer "Biblically Faithful, Courageously Loving" as a gift to the classis.

Haan said Beelen and Krieg covered broad concepts about how churches can approach marriage and family and singleness, with an eye to people coming from a range of perspectives, as well as practical things to signal welcome, such as not using outdated terminology, so a person's "experience of church is livable."

—Alissa Vernon



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The Ants Go Marching

CAN YOU IMAGINE being able to lift a car or a piano with your bare hands? You don't have to become Superman to do it; you just have to become a human-sized ant! Ants are able to lift 10-15 times their own weight. That means that if you were 100 pounds, with the strength of an ant you could lift 1,000-1,500 pounds. That's the weight of a grand piano or a small camper trailer!

There are 12,000 known species of ants in the world, with 1,000 found in North America.

In western Canada where I live (and throughout the western U.S.) there are ants called western thatching ants that build a roof of thatch, made with pine needles, pieces of grass, and sticks, to protect their hills from the elements. They even mow the grass in and around their ant hill to regulate the temperature. When it is cool in the spring you can see that the grass has been nipped off just above the ground. This is by the ants themselves. With no grass, the warmth of the sun can reach the hill and keep them going. If you return to the same ant hill in the heat of the summer you will see that the grass surrounding (and sometimes inside) the ant hill is long and lush. This provides shade from the hot summer sunshine so their home doesn't overheat.

Have you ever seen an ant highway? In a park close to my home there are ant highways all across the lawn. Talking to the locals, I learned that those highways had been there for decades, and you could tell. I got curious and learned that highways are a sign of a super colony of ants. Often each ant hill is its own colony, and if you try to mix the ants from two colonies they will fight with each other. But some species, like the western thatching ants, create super colonies where some of the ants move and create a new hill.

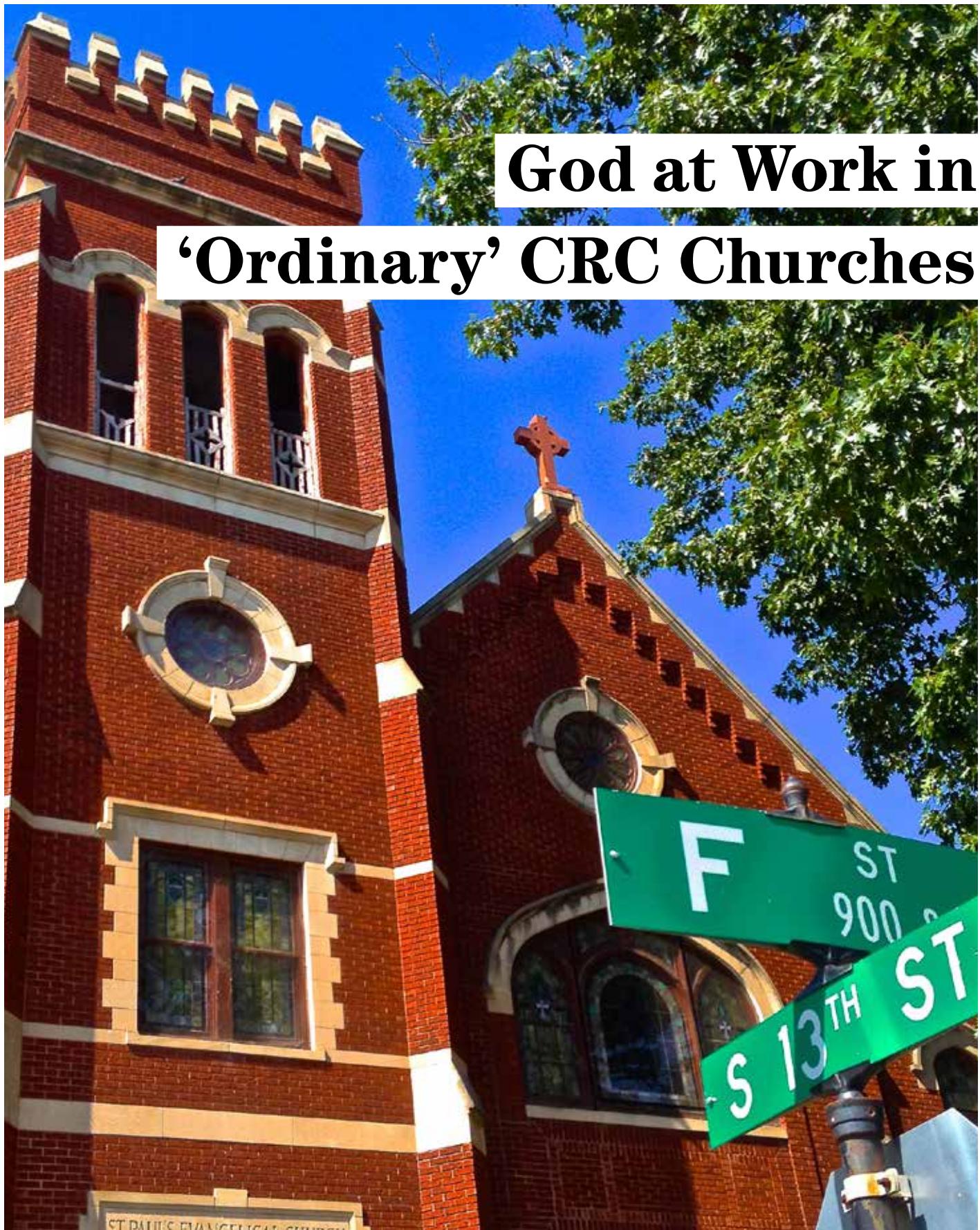
The ants from one colony often visit their offspring, creating highways between them, and if you mix the ants between hills they will tolerate or accept each other. One of the largest known western thatching ant colonies in North America is a supercolony near Lehman Hot Springs in Oregon. It spans almost 10 acres, with an estimated 56 million ants living in 210 active nests. That's 15 million more ants than the number of people living in the entire country of Canada!

Some other amazing fact about ants

- » The hill we see above ground is just the tip. Under the ground the ant hill could be two to three times as deep, aerating the soil, bringing down food that composts into more soil, and creating important pathways for water and air to reach roots deep into the earth.
- » Ants produce formic acid in their abdomen. If you look closely at an ant biting you, you will see them curled up, a sign that they are spraying this acid onto the wound, giving you that uncomfortable sting. They also use this acid to lay down a trail for other ants to follow.
- » In late summer, winged male and females emerge to mate. Once they have mated the male dies and the female sheds her wings and finds a place to colonize, laying eggs underground for up to 15 years. B



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



By Kristyn DeNooyer

Have you ever equated the size or visibility of a church with "successful ministry"? You see the megachurch in town putting up billboards inviting people to Easter services, and you know they will have thousands in attendance. Or you hear about that new and innovative church plant that gets featured not only in the denominational magazine, but also on podcasts and other media because of the unusual way they embody what church could look like. It might be hard to see the way these churches are growing or inviting new people in and not draw comparisons to your own congregation's challenges.

In 2024 and 2025, the Christian Reformed Church invited people to attend 10 events called Gather. At each event, CRC members shared stories about their own churches—the struggles and hardships these church communities were facing, but also the successes and joys that each experienced. It became clear at that first event and continued through the last that God is doing wonderful things with and through CRC churches. Every participant had stories to share about how God had used their church—even those that might seem small, ordinary, and "uninteresting" to outsiders—to further God's kingdom. Here are a few examples.

F Street Neighborhood Church in Lincoln, Neb.

On the corner of F Street and 13th in downtown Lincoln, Neb., a church building hums with new life. Inside, the F Street Neighborhood Church (a congregation of about 150 people) worships together. Their pastor, Rev. Jeff Heerspink, says that what makes this church remarkable isn't its size, but the way God is moving among people who might never have imagined themselves sitting side by side in church pews.

"We have homeless and wealthy, educated and uneducated, ex-cons and lawyers all together worshiping, serving, and working as one body of Christ," Heerspink said. "That's the kind of community God has built here."

The church began as a church plant in 2014, but became an established, organized congregation of the CRCNA in 2023. After more than a decade of faithfully gathering for worship, the congregation continues to grow in numbers and transformations.

Baptisms are a regular occurrence at F Street, with some individuals coming from homelessness, addiction, or

The original building for F Street Neighborhood Church is now transformed into its Art Chapel.

trauma and others simply arriving home after a season of spiritual searching. "Each story reminds us that God is still in the business of resurrection," Heerspink said.

This sense of renewal also fuels a stream of creativity. One of the latest initiatives is the Art Chapel, F Street's restored 150-year-old original church building that now serves as a space where art and faith meet. Art Chapel exists as a healthy way for people to unlock their inner world while learning creative skills, building positive community, and having spiritual conversations.

Equipping others for ministry has long been part of F Street's DNA. In their almost 12 years of ministry, the church has hosted 13 residents who are emerging leaders in areas such as youth ministry, church planting, or media production. Four of those residents still serve on staff today. One of the congregation's newer initiatives, Transformed Life Coaching, offers free 12-week sessions with certified Christian life coaches who address needs like finances, codependency, or fear. They celebrate seeing people find new freedom and direction through this program.

Next on the horizon is the possibility of F Street Farms, an ambitious project that would bring together two nearby tracts of land (about 110 acres total) for ministry and community development. "We're dreaming about how the land could provide food, opportunity for work skills development, or a safe place for people leaving treatment or starting over," Heerspink said.

At its heart, F Street Neighborhood Church remains committed to two core values: acceptance and direction. Those themes shape everything they do, from serving their neighborhood to training others through partnerships with Resonate Global Mission.

"Our call is to be a place of grace in our community," Heerspink said. "But we are also called to multiply and help plant and support churches in neighborhoods that need to see what grace and truth look like in action."

Duncan CRC in Duncan, B.C.

On a cool March morning, the sanctuary of Duncan CRC was filled with joyful anticipation. Pastor Dan Schultz stood before the congregation as nine people ages 12 to 90 prepared to enter the waters of baptism.

"It was a day unlike any other," Schultz recalled. "We celebrated baptisms, professions of faith, and affirmations of members all in one service. The Spirit was moving."



Pastor Dan Schultz baptizes a 90-year-old Duncan CRC congregant.

That morning, the church family witnessed what Schultz called “a living mosaic of faith.” Among those baptized were students raised in Christian homes, two young adults invited by newer members, and a 90-year-old man who was joyfully “doused” with water in lieu of entering the baptismal tank.

“Every story was different,” Schultz said, “but each one spoke of the same God drawing people in, restoring hearts, and calling them to belong.”

These personal stories of transformation have had a ripple effect on the congregation. “When people encounter Jesus for the first time, their energy is contagious,” Schultz reflected. “It reminds us of what it felt like to first fall in love with Christ. Their wonder reignites ours and changes the way we speak, love, and preach.”

One of the most meaningful worship practices at Duncan is something called Insight Time. Each week, the congregation pauses to hear a short interview. It could be a personal testimony, an update from a ministry leader, or the story behind a special offering, but each insight is a simple but powerful connection point that brings laughter, tears, and a sense that what happens in worship applies directly to congregants’ day-to-day lives.

Faith formation continues to deepen among the next generation, too. Each week during the school year, high school students gather at 7:30 a.m. for catechism and a breakfast of fruit, cereal, and muffins donated by church members.

“It’s early,” Schultz admitted, “but the students show up. We grab food, start with an opening question, look how the answers in the Heidelberg are rooted in Scripture, and ask, ‘How does that change the way we live today?’ After we finish, the students walk across the street to go to school. We meet students where they are and experience Jesus together.”

Covenant CRC in Jersey City, N.J.

In the heart of Jersey City, N.J., Covenant CRC gathers each week as a community of about 80 believers. For Pastor John Sideco, the clearest evidence of God at work is found in quiet circles of conversation around open Bibles.

“What has transformed us most deeply,” Sideco said, “is the simple practice of reading Scripture together.” These small weekly gatherings have become a lifeline for the congregation as a place where God’s Word moves from theory to practice. In each group, participants bring their real lives into the discussion with questions about work, relationships, doubt, or purpose. “We are learning that the Word meets us where we are,” Pastor John explained. “It’s not just information, it is formation.”

In those circles, trust and accountability take root. Over time, people who once hesitated to share now find freedom, honesty, and encouragement. The impact shows not so much in numbers, but in the depth of how members articulate the gospel, live out grace, and incite others into fellowship.

At the heart of Covenant CRC’s identity is a commitment to sovereign grace under Scripture and gospel-formed unity. These values have shaped a renewed sense of belonging within the congregation. Elders, deacons, young adults, and lay members increasingly collaborate to serve and shepherd one another and use their diverse gifts for a shared purpose.

“We’re learning that discipleship happens best in community,” reflected Sideco. “Through Scripture, God is forming Christlike character, strengthening our unity, and sending us out in grace.”

This year Thrive, the congregational support ministry of the CRCNA, is focused on church renewal and equipping all CRC congregations to consider what God might be calling them to in the coming years. To learn more or to talk to a Thrive connector in your area, visit crcna.org/Thrive. 

Filling in the Blanks

MY FAVORITE KIND of test is multiple choice (or, as it is sometimes called, "multiple guess"). "Fill in the blank" tests are much tougher. So here's one for you: "_____ by itself, if not accompanied by _____, is dead."

This phrase from James 2:17 is one of the many verses in which James "fills in the blanks" that exist within expressions of Christianity dominated by knowledge and belief. To the blank filled by faith (or belief), James would fill the adjacent one by "deeds" (or "actions") of love and light.

It seems that there are few things more difficult in the life of a believer and a congregation than to hold both belief and action together. In contemplating the beauty and power of the Word, sometimes we build a moat around the messiness of the world—finding comfort in our isolation. Alternatively, sometimes in pouring ourselves into actions of love, we sideline the transformative power of the gospel message. Where belief and action, faith and deed, light and love intersect—there God's Spirit blesses congregations.

The Gather Initiative (ten regional gatherings of our CRCNA classes/ regional bodies held throughout North America during 2024-2025) taught us many things about congregations experiencing renewal. One of the most compelling lessons we learned was that in congregations undergoing renewal, concrete acts of love are combined with sharing the gospel. For example, in several congregations that have a significant ministry of mentoring in local schools, parents and children are receptive to the message of Jesus and are coming to Sunday worship. Congregations that are embracing community service (through food pantries, counseling, addiction support, etc.) are often seeing non-believers come to faith

It seems that there are few things more difficult in the life of a believer and a congregation than to hold both belief and action together.

in Jesus. Christian love, displayed through concrete actions, draws people to the light of the gospel message. As God "fills in our blanks" with belief and action, lives and communities are transformed.

This is exactly what James had in mind when he penned those challenging words in 2:17. In James' community there were those who argued that mere faith in the content of the gospel message was sufficient. Perhaps they misquoted Paul who wrote, "For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Rom. 3:27). Whatever the case, James acknowledged a faith frozen in intellect was indeed a blank unfilled, a root bereft of fruit. Instead, a living, vibrant faith was characterized by care of orphans, support of widows, clothing the naked, and feeding the poor.

It's reductionistic to say that embracing belief and action automatically produces flourishing congregations. Why? Perhaps we disagree about what "flourishing" looks like. I don't think Jesus ever said, "Blessed are churches with (big) buildings, (ample) budgets, and (plenty of) butts in seats." Sometimes demographics,

neighborhood turnover, and other factors play a part in what those numbers look like. But that doesn't mean a church isn't flourishing.

Faith must be accompanied by deeds, belief by actions, light by love. These are the blanks the Holy Spirit fills to renew our churches. And, if I might be so bold, these word pairs go straight to our core identity as Christian Reformed congregations. As Reformed people, we believe in holistic mission—mission in which faith is connected to action, in which word is combined with deed, in which demonstration accompanies proclamation.

"Joining the mission of God, the church is sent with the gospel of kingdom, to call everyone to know and follow Christ, and to proclaim to all the assurance that in the name of Jesus there is forgiveness of sin and new life for all who repent and believe. The Spirit calls all members to embrace God's mission in their neighborhoods and in the world: to feed the hungry, bring water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and free the prisoner. We repent of leaving this work to a few, for this mission is central to our being" (*Our World Belongs to God*, Art. 41).

May God fill the blanks in our lives and churches with light and love until we are renewed by the Spirit's power. 



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

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

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

Walking Together in Calgary

WALK AS WE is a small but growing urban, ecumenical, Indigenous ministry in Calgary, Alta., that is rooted in friendship, humility, and a shared journey toward reconciliation. While not one of the three official Urban Indigenous Ministry Centers supported by the Christian Reformed Church (in Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Regina), Walk As We has deep connections with local CRC congregations and has been supported by CRC Indigenous ministry resources.

In addition, NewGround, a Diaconal Ministries Canada program that helps local churches build sustainable, community-empowering initiatives, has provided Walk As We with a small grant. Walk As We has used this support to focus on listening, learning, and relationship-building. Rev. Layne Kilbreath, director of Walk As We and a member of the Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee (CIMC) and Lantern Community (CRC) Church, believes these foci are foundational to lasting reconciliation.

The seeds for Walk As We were planted during the COVID-19 pandemic when Kilbreath met Alphonse Nepoose, who was part of a drumming group renting the basement of Lantern Community Church. Out of that friendship, the rhythms of drum circles, recovery meetings, and shared meals came a vision: to walk with Indigenous neighbors rather than for them.

"What would it look like if we didn't do things for people, but did it with them?" Kilbreath asked. That's the focus of



In 2025, Walk As We helped lead the Reconciliation Journey Walk and the AMA'HNA'BINO Walk.

Walk As We: "journeying together as equals, learning from one another."

The ministry began at Lantern Community Church, which hosted early gatherings and a "no-barriers" food market led by Indigenous leaders. As The Lantern discerned its next steps, God opened new doors through partnerships with other congregations, including The Road Church and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, where the Neechi Mart (All My Relations Food Market) now operates.

Walk As We reflects an ecumenical spirit supported by respected Indigenous and church leaders Adrian Jacobs (CRC), Rev. Mary Fontaine (Presbyterian Church in Canada), Rev. Tony Snow (United Church of Canada), and Rev. Laurie McKay (St. Andrew's Presbyterian).

The ministry follows a path of learning, friendship, and action. Kilbreath said, "The first stop on the path is learning" where they use learning tools such as the CRC's Hearts Exchanged and The Blanket Exercise as well as a course from Indigenous Canada. The next stop on the path is friendship, where they create spaces where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can build genuine communities. From there they focus on action (ReconciliACTION), joining Indigenous-led initiatives such as the Reconciliation Journey Walk, a 16-kilometre (9.9-mile) walk around the Glenmore Reservoir in Calgary to raise awareness for residential schools before each National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

In 2025, Walk As We helped lead the Reconciliation Journey Walk and the AMA'HNA'BINO Walk, launched the Jesus-Centered Sacred Sharing Circle Church, and supported a new SoberCrew women's circle. Each activity is rooted in relationship and Indigenous leadership.

Through it all, Walk As We keeps Jesus at the center, lifting up values of humility, trust, collaboration, and "truth before reconciliation." Kilbreath describes the ministry as "highly relational," one that's "re-introducing people to Jesus over the long term."

"These ministries give us a chance to experiment with how we love our neighbors as ourselves," Kilbreath said. "People might call it social justice, but really it's biblical justice." He said, "This is part of our identity." 

—Kristen Parker,
CRC Communications

When a Deacon Builds a Well for a School

THE WATER PIPES at the early childhood education center where Omar Bohorquez worked had been dry for 16 years. Training from Resonate Global Mission inspired Bohorquez to provide a solution.

Venezuela's water infrastructure struggles to keep up with the population's needs. While some schools, homes, and businesses have access to piped water, the supply is limited and unreliable. Most buildings do not have access at all and must find other sources. Those who can afford it dig wells. Those who can't typically rely on other means such as purchasing bottled water or collecting rainwater.

Staff at the early childhood education center had tried to dig a well before, but the work was hard and expensive. They ran out of funds and commitment before they ever reached water. Instead, the school relied on the community to provide the water they needed. Parents and neighbors with wells often dropped off full containers to help get the school through the days and weeks.

But then Bohorquez, a deacon at Getsemani Church, participated in Timothy Leadership Training from Resonate. TLT is a program for pastors and other church leaders that provides biblically based, practical training through an interactive approach. It is especially valuable in countries, such as Venezuela, where the church is growing rapidly and formal training in seminaries or other institutions is hard to come by.

In the first module, "Caring for God's People," Bohorquez and other TLT participants were challenged to ask themselves, "What does your community need the most? And how can you meet that need?" Bohorquez



Omar Bohorquez (yellow shirt), shows community members water from the new well he helped dig for an early childhood center.

immediately thought of the school where he worked and their need for water. He developed a plan to bring water to the building.

First, Bohorquez gathered a group of people from his family, church, and other TLT participants to pool their money and purchase tools. Then, between work and other commitments, Bohorquez and volunteers began to dig.

On the third day of digging, a shovelful finally unearthed a small pool of water.

Bohorquez said the completion of the well project caused "a commotion in the community." Neighbors were thrilled, and the church hosted a small celebration where they not only shared food with the children at the center, but also shared how the gospel inspired them to meet this pressing need.

Word even spread to the government municipality, and staff members came to test out the well. Participants are sharing the story with other schools in hopes that they will also be able to provide safe, clean water to their students.

Bohorquez is thankful for TLT training provided by Resonate and the change that it's bringing to his community.

"Before TLT we had good biblical teaching," he said, "but what sets TLT apart is that it's good, biblical teaching that is also practical. We can see how it's changing our lives and community." **B**

Cassie Marcionetti is the content strategy manager for Resonate Global Mission, the mission agency of the CRCNA.

Harvest of Hope: CRC Farmers Fighting Hunger Together with Their Community



From left: Chris Orme and Peter Timmerman, of World Renew, learn about the Growing Project from Jelte van de Belt and Arnold Ypma, of Crosspoint Community Church, a CRC in Tillsonburg, Ont.

IF YOU DROVE by one 16-acre field in rural Ontario, you might miss the blue sign with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank logo. But a bigger sign might catch your eye: "Harvest of Hope." This plot of land is growing more than crops—it's nurturing compassion, community, and Christ-like care for the hungry.

Farmer Jelte van de Belt has been involved in a Growing Project for the past two years. He and Arnold Ypma, who has been participating for a decade now, both attend Crosspoint Community Church (formerly Tillsonburg CRC). The Growing Project supports Canadian Foodgrains Bank, of which World Renew is a founding member. The Foodgrains Bank is a partnership of churches and organizations across Canada committed



Arnold Ypma has been participating in this Growing Project for a decade.

to ending global hunger. Through Growing Projects, farmers and volunteers plant, harvest, and sell crops, donating the proceeds to support food assistance and agricultural development in vulnerable communities around the world.

"We rotate crops every year," van de Belt explains. "It's good for the soil and helps prevent disease. After harvest, we apply manure to keep nutrients in the soil." But the real story isn't just

about farming—it's about generosity and collaboration.

"The seed is donated," he said, noting that a number of farming companies supported this project. "Fertilizer is donated. Farmers prepare the field, plant, spray, and harvest. Even the trucking is donated. Everyone pitches in."

This particular project is ecumenical, officially a partnership between Crosspoint and Mount Elgin United Church, but also involves members from Alliance and Netherlands Reformed congregations. "Everybody comes together to make it happen," van de Belt says. "That's what church should be—working together to bless others."

For 20 years now, this project's harvest proceeds have been donated to Canadian Foodgrains Bank and matched up to four times through a variety of public and private sources, multiplying its impact. The project has raised over \$1 million CAD (about \$712,415 USD), providing emergency food aid and supporting long-term food security in places affected by drought, conflict, and poverty.

Peter Timmerman, executive director of World Renew Canada, visited the field during harvest and reflected on the deeper meaning of the work. "We want to thank the people who participated in this project," he said. "This is a great example of churches and community members working together, which is what Canadian Foodgrains Bank is all about."

Timmerman also emphasized the tangible connection between Canadian farmers and those they're helping. "Part of the reason why this is



Combines harvested 3,322 bushels of corn in Tillsonburg last November.

really meaningful is that this is maize corn, which many of the farmers we work with around the world also grow as a staple crop. It's their livelihood. It's their life. So seeing this project—the actual corn being harvested right now—is a tangible connection to those farmers."

This year 16 acres were harvested, producing 3,322 bushels of corn valued at about \$19,000 CAD (about \$13,535 USD) at current market rates.

Van de Belt sees farming as a way to live out the calling to work toward a world where everyone has enough. "At the end of the year, when everything's done, it's great to look back and say, 'We did it again.'" **B**

Naomi Bula is the communications director for World Renew Canada. World Renew is the disaster response, community development and justice and peace ministry of the CRCNA.

What Is Canadian Foodgrains Bank?

Canadian Foodgrains Bank is a partnership of 15 church-based agencies, including World Renew, the relief and development arm of the CRC. It works to end global hunger through emergency food aid, nutrition programs, and sustainable agriculture. Growing Projects are one way that local communities can support this mission—by turning crops into compassion. **Learn more at worldrenew.ca/foodgrains.**

How You Can Get Involved

You don't have to be a farmer to participate. CRC congregations can:

- » **Pray** for farmers and communities affected by hunger in North America and around the world
- » **Volunteer** with a local Growing Project
- » **Donate** through World Renew or during Canadian Foodgrains Bank Sunday
- » **Learn more** at worldrenew.ca/foodgrains

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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Director's Desk:

Meet Lesli van Milligen from Thrive

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH has a long history of working together and pooling resources to further God's kingdom work around the world. This year we will feature a special column in each issue that includes an interview with one of the directors of these shared ministries. This month we spoke with Lesli van Milligen, director of Thrive.

In what ways does Thrive equip local CRC people and churches to do kingdom work?

Thrive exists because we believe that local churches change lives. When churches are healthy, they can have a lifelong impact on people. And when there is dysfunction, the hurt can be profound. At Thrive, we engage both sides of that equation. We equip and encourage churches so they can do ministry well and help everyone experience what Christ-centered flourishing can be. And when churches struggle we're positioned to help resolve conflict and work toward repair and restoration. Our entire focus is supporting congregations so they can flourish in the way God has uniquely called and gifted them to be in their corner of the world.

What are the core values that undergird Thrive's work? How do you ensure the work aligns with those values?

We have five core ways of being that undergird our work: being curious listeners, being Reformed practitioners working toward excellence, being holistic and wholehearted, being realistic, and being hopeful.

I would say our most foundational posture is our commitment to being curious listeners. We place a lot of value on practices that help us listen well, such as gathering around Scripture together, praying together, and discerning together in community alongside churches.



A big part of that listening also means being willing to wonder with and learn from people whose experiences or perspectives might be different from our own ideas or expectations.

These rhythms help us stay tuned in to God's voice and remain curious and attentive to what he is already doing in our local congregations.

What's one thing about Thrive you wish people knew?

First, I want all of our churches to be encouraged that the good work of the nine congregational ministries that previously existed did not stop when they merged and Thrive was established. Instead, all of those focus areas have been expanded through Thrive's work to be more collaborative, responsive, and effective.

Second, we're one email or phone call away. If you feel stuck in almost any area of ministry or congregational life, there is a strong possibility that we are poised to support you in that. Whether you need to talk through a decision on Sunday school curriculum, want guidance on implementing abuse prevention or disability access policies, or need a neutral, non-anxious presence to help you navigate a conflict

or transition in your ministry, we are ready to offer support. Please do not hesitate to connect with us.

Where would you like to see Thrive in five years?

Five years from now, I would love for Thrive to be on speed dial for every CRC congregation. I often use the analogy of "yeast" for the work Thrive does. We are a "yeast" ministry. We work in the background to support congregations at every stage of their journey. Without yeast the bread won't rise, but people rarely talk about the fact that it is necessary and important. My hope is for every pastor and council and church staff member to know that we are available to support them and that they are not doing the hard and holy work of ministry alone.

We have also just launched a major five-year initiative focused on congregational renewal, and my prayer is that five years from now we will see the impact of those renewal efforts taking root and beginning to blossom as churches discern their unique missional identities and grow in discipleship. I have great hope for the future of the local church.

How can we pray for you?

As congregations experience guidance, relief, or encouragement from the work we do, pray that they will share how Thrive helped them and is available to help other congregations.

Pray that we will continue to find ways to collaborate effectively with other CRCNA agencies. The journey ahead requires intentional partnership and joint efforts.

Pray that God will provide sustained financial stability as our ministry expands. 

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
CRC Communications

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We're here to serve.



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Learning to Surrender All

One Congregation's Lenten Journey through a Time of Instability and Grief

By Bethany Besteman

*Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in endless praise,
let them flow in endless praise.*

On Feb. 13 I walked through the front door of the cozy split-level home that hosted our monthly women's book club, and I noticed the atmosphere was somber, almost grim. As I deposited my shoes by the door and found a spot in the circle of chairs I began to pick up on strands of conversation.

"He doesn't know as of now whether this business trip, scheduled for next week, will happen or not. He might not know until he gets to the airport!"

"Right now no one knows how this will impact our special needs programs."

"Most of my company's contracts come from school construction. I am not worried about losing my job tomorrow, but there are far-reaching effects I don't think people are thinking about."

I noticed Kelly* sat in her usual seat, shoulders hunched up, arms folded across her body, and her expression cloudy. When the talk came around to her she looked up and said in a flat voice, "I think I may have to fire people, and I don't know if my business will survive this."

Everyone in the room that night had an employment worry to share—if not them, then their husband or son or daughter had a connection to the U.S. federal government. Since the end of January, the White House had become the epicenter of a series of earthquakes for federal employees, and it had left us all feeling a bit unsteady.

Earlier that week during a coffee break women's Bible study, prayer requests had likewise swirled around the fear and uncertainty, the anxiety, and general discombobulation that families were experiencing.

"Should we leave?"
"Where would we go?"
"All our friends are here."

*Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet and let them be*

*swift and beautiful for thee,
swift and beautiful for thee.*

Silver Spring Christian Reformed Church is in Silver Spring, Md., one of the Washington, D.C., suburbs. There is an interstate that circles D.C. called the Beltway. Half of it runs through Virginia, half through Maryland. Our church is just north of the Beltway. The map of where our congregation lives and works scatters north and south of the Beltway, with a few outliers reaching all the way out to Annapolis and Baltimore. We have patent examiners and NASA engineers. We have State Department employees and people with military backgrounds. We also have lawyers and accountants and health care workers, some of whom are employed by the government or connected through a contractor with the government. Our congregation is filled with Calvin- and Dordt-trained people who are faithfully following God's call to work in this square inch of the map. Over the winter of 2025, it became a square inch that increasingly felt like a wilderness.

How fitting, then, that this period of unease and uncertainty overlapped

at least in part with Lent. Our pastoral team decided to follow the Lent worship series I had been a part of writing for Reformed Worship. The theme of that series was "Having the Identity of a Servant," and I brought it to our worship team planning meeting with some trepidation. Would this theme feel inauthentic or perhaps offensive for a community wrestling with employment? After all, many of us have heard throughout our lives that the work we do, we do for God, in service to God.

If someone loses their work or is questioning their line of work, will they feel adrift in their ability to connect with a Lent theme focused on service to God? What I learned over the course of that Lenten season focused on this theme was that living a life of committed service to God transcends the circumstances of our lives. Yes, service to God can and does happen in, through, and because of the work we do from Monday to Friday, but "having the identity of a servant" runs much deeper and grounds us when the circumstances of our lives leave us feeling adrift.

*Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,
filled with messages from thee.*

"What about 'Take My Life and Let It Be' as a theme song?"

I don't remember who proposed that song out of the six of us gathered with butcher paper and sticky notes taped all over the walls to brainstorm the services for Lent, but the idea stuck. Someone noticed that there were six verses and six Sundays in Lent.

"What if we connected a different verse to each week of the series?"

As a worship planner, there are times when I'm blessed with the grace of

How fitting then,
that this period of
unease and
uncertainty
overlapped at least
in part with Lent.

feeling the Spirit at work in the planning and preparation of worship. This was one such time. In that planning meeting, through the choice of the theme song the team linked service to God with surrender to God. I felt my fears begin to ebb as I contemplated something that perhaps should have been obvious to me from the beginning.

The call to live a life of service is less about what we bring to God than that we hold our lives loosely, attentive to God's call. Perhaps that truth, more than any other, was what this body needed to hear right now.

*Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne,
it shall be thy royal throne.*

"How are you doing" "Is your family doing well?" "Is your husband still employed?" I typed and deleted, typed and deleted the text message I wanted to send to a friend I was trying to make lunch plans with. Every day a new headline brought to mind a different person I knew and I wondered if their world had started crumbling around them. Then there were the rumors and word of mouth. People's names were being put on lists. So-and-so had gotten an email that didn't sound good.

Kelly and her husband decided to move. Her business depended in part on federal grant money; the instability of those funds led them to speed up their long-term plans to relocate. I was sad at the impending loss of this friend from our community, but, more than that, I was angry.

When my 4-year-old finds his choices and agency slipping away, especially around bedtime ("yes, we have to brush our teeth every night"), he scrunches up his face, bares his teeth, stomps his foot, and lets out noise louder than a grunt and usually a little softer than a scream. I felt like I was doing this to God internally a lot during the months of March and April.

"Why God?" "How long, God?" "This too, God?" In the midst of calls to surrender, our community also had to make space to communicate our honest emotions. We needed to lament.

*Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose,
every power as thou shalt choose.*

To visually communicate our progression through service and surrender, the worship team constructed a temporary installation in our sanctuary. We have chairs rather than pews, so we widened our center aisle by several chairs and brought in sturdy overturned bins that we covered in glossy purple table cloths to represent a series of "altars" or "tables." Each week we placed symbolic items on those tables that reminded us what we offered up to God, what we surrendered to his service. One week it was a clock, another week we placed gardening tools there, remembering that we submitted to the work of the master gardener.

On the fifth Sunday of Lent, the week before Palm Sunday, we were planning to talk about surrendering our

material lives to God—possessions, finances, etc. I needed a piggy bank. I sent out the call to the congregation: did anyone have a piggy bank that the worship team could borrow? Gladys came through for me. One of the church's matriarchs, she quietly served behind the scenes in almost every ministry. The piggy bank was a memento from her college days, and I vowed to take good care of it.

During the children's message, I gathered the children around the altar with the piggy bank. The snout of the pig had a large cork stopper I had removed and I had scattered pennies all over the altar. I had a deacon assist me as we talked with the kids about living lives like an open piggy bank—being generous and sharing with people in need. I had invited families to bring loose change to church and the children helped gather this up and place it by the piggy bank to be used in a collection for one of our church's missionaries.

As I thought back over the service, I was struck by how many in our congregation lived much like Gladys who had lent me the pig—they lived open-handed lives despite the turbulence of the present moment and through many past turbulent times as well. Many members of the church showed me what it meant to surrender themselves to God.

*Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee,
ever, only, all for thee.*

We arrived at Holy Week at long last, but a shadow lay over the week for our congregation. Gladys, the same beloved member of our church who had donated the piggy bank, was in the hospital, having suddenly fallen ill, and the news from her family was

increasingly grim. When word of her passing circulated on Monday morning of Holy Week, I remember feeling empty. My art journal from that time focused on 2 Chronicles 20:9,12: "We will cry out to you in our distress. ... We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

I cried on and off in my office all week as I prepared for Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It seemed grossly unfair to me that in a season of our church filled with instability and sacrifice, God would take yet more from us. We were surrendering already. We were trusting God already.

Grief has a way of making seem irrelevant some theological truths that are easier to stoically assert at calmer times of life: "God's timing is not ours;" "God works all things for the good of those who love him;" "God is in control." When grief swamps my mind, I want to snatch back control, not surrender it. In the arrogance that grief engenders I want to speak to God about my life like I would to my 4-year-old who had found a sharp knife: "I'm not sure you can be trusted with that; you might hurt somebody."

I arrived at Good Friday feeling raw, like my soul had been subjected to a cheese grater. It was a joint service with our sister congregation in D.C. Both congregations had experienced some painful events over the course of Lent, and Pastor Ben opened with an acknowledgement that helped me settle and refocus:

On Good Friday, we come to survey the wondrous cross, on which our prince of glory died. ... For many of us, this Holy Week has felt heavier. The fragility of life feels nearer to us at the DC Reformed Church, and the pain of death feels nearer to our friends at the Silver Spring CRC with the sudden passing of Gladys. Our

church is mourning with you. And we don't have to leave behind these emotions at the door. If anything, Good Friday is precisely where God invites us to bring our hearts. Today, we come to see a love stronger than death. We remember the sacrifice of our Lord with gratitude because his death gives us life and brings redemption to the world.

Yes, there was uncertainty, grief, turbulence, and sacrifice. And the Lenten practice of surrender and service didn't mean that we were somehow exempt from these things in the future. Rather, we were better prepared for them and we knew we didn't go through them alone. Someone had gone through all this and more on our behalf. He can, in fact, be entrusted with all of our lives, and we can rest in the sure confidence of his love. B

*Names changed.



Bethany Besteman lives in Silver Spring, Md., serves as pastor of worship and discipleship at Silver Spring CRC, and edits for *Reformed Worship*. She graduated from Calvin University (B.A.) and Catholic University of America (M.A., Ph.D.).

1. When have you experienced a season of fear, instability, and loss? How does knowing God's character and truth help you?

2. A third of the Psalms are laments. How can honest lament honor God and grow our faith? How does this article show us the difference between groaning to God and grumbling about God?

READ MORE ONLINE

We Owe Love: The Gospel Debt of Grace and Mercy

This is the love
we owe—not just
worshipful words,
but grace and
mercy lived out.



Alexander Flanders is a substitute teacher and deacon who lives in Grand Rapids, Mich. He attends West Leonard Christian Reformed Church.

“DEAR FRIENDS, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

—1 John 4:11

The apostle John’s words in 1 John 4:7–12 are among the most cherished in the New Testament: “God is love,” and that love is not just declared but demonstrated. “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9–10).

Love, according to Scripture, is self-giving, sacrificial, uniquely demonstrated by Christ, and initiated by God. But John doesn’t stop there—he calls for a response: “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” The word “ought” is stronger than it seems. In Greek, it’s *opheilomen*, meaning we owe, are obligated, or are indebted. Love is not just a suggestion; it is a gospel debt—not to repay grace, but because of it. Since we’ve received God’s love in Christ, we owe love to others.

That might sound uncomfortable, especially in a world where obligation is often negative. But in Scripture, debt can be a call to reflect God’s mercy. Consider Jesus’ parable in Luke 7:40–50: two debtors are forgiven—one more, one less. The one forgiven more loves more. Forgiveness fuels gratitude in action. Similarly, in Matthew 18:21–35, a man forgiven a massive debt refuses to forgive a smaller one—and is condemned. The message: true grace and mercy changes us.

John writes, “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us.” Love becomes the evidence of God’s presence. Through forgiveness, service, patience, and compassion, God’s love becomes visible. These aren’t random virtues

but the Spirit’s fruit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). These qualities are not self-generated but grown by the Spirit within us. They mark the shape of a life rooted in Christ, showing that our transformation is not superficial, but deeply spiritual and lasting.

Jesus illustrated this love in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). Asked to define “who is my neighbor,” he told of a man left for dead. Religious leaders passed him by, but a Samaritan—culturally despised—stopped, cared for him, and paid for his healing. Love was interruptive, sacrificial, and costly. The Samaritan didn’t owe the man anything. But in God’s kingdom, love crosses lines and pays the price. Jesus concludes, “Go and do likewise.”

This is the love we owe—not just worshipful words, but grace and mercy lived out. We reflect Christ’s compassion because we’ve received it. In the Reformed tradition, we affirm that salvation is by grace alone, not by works. But grace and mercy never leaves us unchanged. As the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 86) says, good works are the fruit of gratitude and the Spirit’s renewal.

So what does it mean to “owe love”?

It means choosing reconciliation over resentment, compassion over convenience, mutual service over preference. Even when love costs, we remember how much we’ve been given. God’s mercy becomes visible when we love as he loved us. B

1. How does God’s mercy in Jesus Christ, shown in his atoning sacrifice, prompt your grateful worship? How does this “gospel debt” prompt your action toward others?

READ MORE ONLINE

When Doubt Is Your Companion

God is not
threatened by
our uncertainty.
He does not
turn away
when we waver.

I'VE BEEN A CHRISTIAN for most of my life. I grew up hearing the Bible stories, singing the hymns, praying at meal-times. I've read theology books and led small groups. I've stood in sanctuaries, recited creeds, and proclaimed truths I still believe.

But every now and then, doubt comes and sits beside me. It doesn't knock first. It doesn't announce itself. It settles in quietly like an unwelcome guest who knows the way around the house. And when it does, I feel like a man whispering into the void. I still pray, still read, still sing, but some days I wonder if anyone is really listening. This used to terrify me.

For a long time I thought doubt was a sign of failure. I thought mature faith meant certainty, and anything less was spiritual weakness. I imagined that strong Christians didn't struggle with questions. They walked with heads held high, sure of every step. So when my heart hesitated, I felt ashamed. I kept those questions tucked behind polite nods and practiced prayers, hoping they would just go away.

But here's the strange thing. Doubt has not destroyed my faith. In some ways it has deepened it. When I stopped running from doubt and started asking honest questions, I discovered something I hadn't expected. God is not threatened by our uncertainty. He does not turn away when we waver. In fact, Scripture is full of people who wrestled with doubt and still found their way into the heart of God's story.



Dan Veeneman is a lifelong learner, avid reader, and enjoys writing almost as much as he enjoys a cup of good coffee. He lives in St. Albert, Alta., with his loving and supportive wife and three pre-teen children. They worship at Sturgeon Valley Baptist Church.

Bible Stories

Think of Job, who shook his fist at the heavens and demanded answers. Or Jeremiah, the "weeping prophet," who cried out in frustration, "You deceived me, Lord, and I was deceived" (Jer. 20:7). Or David, who in Psalm 13 wrote, "How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" These were not moments of polished devotion. They were raw, honest cries. And they are recorded not as failures, but as faithful expressions of a relationship with a God who invites truth from his people.

Even John the Baptist, who once pointed directly at Jesus and declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God," later sent word from prison asking, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matt. 11:3). That story has always struck me. John, who had heard the voice from heaven and baptized the Messiah himself, still had doubts when the prison walls closed in.

And how did Jesus respond? Not with rebuke. Not with disappointment. He told John's messengers, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk ... blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me" (Matt. 11:4–6). Jesus affirmed John's place, his calling, and his questions.

I've come to believe that doubt is not the opposite of faith. The opposite of faith is indifference. Doubt means we still care enough to ask. Still care enough to wrestle. Still care enough to long for answers. And wrestling has always been part of the journey. Jacob didn't become Israel until he had spent the night in struggle.



Some of the most faithful people I know are those who have walked through the valley of doubt and come out holding on to hope—not a loud, showy hope but a quiet, sturdy one. The kind that has been tested in silence and tears. The kind that keeps showing up, even when the skies are grey.

God is Faithful

I won't pretend I've got it all figured out. There are still days when the mystery of God feels overwhelming, when suffering seems senseless or prayers feel unanswered, when I read Scripture and walk away with more questions than clarity. But I'm learning not to panic when that happens. My faith is not built on my feelings. It's not propped up by emotional certainty. It is built on the character of God, who is faithful even when I am unsure. "If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). That verse has become a quiet anchor for me in moments of spiritual fog.

And the more I've leaned into that truth, the more I've seen how God meets us in our questions. Not always with answers, but with presence.

There is a story in the Gospel of Mark that has become one of my favorites. A desperate father brings his tormented son to Jesus and says, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Jesus replies, "If you can? Everything is possible for one who believes." The father responds with words I've prayed many times myself: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:22-24). Jesus doesn't turn him away. He heals the son.

Faith and doubt can live in the same heart. And God, in his mercy, honors even our faltering belief.

So these days when doubt shows up, I don't treat it like a curse. I acknowledge it. I ask my questions. I return to Scripture—not for easy answers, but to be reminded of the story I'm a part of. I speak honestly with trusted friends. I keep worshiping. I keep praying. I keep going to church—sometimes

with enthusiasm, sometimes with a whisper.

More often than not, those questions lead me back to the feet of Jesus.

Even when doubt sits beside me, I'm learning not to fear it. The One I follow is not fragile. He is patient. He is kind. He is Emmanuel—God with us—even in the quiet, shadowed places of our faith.

He's not going anywhere. And neither am I. B

Won't You Be My ... Spiritual Giant?

FEW CHRISTIAN living books have a premise as unique as Lori G. Melton's *Journey with a Giant*. The Allegan, Mich.-based spiritual director shares her formative journey with Mister (Fred) Rogers as she guides readers in choosing their own "giant" of the faith.

Drawing from Hebrews 12 and the "cloud of witnesses" described there, Melton demonstrates how everyday Christians can be more deeply formed in Christlikeness as they are discipled and mentored by believers, both famous and obscure, who have gone before us. It's iron sharpening iron across time and space, and it's exhilarating.

One of the features I relished in the book is the mini profiles of various giants whom current-day believers have chosen. Take Hadewijch of Antwerp, born in 1200; Rembrandt van Rijn; and a woman who was on the Mayflower, chosen as a giant by her 14th-generation descendant. An Assemblies of God minister chose John Calvin as her giant, lauding his love for Scripture and his social justice work in his church community. (This last example proves that theological diversity is acceptable and even welcome when choosing a giant with whom to walk.)

Jackie Robinson, Desmond Tutu, Harriet Tubman, Origen, and many others are profiled here by those who have grown in their faith thanks to these giants and their examples. Of course, it helps if there is quite a bit written about or by the giants themselves.

Melton, who attends a Bible church, chose Mister Rogers, whom she calls "Fred" throughout the book. Rogers was a devout believer, a Presbyterian minister who felt called to show compassion and kindness to children through his beloved TV program

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. Readers will be encouraged and moved by Rogers' faith life, a life of acceptance and love fueled by a steady practice of spiritual silence. Once Melton read everything she could get her hands on about "Fred," she moved on to his spiritual mentor, Henri Nouwen, finding a golden thread of meaning between Nouwen's Christian walk and Rogers', a thread that now winds its way through her life.

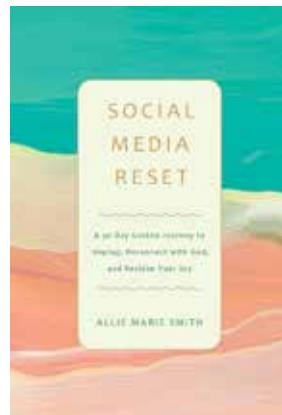
Readers might consider going through the book twice: once to understand the concept of journeying with a giant and again to guide their journey.

"I had grown accustomed to sharing life with spiritual companions, taking them my questions and fears, and letting their lives speak into mine," Melton writes. These companions don't replace Christ, but rather instruct and encourage believers to discover new insights about him through their lives and writings.

As I read through the book, I wondered whom I might choose as my own giant. I was drawn to women writers I admired, including Jane Austen and Madeleine L'Engle, but could not pick which one to "journey" with. Upon cleaning out my bookshelf, I found two unread books about L'Engle, including one about her faith journey. Aha, I thought. I had found my giant, a voice that would call me deeper as I journeyed on the way of Jesus. (Waterbrook) B



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



Social Media Reset: A 30-Day Guided Journey to Unplug, Reconnect with God, and Reclaim Your Joy

By Allie Marie Smith

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Start 2026 with a social media reset. Need help curbing mindless scrolling, toxic comparisons, and other phone traps? Allie Marie Smith's book, a worthy and compassionate guide, invites readers to reset for 30 days and seek deeper rest and a more authentic, grounded life.

It's definitely not easy to unplug from social media; our brains have learned to come there for hits of dopamine. For Smith and many readers, social media became "a means through which I searched for connection and human approval but never found it." She guides readers in becoming more intentional and using it for good. Smith enjoys using her socials to "encourage others, keep up with friends, talk about my work, and share special moments of my life. Knowing my purpose for social media helps me avoid using it mindlessly." (Tyndale Refresh)



Veritas

By P.O.D

Reviewed by Jeremiah Basuric

Punk-rock-rap-metal-reggae band P.O.D. achieved success after 9/11. Their positive, faith-filled message was a balm. Since then, P.O.D (Payable on Death) has been a perpetual underdog, never accepted by mainstream Christian music nor fully embraced by the world. But they have stayed true (veritas) to themselves and their calling.

This newest album is an homage to their rock-rap roots and a reflection on their collective experience through COVID, when it was hard to discern truth from lies (listen to "DEAD RIGHT"); hard on mental health (listen to "LIES WE TELL OURSELVES"); and hard on the heart (listen to "LAY ME DOWN").

But it was also a time of resilience. Tremendous loss can reverberate an echo of eternity into the heart. This truth was payable on death in Christ. (Mascot Records)



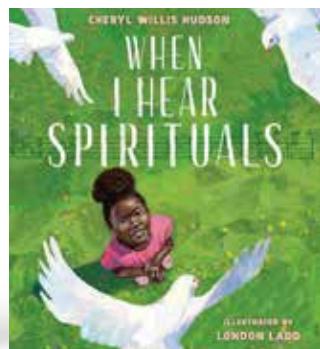
The Big Relief: The Urgency of Grace for a Worn-Out World

By Dave Zahl

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

"We are all carrying so much," Dave Zahl says in his wise, wry treatise on grace, "the Big Relief at the heart of Christianity." It's a relief from stress, legalism, guilt, and feeling like we don't belong. I wish Zahl's book was on the syllabi when I was a Bible college student. He effortlessly weaves pop culture references with nods to antiquity and sagas from his own life story to illustrate what grace is and why it is so compelling.

Anyone who keeps trying to earn the approval of others or God will find a healing balm in these engaging pages. Because of the God who "descends Jacob's ladder to muddy himself with the cares and concerns of everyday people," we can rest in grace. We can exhale in the Big Relief. (Brazos Press)



When I Hear Spirituals

By Cheryl Willis Hudson. Illustrated by London Ladd

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In this exquisitely illustrated and narrated ode to African American spirituals, young readers will encounter a wonder-filled girl who reflects on the emotions she experiences when she hears her ancestors' songs and recalls the lyrics they sang.

As the girl looks at doves flying in the sky above her, she thinks, "When I hear spirituals, / Sometimes / A big, full feeling / Grows in my chest. / My heart pounds / So fast and so hard / Seems like / It will / Overshadow / The sounds / Of the beautiful songs."

Passionate, worshipful, and relevant, this picture book could be a springboard for parents and children to talk about God's desire for all his children to be free—spiritually liberated from sin and sorrow and physically unshackled from chains. (Holiday House)

The Lowdown

Matins: This book by Calvin University professor Otto Selles gathers poems, photographs, and oil paintings to reflect on mourning, memory, childhood, and parenting. Its title, *Matins*—“mornings” in French, “morning prayer” in English—points to the spirit of reflection that prompts us to consider our place in the world. (Pandora Press)

Starring Milo

Ventimiglia: After the breakout success of the song “I Can Only Imagine,” MercyMe’s Bart Millard is living the dream with sold-out arenas, a devoted fan base, and a thriving career. But his past soon threatens the family he’s built in *I Can Only Imagine 2*. (Feb. 20 in theaters, Lionsgate)

Beloved Series Returns: A new era of the sitcom *Scrubs* begins midseason on ABC. The show reunites regular cast members Zach Braff, Donald Faison, Sarah Chalke, Judy Reyes, and John C. McGinley. (Feb. 25, ABC)

Keeper of Lost Children: In this time-jump novel, Ethyl Gathers is living in Germany in the 1950s when she finds an orphanage filled with children of German women and Black American GIs. Ozzie Phillips volunteers for the desegregated army in Germany in 1948. And in 1965 Maryland, Sophia Clark discovers a secret that upends her world. By Sadeqa Johnson. (37 Ink)

This We Believe

The teachings in the confessions are teachings that we, as a body, agree on.

EVEN IF YOU HAVE been barely listening to decisions made in the Christian Reformed Church over the past several years, you have heard the term “confessional church” tossed around. You might have quietly wondered what exactly this means. What does it mean to be “confessional”? What are these documents we refer to as “confessions”? Perhaps you already know the answers to these questions but, if not, I hope to offer a brief introduction suggesting that confessions are historical, biblical, communal, and ecumenical.

Each of the confessional documents we will examine in this column—The Belgic Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt—arose in a particular historical situation. Quite often, after the Reformation began, the purpose of these documents was to clearly point out differences between the beliefs of the Reformers and those of the Roman Catholic Church. The historical nature of these documents, however, in no way suggests that they are irrelevant to the church today.

These documents, which were often born in times of conflict, summarized various biblical teachings—doctrines—to clearly demonstrate that their answers to the questions of their time were grounded in Scripture. As summaries of biblical teaching, the confessions are not more important or even have the same importance as the Bible. Rather, they are based on the Bible. Thus, insofar as the teachings in the confessions accurately reflect the teaching of the Bible, we continue to affirm them as doctrines we believe.

Confessions—doctrines we believe—are also communal reflections on theological topics. We are not lone wolves. We are part of a community known as the Christian Reformed Church, a little denomination that is part of the larger body of “Reformed”

churches, which are part of the still-larger body of Christ. Our confessions reflect a sort of “group thinking” on important issues, a consensus among us regarding how to understand particular theological topics. For example, the Canons of Dort were composed to defend the Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God in salvation against a perceived challenge to that doctrine by the followers of Jacob Arminius. The Canons were not written in isolation, but by a consensus of Reformed thinkers coming together to consider what exactly “we believe” about these teachings.

The teachings in the confessions, therefore, are teachings that we, as a body, agree on. They help identify us by telling us who we are and are not and what we do and do not believe. In that way they also form a boundary around us, offering a standard of orthodoxy for our group.

It is worth remembering that this sort of thinking can be abused. It is good to affirm together that our interpretation of various biblical truths is correct. But particularly at the confessional level, we must do so with humility, what Richard Mouw calls “convicted civility.” In other words, we should not suggest that those who interpret Scripture differently than we do are either not Christians or, worse yet, going to hell. That knowledge belongs to God alone.

The final aspect of confessions is that they are ecumenical. That is, we hold some of the teachings in our confessions in common with others in the wider body of Christ. For example, most of the first half of the Belgic Confession is widely shared throughout the Christian Church. Thus, our confessions are communal in the sense that they draw us together as Reformed, and that they bring us together with Christians from many different backgrounds who confess with us, “We believe!” 



Mary L. Vanden Berg, Ph.D., is a professor of systematic theology, emerita, for Calvin Theological Seminary. She lives in Byron Center, Mich., and attends LaGrave CRC. She is author of *Aquinas, Science, and Human Uniqueness*.

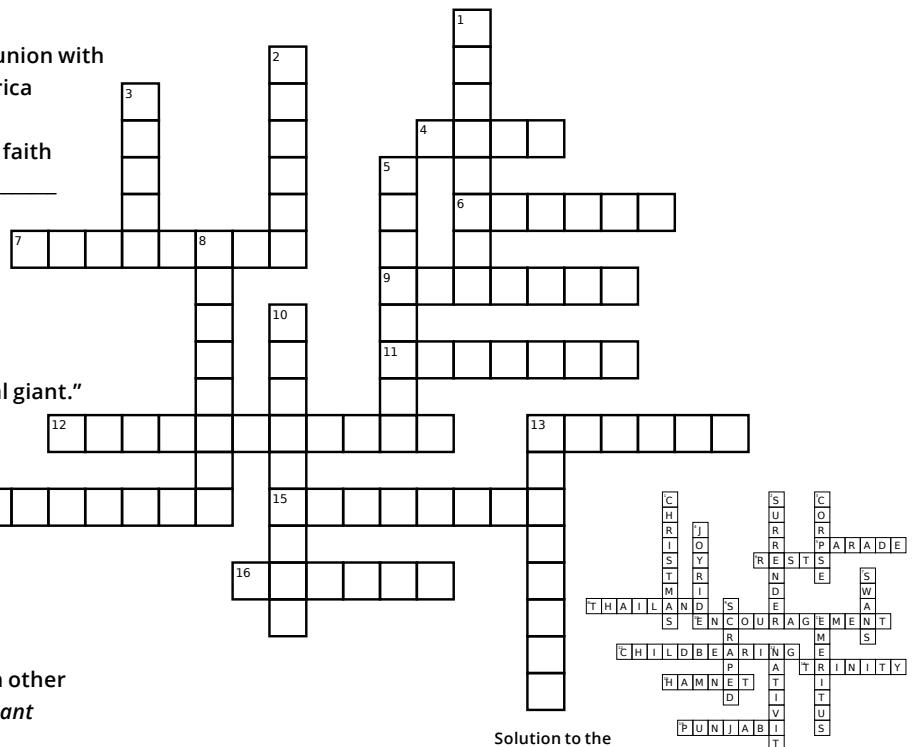
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle throughout this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions in the next print issue. (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

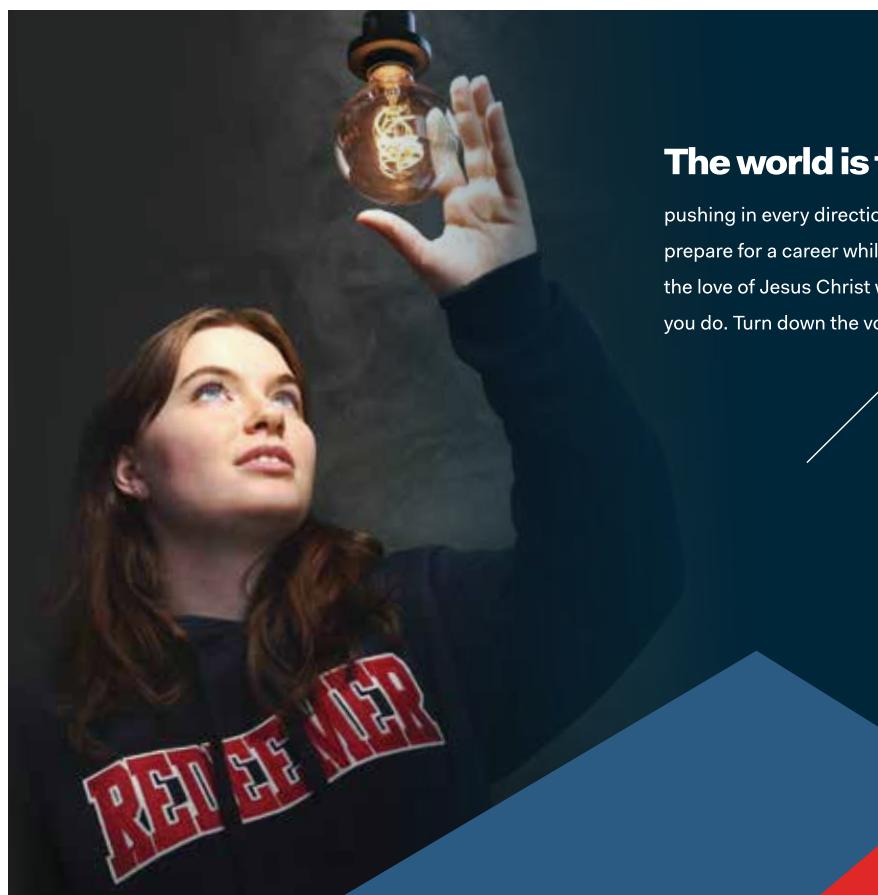
Down

1. _____ of Reformed Churches is now in communion with the Christian Reformed Church in North America
2. *The Banner*'s new interim editor
3. Not a sign of failure, sometimes it can deepen faith
5. Confessional documents were often born of _____
8. One way 1 Peter describes Christians
10. The CRC's first official publication
13. John calls for a _____ to God's love

Across

4. "Take my _____ and let it be"
6. Henri _____ was Mister Fred Rogers' "spiritual giant."
7. A conference on discipleship, leadership, and church planting
9. Finding _____ Ranch
11. A descriptive word for ears
12. A loving posture includes developing _____
13. *The Big _____: The Urgency of Grace for a Worn-Out World* by Dave Zahl
14. Pastor Appreciation Month
15. Ant colonies build these to connect with each other
16. Lori J. _____ is the author of *Journey with a Giant*





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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Congregational Announcements

WESTERN SPRINGS CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH (Western Springs, IL) will disband on January 18, 2026, after much prayer, conversation, and spiritual discernment. In this new chapter, the congregation will join together in ministry with Trinity Presbyterian Church, trusting God's continued leading and provision. Established in 1938, WSCRC faithfully served the community for generations, with Rev. Mark van Stee serving as its final pastor. We step forward with gratitude for God's past faithfulness and trust in His ongoing work through this united fellowship.

Church Positions Available

LEAD PASTOR Emmanuel CRC in Calgary, Alberta is seeking a lead pastor. This church of about 230 people is well established in this growing community. After having gone through the difficult departure of half the congregation almost a year ago, the church has prayed, grown closer together, and set out on a new path of celebrating God, community, and each other. We are seeking a pastor who can lead alongside us and guide us with God's precious Word. For more information about Emmanuel church please see our website at emmanuelcrc.org, or send us an email at pastorsearch@emmanuelcrc.org, or check out our church profile information at the CRCNA Network under Church Jobs at <https://network.crcna.org/jobs>.

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.

SEEKING FULL-TIME PASTOR Covenant CRC in Sioux Center, IA, invites pastors committed to the Reformed tradition and to excellent preaching and teaching to explore ministry with us. He/she should enjoy ministering to persons of all ages, thrive through collaborative and creative worship planning, work with us to live what we believe, and foster community within the congregation. Position opens March 1, 2026. Contact Search Committee Chair Sally Jongsma at jongsma@mtcnet.net.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR A FT SR. PASTOR at Golden Gate CRC (ggcrc.org) in San Francisco to provide leadership, direction and vision for our 3 diverse congregations and 4

associate pastors. Qual: M.Div. accredited theological seminary. Min 5 yrs. church pastor exp. Proficient in English; fluent in Mandarin or Cantonese. Authorized to work in the US. Inquire at srpastorsearch@ggcrc.org.

WILLIAMSBURG CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH, located in a rural community south of Ottawa, Ontario, is seeking a full-time pastor to support and equip our congregation in worship, youth involvement, and hospitality. We welcome a spiritually mature, relational individual who will partner with us in carrying out our mission. For further details, visit WilliamsburgCRC.org or email SearchCom@WilliamsburgCRC.org.

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS NORTH CASCADES will meet on Thursday evening, Feb 26, 2026, from 7-9 pm roughly.

Obituaries



CORNELIUS "CORKY" JOHN DEHORN, a U.S. Marine Corps World War II Veteran, passed away on December 1, 2025 at the age of 99. Corky was the beloved husband of the late Grace Huizenga De Horn for 68 years, the loving father of Donna (Bruce) Essebaggers, Nancy (Terry) Boerema, Gail (Jim) Punt, and Thomas (Gwen) De Horn, cherished grandfather of 10 with their spouses, and the adoring great-grandfather of 12. Corky was preceded in death by four sisters, Cora Scheeringa, Gertie Beukema, Dina Recker, and Audrey Hiskes. Corky will be dearly missed by his sister Sas Cooper and many nieces and nephews.



KAMSTRA, GRACE 90, passed away peacefully at her home on November 24 2025. Born Geesje Wijske teVelde on June 2, 1935 in Stadskanaal, Groningen, Neth. to Bay (Berend) and Bonnie (Hartholt) teVelde. She was the second of 7 children. As a young girl in Holland, she shared many stories of WWII with her family. In 1948, with the sponsorship of her uncles, Grace at 13, and her family moved from the Netherlands to Artesia, California where her father started a dairy business. While still learning English, Grace attended and excelled at Bellflower Christian School. Her parents encouraged all the chil-

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dren to speak only English so they could also learn the language. A few weeks after becoming an American citizen Grace married her high school sweetheart, John Kamstra on August 10, 1954 and within 5 years they welcomed 3 sons and a daughter. They began with a dairy in Artesia. Later, an opportunity arose in 1966 and with a "leap of faith" moved to Enumclaw, Washington to rent a dairy. In 1969 they bought a dairy in Eatonville. John and Grace retired from the dairy business in 1997. Our "Amazing" Grace loved the Lord. She taught her children, grand, and great-grandchildren about Jesus. Grace was a servant and a giver. As a member of Tacoma Christian Reformed Church, she taught Sunday School, V.B.S and led ladies Bible study. She also found time to have fun with her witty sense of humor. In 2006 John and Grace moved to their home in Graham where she lived until her passing. Grace is preceded in death by her parents, brothers Roelof, Herman, George, and Ralph, and sister Margaret DeKruyf. Grace is survived by her sister Betty Idsinga, John, and children John, Terry, Bob, and Cindy (Tucker).

SHARDA, MARTIN, of Grand Rapids, MI was called home by his Lord on November 24, 2025, at age 101. He was predeceased by his wife Kathleen and is survived by children Joan (John) Lutsi, Christine Sharda, Claire (T.J.) Sapunarich, Anne (Scott) Rush, and Tom (Jennie) Sharda; eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Birthdays

90 YEARS

LES AND FRAN (VAN WEELEN) SPOELSTRA will celebrate their 90th birthdays on February 4 and 3. They were blessed with 4 sons; Mike and Kari, Vern and Maribeth, David and Gretchen, Doug and Brenda and one daughter Susan (Garrett deceased) Brown. They are also blessed with 13 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren. They are thankful to God for His faithfulness and love shown to them over the years. They reside at 512 Fairway Drive in Redlands, Ca. 92373

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Join a small team of dedicated designers, passionate editors, and contributing writers to carry on the 160-year legacy of *The Banner*, the bimonthly periodical and online magazine of the Christian Reformed Church. *The Banner* informs members about what is happening in the church, strengthens their Christian life, and stimulates critical thinking about faith issues in culture.

The Editor in Chief will be responsible for the content of *The Banner* to ensure it fulfills its stated purpose, including writing content and overseeing other staff who provide content.

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—Jess Sweitzer, founder and director, Project Bible Runners



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Thanks for What You Do

There was only one lane open, and there were a dozen carts in line ahead of me.

IT WAS A BUSY SATURDAY morning, and Safeway was packed with grocery shoppers. Like all the rest I prowled the aisles filling my cart and checking things off my list. After 45 minutes of hustling I had completed my list and headed to the checkout lanes. There was only one lane open, and there were a dozen carts in line ahead of me. Great.

"Where's the manager?" complained the lady ahead of me. "This is ridiculous. I'm going to have to find another store to shop at. The service here is nonexistent."

The self-help kiosks were also crowded, so there was no relief. You could hear lots of mumbled grumbling from everywhere around. People joined the line behind me. There were more unhappy comments. One guy cursed, shoved his cart aside, and walked out of the store leaving the frozen foods thawing in his cart.

The sweet older lady behind me was quiet and stoic, but the guy slouching behind her with a full basket of numerous cases of beer and assorted snacks was loud and obnoxious. He ranted and raved and complained to anyone within earshot about the injustice. As if we weren't miserable enough, we had to be subjected to his constant, annoying whining. The stoic lady finally had enough, drew herself up to her full five feet tall, and told him to button up because she was sick and tired of hearing about it. It shocked him into silence. An "amen" echoed from somewhere behind him. There was a silent chorus of nods all around. We had a new hero.

I invited the no-longer-stoic lady to swap places with me, but she declined. "I'm in no hurry," she said with a smile.

While the woman ahead of me was paying for her groceries, I hustled to place my items on the conveyor,

making sure to have my rewards card and credit card in hand so as to make things go as quickly as possible.

Without looking up, Maria, the clerk, mumbled, "So sorry for the delay. We're shorthanded. Please accept our apologies." She'd repeated the phrase to each person. Maria was in her 50s with black hair and dark eyes. Her hands flew as she moved items over the scanner.

"What happened?" I asked.

She looked up sharply.

"Everyone called in sick today except me. I'm the only clerk here."

"Wow! This must be really hard for you. Thank you so much for coming in today and for putting up with all the abuse. You're amazing," I said. "I really appreciate you. Thank you for what you do."

Her eyes glistened, and she burst into tears. She rushed around the end of the check stand, almost knocking the bag boy over and shoving my cart aside. She reached up and hugged me. She pulled down my face and kissed my cheek. "Thank you, thank you, thank you. That's the first nice thing I've heard all day."

There was silence in the line behind me as she made her way back to the register. As I paid and pushed my cart away I heard the no-longer-stoic older woman say, "I appreciate you, too. Thanks for what you do." She then told the bag boy, "Thanks for what you do, as well."

The guy behind her was strangely silent.

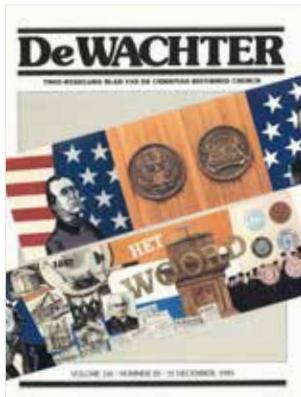
"Thanks for what you do." It's a good thing to say. 



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



De Wachter, true to its name “The Watchman,” stood in defense of the beliefs of the CRC.



IT'S THE BANNER'S
160th birth-day this year, but it wasn't actually an official publication of the Christian Reformed

Church until almost 50 years later. That honor belongs to *De Wachter*, the Dutch language publication published by the church from 1868 until 1985.

De Wachter, true to its name “The Watchman,” stood in defense of the beliefs of the CRC, known then as the True Holland Reformed Church. *De Wachter* brought sermons, Sunday school lessons, and church news to the 19 congregations of the church. It helped Dutch immigrants to “the new country” learn more about the teachings of the newly formed denomination. Its early editors were all professors from the newly established Calvin Seminary.

The synods of the day firmly controlled the magazine, deciding what type of paper the magazine would be printed on, what kind of advertising would be allowed, and what the subscription price would be.

Synods also dictated what content was required to be printed. From its

earliest days, editors were required to report the important decisions made at each synod. In 1890, it required reports from each classis meeting so that, as the Acts of Synod that year state, “the pulse beat of each other’s ecclesiastical life be better experienced.” Other synods mandated the addition of new departments: a children’s section; monthly reports from the seminary; a column dedicated to young people; meditations; departments for dogmatic and ethical issues; and missions. Seminary professors were required to submit articles written in a popular style about the discipline they were teaching to increase “love for Reformed instruction among our people.”

The content of the magazine wasn’t always grace-filled. In his tribute to *De Wachter* in 1985, Rev. William Buursma noted that in its first decades the magazine was highly partisan and parochial. “A CRC synod in the 1880s expressed its concern about the heated dialogue being carried on in the pages of the paper,” he wrote. Synod 1892 noted that the magazine’s content often “does not edify ... often reduced to personalities.” Another request from a classis asked synod to “take steps for improvement ... with respect to the editor in chief and articles concerning ecclesiastical questions.” In 1884, a congregation requested that *De Wachter* “refrain from publishing personal and religious articles, and to refuse to accept articles which have not been written to stress or advance the truth but rather injure a person.”

Over the years several debates on doctrinal beliefs, church practice, and the modern world appeared in its pages, including baptism, the covenant of grace, use of English in



Gayla Postma retired as news editor for *The Banner* in 2020.

DE WACHTER

WEEKBLAD

IN HET BELANG DER WARE HOLLANDSCHE GEREFORMEERDE KERK

En ik gene ik in zegen, dat ver ik aljen

wankt. Marc. 13. 36.

C. YORST.

UITGEVER.

HOLLAND. — MICHE.

Ik heb geloofd, daaron
geleuven wij tek. Dan

2 Chr.

worship services, and whether women could vote in congregational meetings.

As the church became more Americanized, the magazine waned in influence. In 1926, *De Wachter* had fewer subscribers than *The Banner* for the first time. In 1936, subscription and advertising income for *The Banner* was double that of *De Wachter*, though the magazine did experience a revival as immigrants from The Netherlands poured into Canada after World War II.

In 1963 the magazine became a bi-weekly. Though in earlier decades it had provided income to the church's seminary, *De Wachter* was now operating at a loss. However, recommendations in the 1970s to phase out the magazine were defeated.

By 1980 it was on life support but survived after editor Rev. William Haverkamp asserted that *De Wachter* was still considered an official publication of the CRC, alongside *The Banner*, and filled an obvious need in Canadian churches.

Synod 1983 finally decided to put the magazine to rest. Its last issue appeared in December 1985. *De Wachter* was never produced on CRC Publications' computerized typesetting equipment because the operators of that equipment could not read Dutch.

In his 1985 tribute, Rev. Buursma wrote that although it engaged in theological warfare at times, its pages were also graced with meditations, sermons, devotional articles, poetry, and information about the struggling, but steadily growing, denomination. Of its 10 editors, he wrote, "each spoke prophetically to his time." B

BANNER

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