

1866-2026



BANNER

MARCH/APRIL 2026

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A large, dense school of fish, likely sardines, swimming in clear blue water. The fish are oriented in various directions, creating a complex, textured pattern of blue and silver. The lighting is bright, highlighting the scales and fins of the fish.

Mob Mentality

Truth-Telling is Courageous

**Have I not
commanded you?
Be strong and
courageous. Do not
be frightened, and
do not be dismayed,
for the Lord your
God is with you
wherever you go.**

—Joshua 1:9

Too often, silence shields abuse and protects the powerful instead of the vulnerable. As we recognize Abuse Awareness Sunday on April 26th, let's renew our commitment to truth so the vulnerable are protected and healing and hope are possible.



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A Ministry of the Christian Reformed Church

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BY THE NUMBERS

Thrive, the Christian Reformed Church ministry focused on equipping and supporting congregations across the denomination, tracks and helps churches in their pastor search process. The number of churches with a pastoral vacancy—those actively searching to fill it—is about 18% of the total number of organized congregations. That’s 146 across the denomination.

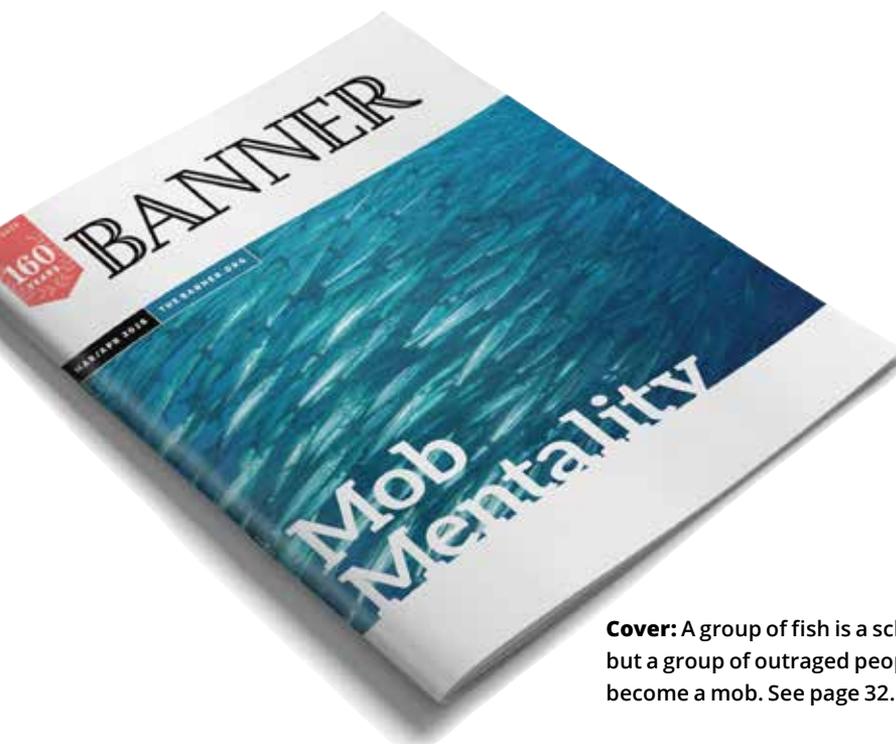


Vacancy

Here's the number of vacant churches by region:

- 21** Canada West (4 classes)
- 35** US Midwest (11 classes)
- 42** Canada East (7 classes)
- 7** US East (4 classes)
- 23** Great Lakes (12 classes)
- 18** US West (11 classes)

Source: Thrive, Feb. 3, 2026



WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » News: Hearing From a Pastor's Heart in Minnesota
- » Church Worldwide: U.S. Evangelicals Divided Over Faith and Immigration Tension
- » Music: *Hero & the Villain*, by Dan Bremnes
- » Movie: *Deliver Me From Nowhere*
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Young Adults Writing Contest

Topic: Sustaining Faith

***The Banner* is pleased to present a writing contest on the topic of sustaining faith. What does sustaining faith look like? What does it mean to be sustained in faith in today's world? How does God build a faith that lasts? Please use a personal story to illustrate the theme of your article.**

We'll publish the top two winning articles in print and the top three online, plus award cash prizes of \$1,000 USD (first prize), \$500 USD (second prize), and \$250 USD (third prize).

- » Deadline for submissions is 11:59 p.m. May 31.
- » Contest open to anyone ages 16-23 who has not been previously published by *The Banner* and who is a member of or regularly attends a Christian Reformed church.
- » Articles should be no more than 1,000 words in length, submitted as a Word file or Google doc and accompanied by a separate cover letter that includes your name, address, phone number, where you worship, and brief biographical note. Do not include this information on the essay itself. Email to info@thebanner.org with the subject heading "Writing Contest."
- » Decisions of judges are final. We reserve the right to withhold one or more prizes if none are deemed worthy. Winners will be notified by July 6.

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TheBanner.org

Fixed Eyes

Only Jesus can sustain a people from generation to generation.



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/korean 에서 보실 수 있습니다.

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WHEN MY HUSBAND and I were students, we ran a lawn-mowing business. Joel mowed in super straight lines. Mine were wavy, with missed grass. Ugh. I'd stare down at my feet, concentrating on getting that mower wheel right on the edge of the last pass. But at the row's end, I'd turn, and again another crooked line. Joel would say, "Lora, the problem is not your feet. It's your eyes! Pick a spot ahead and fix your eyes on it. Your feet will go where your eyes are looking."

What are our eyes on? Whether we're talking church life or home life (or the life of a denomination magazine), where are we ultimately looking? Our feet go where our eyes are fixed.

It's not just about direction; it's also about endurance. Where we look determines whether we keep going or give up.

That's what the first hearers of the book of Hebrews found out. Their eyes were on their discouragement: hands drooping, legs dragging (12:12); pressure mounting, people leaving (10:25); and everyone wondering whether a life of faith was worth the trouble.

Into that space came this word: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. ... Consider him ... so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:2-3).

Jesus is worth the trouble. Over and over, Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is better than anything we could look to. Hebrews has us look to the gospel—look what he endured for us! He suffered the shame of mockery, the pain of torture, the evil of betrayal, and the horror of forsakenness. He did this for "the joy set before him." And what was that joy? Not glory. He had that. Not the Father—also his. His joy was redeeming a bride for his very own. His joy was us.

We fix our eyes on him because he first fixed his eyes on us, in holy, atoning love.

As churches, there are lots of good things we can be tempted to fix our eyes on: organs and liturgy; worship bands and emotions; numbers; preserving the past; shaking up the future; justice causes; or fellowship. These are gifts, and they matter.

But none of these things died for us. None of these things are ultimately life-giving. Good gifts make bad saviors. By themselves, these are wearying things if we try to fix our eyes on them.

The same goes for a denomination. We might rightly thank God for rich theological systems, piercing preaching, and excellence in academics. We might have transformationalist worldviews, missional discipleship, Revelation 7 diversity, and initiatives of renewing, reframing and multiplying. These might all be signs of God's favor.

But as former seminary president JH Kromminga cautioned at our 100th anniversary, "God's favor is our challenge." The challenge is that if we ever look to blessings more than to the Blessor, we are choosing a dead-end, idol-path. That road always ends in pride, exhaustion and collapse, for us, and for our children.

Only Jesus can sustain a people from generation to generation. Only Jesus and his cross are worthy to hold our eyes—and our hearts.

So for us, whether as an individual, a church, or a magazine, this is our prayer, our passion, and our purpose: to keep our eyes on Jesus, the One who fixed his eyes on us.

Our feet will go to where our eyes are fixed.

Lord Jesus, may we run the race before us, strong and brave to face the foe, looking only unto you Lord, as we onward go. **B**



REPLY ALL

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

Being Quiet

Your thoughtful article in the November 2025 *Banner* resonated with me (“Being Quiet in a Culture of Volume”). Especially the phrase “consider ways a person can be encouraged to grow the gifts they already have.” Gifted listeners have a crucial place in the Kingdom of God. Gifted writers as well. Thanks for taking the time to share.

» Susan Van Dyk // Marion, Ill.

Remembrance Day

I just finished reading the article by Anita Brinkman, “Ontario Church Creates Community Poppy Display for Remembrance Day” (December 2025). I appreciate that the article includes the encouragement to remember our veterans. In future, would you be able to keep the following in mind regarding Canadian Remembrance Day? First, the Canadian Government considers everyone who completes Basic Training and signed up to serve to be a veteran. Second, World War II is not the last war Canadians have fought in. Soldiers who have served in Afghanistan, Korea, and other locations continue to feel that their service has been erased by fellow Canadians. Finally, when remembering veterans, remember those who returned alive, not only those who died. Remember those who returned and carry lifelong invisible injuries, and also their family members who also sacrificed.

» J. Masselink // Guelph, Ont.

Finding Common Ground

I was saddened by the article about the Classis Chicago South Racial Reconciliation Committee (“Chicago South Racial Reconciliation Committee Suspends Its Work,” (October 2025). As a former longtime member of Pullman CRC, I was also saddened to see that it is in the process of disaffiliation. The CRC was born out of division and has been prone to division over the years, and I think a sense of embattled virtue is and has been a factor in every case—a sense that one’s position on an issue that is integral to one’s self-image as a good person is under attack, and is so important that little else matters. That condition causes one to fail to ask such important questions as: Is my position so unambiguously right, and the other side’s so unambiguously wrong, that there cannot be any common ground? Do the actions or failures to act on the part of the other side stem from malice or ill will, or is there a more innocent explanation? Is my position so important that if it does not carry the day I have no recourse other than to depart? The hour is late, but can we climb off the barricades and seriously ask ourselves those questions?

» Alan Van Dyke // Grand Haven, Mich.

Synodical Changes

Many letters have been printed expressing dismay about Synod 2025’s change of *The Banner’s* mandate (“*The Banner’s* Mandate Curtailed,” July/August 2025). As a new Christian Reformed Church member after membership in a pluralistic denomination where relativism and tolerance were the dominant values, I welcome the change of focus. I want to see how the historic Reformed faith based on Scripture and the three forms of unity respond prophetically to the issues of our day. Jude 3 says to “contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.” This faith addresses the needs of all people in all places for all time.

» Al Jackson // Kalamazoo, Mich.

God is omniscient. Who is wiser that he should know better? I want to understand God better, not study lesser minds. I support synod.

» George Meier // Kalamazoo, Mich.

I was very sad to read of Synod 2025’s decision to change *The Banner’s* mandate. I have greatly appreciated the various points of view in different articles over the years. In fact, we have used different articles in our small group, as well as at an occasional adult education time in our church, to stimulate deeper discussion about our faith and our beliefs. I have also valued reading Shiao Chong’s editorials and will miss his thoughtful and faithful reflections on issues facing all of us. I am sorrowful at his departure.

» Sandra Spee // Olympia, Wash.

The Least of These

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" —Matthew 25:40

HE SHOWS UP every Monday while we drink something from Starbucks in the lobby of the Piggly Wiggly. He wears the same clothes all year. It is the uniform of a homeless man—tired sneakers, khaki pants stained and strained from constant wearing. A scruff of beard and a tangle of hair protrude from a sweat-stained hoodie. Head on chest, he scans the floor from hooded eyes. In the basket of his borrowed grocery cart a half-filled plastic bag, the repository of the man's worldly belongings. He makes his way to a microwave oven on the counter. We watch his weathered hand transfer a bagel remnant from bag to oven.

On this cold, blustery morning we wonder where he spends the nights. Our town has no viaducts, no homeless shelter, only a battered barn where winds blow through the gaps and rats nest in the straw.

We look away, lest his gaze embarrass us. We go back to talking about bargains at Costco, the outrageous rise of co-payments at doctors' offices, the annoying proliferation of spam calls. We talk IRAs, 401Ks, the Nasdaq's fluctuations.

We forget the ragged man warming his bagel in the store microwave. He doesn't bother us; we don't bother him. Our worlds are so far apart that there seems no bridge long enough.

Do any of us wonder why he shows up every Monday morning during our café latte time? Is it something more than coincidence? We can choose to ignore him, a dirty old man, an "embarrassment" to civility and clean living. It's not why he came, but his presence here could be seen as providential, to make us uncomfortable

On this cold,
blustery morning
we wonder
where he spends
the nights.

and get us to move, for a brief time, from our world of ease and plenty to his world of scraping by and despair. Perhaps he's the wounded man for whom the Good Samaritan took a chance. Maybe he's the prophet Micah reminding us that the Lord is less interested in outward shows of piety than in walking humbly, acting justly, and loving mercy.

It's not likely we can do anything much about rehabilitating him, curing his schizophrenia. Maybe he doesn't want help. But he's here and we can't deny his presence. Yet we would prefer to ignore him, to go on talking trivia and forget that trivia for the dirty, homeless man in the room is a crust of bread in a restaurant dumpster, a table in the library on which to rest his head.

He makes us uncomfortable, and that might (should?) be a beginning. **B**



Hank Ottens is a retired orthopedic surgeon and an active gardener, photographer, and singer. He attends Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, Mich.

As I Was Saying

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

- » When Being Authentic Isn't Enough
- » The Next First Step
- » Annihilationism is Not the Better Option



From Empty Nest to Openness: Finding Joy in Life's Next Chapter

By Linda Hanstra

I remember the days before each of our little ones arrived. Fresh sheets clung to the crib mattress, with soft blankets nearby. The musical mobile hung with anticipation over the place that would soon hold our little bundle. I stocked the changing table with newborn-sized diapers and laundered and folded tiny onesies and sleepers. Toward the end of each pregnancy, I poured every bit of energy I could muster into the “nesting” process.

As our family grew, so did our need for space. We painted, wallpapered, and furnished our new home—“feathering the nest” to make it our own. We filled our nest with four children and all the noise, activity, and belongings that came with them.

Then, one by one, the kids moved away for college, jobs, and homes across town or in other cities. After 26 years of hustle and bustle, clutter and chaos, love and laughter, the sudden lack of children and all that came with them made our home feel empty. In the silence, the term “empty nest” made perfect sense to me.

I soon realized, however, that “empty nest” described only a few quiet rooms in our house. It was far from the reality of our lives after the kids moved out.

An Empty Nest Alternative: The Open Door

A mama bird will push her fledglings out of the nest, encouraging them to fly away; hence, the “empty nest” metaphor. Most young birds stay nearby for a while as the avian parent teaches them survival skills. But eventually the whole family—parents included—leaves. In fact, most bird species separate, never to return, after abandoning the nest.

When our kids leave home, many parents—like the birds—teach survival skills, sharing the wisdom our parents once imparted to us. How to find health insurance, keep a budget, save for retirement, or secure a mortgage. How to maintain a vehicle, grow a garden, or make a favorite recipe. When to call the plumber, the exterminator, or the doctor.

But teaching survival skills is where our bird metaphor ends. Unlike the

birds, we don't send our young ones off, never to see them again. So if this new life phase is unlike an “empty nest,” how should we describe it? What characteristics define it? And can parents learn to embrace it with joy?

Gretchen Rubin (podcaster and author of *The Happiness Project*) has coined the term “Open Door” to replace “Empty Nest.” The Open Door implies kids are welcome to come home for a time, and they often do. It also describes the parents' invitation to step across the threshold into newfound time and freedom. It's their chance to explore the adventures and activities they put on hold while raising their young.

The Open Door analogy is on point for its welcoming posture and enticing possibilities. In considering how we could put the open-door mindset into practice, I thought of my mother. After she died in 2021, I wrote a eulogy to describe all she had meant to her family. There were countless memories of the ways she showed her love over the years, but I summed them up in three words: home, hands, and

heart. As our children leave the nest, it seems that leaving the “doors” wide open to these three aspects of our lives could dispel the emptiness, replacing it with openness.

Open Home

I hope my home is like I described my mother’s: “No matter where we ended up, the home Mom created was a magnet that kept pulling us back.”

Our children often come home between semesters, jobs, or moves. We welcome them whenever they need a place to sleep, a holiday dinner, conversation over a cup of tea, or a shoulder to cry on. They might need a place to live after an illness, separation, job loss, or other unexpected life event. They’re welcome to visit, which, depending on their proximity, could be more than once a week or less than once a year. And the virtual door is always open for them to call, text, or video chat whenever and for whatever reason.

An open home also implies hospitality toward others (1 Peter 4:9). We can show the love of Christ by inviting folks in for coffee or a meal. Spare bedrooms that were once bursting with kids’ things are now gathering dust. Why not use them for extended family visits or reunions with old friends? Perhaps a college student, a small family, or an international exchange student is looking for a temporary home.

Open Hands

Our hands—no longer busy feeding our brood, handling mountains of laundry, or putting away endless clutter—are now free for other pursuits. My hands have recently started preparing and serving lunch at our local women’s shelter. My fingers type stories that encourage others on their midlife journeys. Free hands

Who in your
family,
neighborhood,
church, or
community needs
your kindness
and love today?

also mean more time for the pastimes I love, such as knitting, reading, and kayaking.

What were your hands made to do? Do you have a flair for sewing? Join a quilting group. Cooking? Bring a meal to a new mom or shut-in (or take a specialty cuisine class for your own enjoyment). Woodworking, painting, or mechanical skills? A Habitat for Humanity build might call your name. Have a car? Offer rides to church or medical appointments for those who can’t drive. Love being with babies or children? Volunteer at a local school, pediatric unit, your church nursery, or children’s worship center.

Open Heart

The Openness season can expand our hearts in unexpected ways. As our kids need us less for survival and more for support and friendship, our relationships change. Adult children might call or text with life updates. They bring good news, excitement, and joy. Or through tears, they share bad news, anxiety, and sadness. During these conversations, we can offer advice when requested, but our key role is to provide a listening ear and an open heart (2 Cor. 6:11,13).

Grandchildren—if we have them—are the perfect reminder of the unconditional love we have for our children and that our heavenly Father has for us in Christ. Giving our free time to support our kids in parenting is a win-win; they receive much-needed respite, and we get to experience the joy and laughter the little ones bring.

Having an open heart will urge us outside our comfort zones as we travel to new destinations, read about and experience different cultures, and interact with others outside our usual circles. As we open our hearts, we will see the goodness in all of God’s children and show his love through kindness and acts of service.

Who in your family, neighborhood, church, or community needs your kindness and love today? Where can you go or what can you read or do that will expand the horizons of your heart?

If you’re feeling empty or lonely as your kids leave the nest, start looking for the openings the Lord provides in your life. Are you ready to open up your home through hospitality? Where can your hands offer the physical gifts, talents, and skills you possess? Can you offer someone comfort, support, or kindness, as God prompts you to open your heart?

The joy we receive from opening our homes, hands, and hearts during the Openness season just might make our emptiness fly away! 



Linda Hanstra, author of *Empty-Nest Joyride: Hope, Love, and Purpose on the Road to Contentment*, attends Church of the Savior in South Bend, Ind., with her husband, Tom. Find more of her writing at lindahanstra.com and on Substack.

BIG QUESTIONS

Church/Bible/Doctrine

Our son loves working with his hands, so we think trade school fits best, but his high school counselor is steering him to college based on his test scores. Any advice?

What a blessing that your son has these different gifts, even as it creates challenges in discerning how best to use them!

I encourage you to talk with your son about his hopes for the future, including whether working with his hands is something he'd like to do full-time, part-time, or more as a hobby. It's also good to be realistic about what is possible. Some trades require long hours, and some are hard on the body. Furthermore, while there is a significant demand for many trades today, not all trades can earn a person a living. It is wise to talk to someone at a local college or who is already doing this kind of work to see what is available in terms of professional training and internships (Prov. 11:14).

While it sounds like trade school is a good fit for your son, he might also want to look at going to university or college. Even if he goes only for a year



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

or two, he could learn extra skills, such as business and marketing, that can help him earn a living. Furthermore, going to college is more than simply training for a future job; it's an opportunity to make deep friendships, expand your understanding of the world, and grow in independence.

However, if you decide university is not currently worth the cost, there are other ways for your son to develop close friendships and explore how to use his gifts to serve God and his neighbor. Your son could take a gap year with a Christian organization, do service or mission projects, and/or he could move into a house with others. He could also develop his skills, both in his trade and in organization and leadership, through volunteering with relief organizations or helping out with a boys club at church or in the community.

While this season is about preparing your son for a future path, it is also a season of faithful formation, exploration, and learning who he is and what his gifts are. I hope you and he can approach this season with a prayerful sense of wonder and openness to God's leading.

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

Digital Life

I have 10,000 pictures on my phone. How do I get that number down so I can actually find what I am looking for?

The problem you're having is a common one. I read somewhere that the average number is 2,500.

William Katerberg is the curator of Heritage Hall, the archives for Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, and the Christian Reformed Church in North America. When we were preparing to move the denomination's offices from a very large space to a much smaller space, Will advised us to leave documents in chronological order as they tell a more complete story when left in order.

Fortunately, the systems that manage our digital photo files (Google Photos, Apple Photos) automatically keep images organized by date. In time, AI will do much more sorting for us, but I don't think it'll get so smart that we'll want it to delete all the photos it predicts we won't ever need. We still need to do our part.

My mom, a widow, died a little more than a year ago, and I volunteered to be the first of my siblings to take possession of the four large boxes of photo albums, loose photos, and slide transparencies to sort through and take what my family wanted before passing it on to the next. I wasn't sure where to start, and the task was

made more difficult with the mix of emotions these images represented. I finally made my way through, and from that experience have these suggestions for helping manage our physical and digital pictures:

- » Any bad or blurry photos should be trashed immediately.
- » Get rid of duplicates or near-duplicates.
- » Think about these images telling a story. Unless it's a story about food, your children or grandchildren are unlikely to be interested in what you ate every day. They are more likely to be interested in what your whole life looked like. What did your house/yard/church/town look like? How did you spend your time? Who did you hang out with?
- » In addition to close-ups of your kid and his birthday cake, you might also take a wide shot to capture what your dining room looked like at the time.
- » Keep your sorting system simple. It's tempting to get too organized, but if your system is not quick and easy, you'll soon tire of it and stop. I'd suggest tagging your images instead. Search online for how your photo manager of choice handles tagging.
- » Create a 'dump later' folder for those images you're not sure whether to keep or get rid of. Once motivated, you don't want indecision to get in the way of progress!

If you live in the northern hemisphere, the grey days of winter are the perfect time to do some digital housekeeping and establish a system for keeping your picture inventory to a reasonable level.

Dean Heetderks is director of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of *The Banner*. Wondering about any part of the digital side of your life? Tell him about it at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.

Church/Bible/Doctrine

If Jesus is ascended into heaven, how is he also "in my heart?"

In Ephesians 3:16b-17a, Paul prays that "out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Here, we see him clearly speaking of Christ dwelling in our hearts. We sing this same language: "You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart" (Psalter Hymnal 405).

But we also read in Scripture that Christ bodily ascended (Acts 1:6-11) and is seated at the "right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56, Rom. 8:34, Eph. 1:20, Col. 3:1, Heb. 1:3, 1 Pet. 3:22). We might be left with a question: do these two claims contradict each other? How can Christ be truly in our hearts and at the right hand of the Father?

For this question, the extra-Calvinisticum is very helpful. While the name suggests that it originated with Calvin, the concept had been around long before him. And what it teaches is simply this: Christ's divine nature as the God-man was fully united to his human nature. In other words, he is really God and really human. But, because he is really God, Christ's divine nature can never be fully contained within his human nature. The theological way of saying this is that the finite cannot contain the infinite. In other words, divinity is bigger, greater than humanity, so cannot be wholly contained within a finite human body.

The Heidelberg Catechism sums up this extra-Calvinisticum in Q&A 47-48:

Q: But isn't Christ with us until the end of the world as he promised us?

A. Christ is true human and true God. In his human nature Christ is not now on earth; but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit he is never absent from us.

Q. If his humanity is not present wherever his divinity is, then aren't the two natures of Christ separated from each other?

A. Certainly not. Since divinity is not limited and is present everywhere, it is evident that Christ's divinity is surely beyond the bounds of the humanity that has been taken on, but at the same time his divinity is in and remains personally united to his humanity.

This has striking implications. Our Lord, who took on our own flesh and is physically ascended to heaven is also with us, personally, in our hearts through the Spirit. He is really, truly with us "until the end of the age," as he promised. What a good, true, and comforting word!

Jessica Joustra (Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary, Vrije Universiteit) is an associate professor of religion and theology and director of the Albert M. Wolters Centre for Christian Scholarship at Redeemer University.

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

Michigan Church Taps Internal Talent for Intergenerational ‘Praise Days’

NEWS

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Incorporating workshops offered by its own congregants, Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich., forgoes a traditional Vacation Bible School with an annual summer Praise Days program, running since 2013.

Offered for children who are entering first through sixth grades, Praise Days gives an opportunity to learn new things and discover God-given creative gifts and talents alongside skilled adults in their congregation.

Children get to choose one project station to try out each night from Monday through Wednesday. They attend a large-group opening worship and teaching time, then go to their respective project stations where they undertake an age-appropriate project with adult guidance. On the final night of the program, participants have the opportunity to display or demonstrate their creation.

Project stations for past Praise Days have included sewing, engineering, Lego construction, circuitry, baking, ballet, woodworking, Taekwondo, drumming, and painting.

Tapping into the gifts and talents of volunteers was a big part of developing Praise Days, as the church sought a creative alternative to the typical Vacation Bible School experience.

“Allowing volunteers to teach and lead students in something they’re passionate about is something that has always been special about Praise Days,” said Sheila Schippers, one of the program’s organizers.

A high volunteer-to-student ratio gives volunteers an opportunity to develop deeper, more intentional relationships with participants, Schippers said.



Photo by Maranatha CRC

Having adults share their skills and expertise with young people is a big part of Maranatha CRC’s Praise Days.

About 75 kids attended last year’s Praise Days, with a mix of kids who attend Maranatha CRC and those who live in the surrounding Maplewood neighborhood of Holland who typically hear about it by word of mouth.

Maranatha pastor Matt Stob calls Praise Days “a joy-enhancing week for our entire congregation.”

“Not only do the kids look forward to this week each year and engage the worship and craft times with enthusiasm, the many student and adult volunteers who come together to make Praise Days happen enjoy being together for the week and working together to host our version of VBS,” Stob said. “As the kids discover more and more of the wonder of God and his creation, the volunteers also enjoy the satisfaction of using their gifts to contribute to something that, year-after-year, proves to be much greater than the sum of its parts.”

—Greg Chandler

B-I-N-G-O and the B-I-B-L-E

Hearing that Cornerstone Prison Church in Sioux Falls, S.D., plays Bingo for Bibles sounds strange at first, but because prison rules restrict giving items of value to individuals except by chance, the game is a way to have inmates “win” the Word.

A personal Bible is a treasured possession for many people, including the members of Cornerstone that meet within the South Dakota State Penitentiary. That’s one of the reasons Bingo for Bibles has become an activity staple for the congregation, usually hosted twice per year.

Scott Van Voorst, pastor at Cornerstone, said that this activity was initiated by a previous pastor and had stopped during the COVID pandemic, but “the guys on the inside shared how much God has used Bingo for Bibles in the past to make connections and get guys into the Bible,” so they decided to bring it back. The most recent bingo night was in November.

Inmates sign up for the event and they play traditional bingo, winning the opportunity to select a study Bible as they mark off a row. Six leather-bound study Bibles, provided by the Cornerstone staff, were prizes at the Nov. 9 event. A Cornerstone bingo night also includes snacks and soft drinks between rounds.

This isn’t the only way for an inmate at the South Dakota State pen to receive a Bible, but Van Voorst explained, “Within the prison system any exchange can be a part of a favors-based relationship, so the only way we can give away a valuable study Bible is if we do not control who ends up getting it or if we committed to buying one for everyone in the entire prison population regardless of what they were likely to do with it. Playing bingo makes it so that we can bring in a few of these expensive Bibles, since we do not control who gets one and therefore are not engaging in a favors-based relationship.”



Worship pastor Cory Grimm, pastor Scott Van Voorst, and office and lay ministry support Jean and Gord Dyk, make up the staff of Cornerstone Prison Church.

Van Voorst said they have given away about 30 study Bibles through the bingo games. Also, many paperback Bibles are given to anyone who asks for one. He estimates that they have given over 750 Bibles in total since 2021.

“Having a really nice Bible gets men excited about getting into it more,” Van Voorst said. “There have been times where men were new to the faith or in a season of backsliding or wrestling with doubt only to get serious about personal study again when they received a new study Bible.”

“It also becomes a tool for the guys to share the gospel,” Van Voorst said. “There is very little in the prison with more financial value than the Bibles we give away at Bingo for Bibles. Sharing about what they received or about others who

received one becomes an example of a very valuable gift provided by someone else. Van Voorst said the analogy isn’t perfect because obtaining a Bible is hardly comparable to the inestimable gift of the forgiveness of sins, but “the reality that most could never get something so nice (as a study Bible) without it being given (freely) parallels the gift Jesus gives us that we could never earn.”

Cornerstone Prison Church was organized in 2013. Van Voorst is its fourth pastor, called in 2021. Cory Grimm, ordained in the Reformed Church in America and pastor of Alliance of Reformed Churches-affiliated Christ Community Church in Primghar, Iowa, is Cornerstone’s part-time worship pastor.

—Kyle Hoogendoorn

Church Renewal and ‘Watering’ Through Ministry Shares Part of February Council Meeting

The Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church met by video conference Feb. 4-6, receiving ministry reports, updates on church renewal plans, budget projections, and matters to share with Synod 2026.

Roberta Vriesema, director of partnership administration, presented projected budget numbers for the CRCNA, starting with a metaphor imagining the CRCNA as a community garden.

The garden, Vriesema said, has a unique history spanning almost 170 years, with a fence and cornerposts representing the confessions as “firm boundaries on where and how our garden would grow,” and raised garden beds with an irrigation system to nurture the crops: corn for Resonate Global Mission; many varieties of beans for Thrive and its congregation-focused ministry; and spreading tendrils of squash for ReFrame Ministries’ multilingual media mission. “Corn provides the structure for the beans to climb. Beans fix nitrogen to fertilize the soil. And squash spreads on the ground, suppressing weeds and retaining moisture,” Vriesema said.

The irrigation system is a representation of ministry shares, the pledged money member churches contribute to the running of the denomination. “While we can rely on ‘the rain,’ or ad hoc free-will offerings alone, it would mean that our harvests, then, are less reliable and prone to shifting weather and giving patterns,” Vriesema said. “Ministry shares allow us to pool resources and provide a steady and reliable stream of water to all of our crops all season long.”

Ministry share giving has been declining, prompting the Council of Delegates to propose cost-saving measures, which it received in a report in September and will present for deliberation to Synod 2026.

Vriesema told Council members the numbers she presented weren’t final but based on current projections. With a base of 811 organized churches, the expected



Delegate Steven Hull, Thornapple Valley, resigned from the Council of Delegates as of the February meeting to take a position as regional mission leader with Resonate Global Mission.

ministry shares for the 2026-2027 fiscal year are \$13.29 million USD. They were \$14.3 million USD in the 2025-2026 budget, with a base of 824 organized churches. (The projected—not actual—numbers for both years are combined ministry share dollars from Canadian and U.S. congregations, using a conversion factor of \$0.72 for 2026-27 and one of \$0.70 for 2025-26.) Not every church submits a pledge. Drew Sweetman, Classis Muskegon, reporting for the finance committee, said 264 churches last year pledged \$0.

“Do we have any strategies for getting those churches who don’t supply any irrigation to start watering the garden?” asked Canada-at-large delegate Linda Vansligtenhorst.

General secretary Zachary King said the leadership team is carefully considering “how we can communicate better about what we would say is a covenant obligation to give toward the community of churches and the needs of supporting that community. We’re trying to be responsive to those who have concerns, and so I think there’ll be more (pledges) coming in the coming months as we’re calibrating ourselves to this new reality

with disaffiliated churches.” King said there’s been a loss of 5% to 7% of the congregations through disaffiliation, and “some of those churches that are disaffiliated have been churches that have given significantly.”

He also noted, “We have seen some churches come back to the ministry share giving system, and so to those churches, I want to say thank you.” The Council will review an updated picture of the budget at its meeting in May.

Endorsed Allocation Plan

Ministry shares are only part of the denomination’s total revenue, making up varying percentages of each ministry’s overall income. The Council of Delegates endorsed a ministry shares allocation plan, similar to the mechanism it endorsed in 2024, that would see ministry share revenue allocated first to governance and ministry support costs such as the Office of General Secretary, synod, the Council of Delegates, and the U.S. and Canadian ministry offices, then distributed to the ministries—Thrive, Resonate, ReFrame—according to their ministry needs, with allocations also provided to Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary. World Renew is funded completely outside of ministry shares.



General Secretary Zachary King, to churches who have come back to ministry share giving: “Thank you!”

Sweetman explained, “The methodology is we’re looking at all revenue streams, and how ministry shares, using Roberta (Vriesema)’s illustration, provides the foundation for that. There are other revenue streams available at varying levels to the different agencies.” If much of a ministry’s budget needs are able to be met by fundraising or other income, its allocated portion of ministry share money is less. But if pledges increase, the governance and ministry support costs don’t take any more—“it automatically would go to the agencies,” Sweetman said.



Director of partnership administration Roberta Vriesema described the Christian Reformed Church in North America as a community garden, irrigated by ministry shares.

The Council of Delegates’ financial discussions included questions about funding the renewed effort toward church planting, which the denomination committed to at Synod 2025. A fleshed-out 10-year plan is due to Synod 2026.

Possibility, Not Burden

As Thrive presented its connected church renewal plan to delegates, director Lesli van Milligen said it’s important that congregations “not see church planting as one possible way that we can engage in the work of the CRC and (congregational) renewal as another possibility,

because what happens is we end up having a menu where congregations can say ‘we’re not really interested in planting a church,’ and ‘we’re doing great, we don’t need renewal,’ so the third item on the list is ‘we’re not going to do anything.’” Instead, van Milligen suggested, the prongs of church planting shepherded by Resonate and church renewal shepherded by Thrive can together “work toward a culture shift in the denomination” focused on transformation. Thrive’s tool for starting that is a learning and discernment process called Thriving Essentials, which it wants to see taken up by every church.

Melissa van Dyk, Canada at-large delegate, expressed concern that local church leaders are too overextended to take on another initiative. “I hear your strong encouragement for us to be taking Thriving Essentials, especially as a congregation ... but what do you do when you see leadership burnt out?”

Van Milligen acknowledged that “we’ve asked our congregations to participate in two huge initiatives—renewal and church planting” and suggested Thrive is available to help churches find a way to start. “Talk with us,” she urged delegates. “We can brainstorm to help you, so it’s not a burden for you to bear but a possibility.”

Herb Schreur, Classis Northcentral Iowa, suggested, “We have to have enough faith to make a plan big enough that it will not work without God. Yes, we can’t shoot for the moon, but we also have to make sure that we do not limit our God by our limitations.”

Synod

The Council of Delegates processed several items to pass on to Synod 2026, recommending, among other things, that synod do the following:

- » Declare as complete the Office of General Secretary’s mandate to prioritize resources to help classes and churches navigate the process



Thrive sees its Thriving Essentials tool as a learning and discernment process that can help every church.

of limited suspension, prescribed by Synod 2024

- » Adopt revised Rules for Synodical Procedure, which remove the requirement that synod be served by a parliamentarian appointed each year; change the deadline for distribution of study committee reports; allow the director of ecclesiastical governance to join the general secretary on the synodical Program Committee; remove the proscribed distinctions between study committees and task forces; and remove the duplication of the Judicial Code
- » Accept the review of the Dignity Team, formed in 2021, and renew its mandate for five years
- » Adopt a significant schedule change for Synod 2027, convening from 6:30 p.m. Saturday, June 5, and adjourning no later than noon Saturday, June 12. (Typical synods for the past several years have convened at 8:30 a.m. Friday and adjourned no later than mid-afternoon on Thursday.)

See the full February meeting coverage at thebanner.org/department/governance-news.

—Alissa Vernon,
News Editor

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Dr. Joel H. Nederhood

1930-2025

A humble, faithful servant of the Lord, for over 30 years Joel Nederhood proclaimed the gospel through the Christian Reformed Church's radio and television ministry, *The Back to God Hour* (now ReFrame Ministries). In an article announcing his death, ReFrame described Nederhood as "the media voice of the CRC." He died Dec. 2 at age 94.

After graduating from Calvin College (now University) in 1952, Nederhood served in the U.S. Army for two years, after which he continued studies at Calvin Seminary, graduating in 1957. He then completed a doctorate from the Free University of Amsterdam.

In 1960 Nederhood was called to be the associate radio minister of *The Back to God Hour*, serving alongside Dr. Peter Eldersveld, the ministry's first radio pastor. In 1965, following Eldersveld's death, Nederhood became the primary minister of the radio program. When he retired in 1996, *The Back To God Hour* had nine major language ministries.

For 10 years after retirement Nederhood was the preaching pastor at Cottage Grove CRC in South Holland, Ill. He enjoyed running, which he did every day, into his 80s. He taught at Westminster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill., and was the chancellor at Eastern Ukraine Theological Seminary. In 2005 he received Calvin Seminary's Distinguished Alumni Award.

Nederhood is survived by Mary Lou, his wife of 71 years; three children; 13 grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Noteworthy



Patricia R. Harris, president of Kuyper College since 2017, has announced plans to retire June 30. She is the college's fifth president and served as provost before her presidential appointment. "The mission and work of Kuyper College have shaped my life since my own college years, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve the Kuyper community over the past 13 years. It has been a true joy and privilege to work alongside dedicated faculty and staff who are committed to helping students grow in their faith and prepare for their callings within every square inch of God's world," Harris said in a Jan. 7 announcement from the school's board of trustees. The board has initiated a presidential transition process.



Nicole Martin became president and CEO of *Christianity Today* in November, with the publication's board of directors announcing the unanimous appointment. "Bringing more than 25 years of nonprofit, academic, and ministry leadership experience to this role," *CT* wrote, "Martin has committed to reaffirm (magazine founder) Billy Graham's vision for *CT* by serving the church through creative and redemptive storytelling, informative journalism from an Evangelical Christian worldview, and resources and convenings that foster flourishing."



Today, the daily devotional publication of ReFrame Ministries, celebrated 75 years in 2025, having first been published as *The Family Altar* in January 1950. ReFrame hosted an online Direct Connect panel in honor of the milestone in January 2026. ReFrame director Kurt Selles, marketing communications manager Christopher Hunt, and contributing authors Darrell Delaney and Beth Fellingner shared about the devotional's origins, impact, and reach. Selles said 913 months of *Today* have been published, all with the format of a Bible reading, reflection, and prayer by one author on one theme for the month. Between 300 and 500 pastors have contributed as authors over the years, Selles said.

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Anthony (Tony)
Van Zanten*

1939-2025

Tony Van Zanten, founder of Roseland Christian Ministries, a faith-based nonprofit in the Roseland neighborhood of Chicago, died Dec. 15, 2025. He was 86.

After two years at Dordt College (now University), Tony studied at Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and was ordained in 1965. He served Madison Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Paterson, N.J., for 11 years before being called to Chicago where he founded and pastored the Roseland Christian Ministries Center until 2004. Three months before his planned retirement that year, Tony suffered a stroke that greatly limited his ability to read, write, and remember.

“He honored lives the world so often passes by, writes off, or leaves unnamed. And in doing so, he bore witness to the heart of the gospel—to Jesus, who sees those who go unseen, touches those the world leaves untouched, and lifts up those who have been pushed down, worn down, and forgotten,” wrote Joe Huizenga, current executive director of Roseland Christian Ministries, as he remembered Tony in the ministry’s December newsletter. (Roseland Christian Ministries disaffiliated from the CRC as of September 2025.)

Tony loved puzzles, painting, and photography. In 2008 he received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Calvin Seminary.

Tony is survived by Donna, his wife of 64 years; two children; six grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Cornelius (Neil) Vriend

1932-2025

Neil Vriend is remembered for his kind, thoughtful, gentle demeanor and his consistent hospitality. He was genuinely interested in others and recognized by many as a bridge-builder between those with differing perspectives. Neil, 93, died Dec. 18, 2025.

Born in the Netherlands, the 10th of 11 children, Neil immigrated with the family in 1939 to Houston, B.C., where they farmed vegetables. He left high school to help on the farm and work in the B.C. logging industry, returning to graduate as a young adult. He then studied at Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, graduating in 1962.

He was ordained that year and served Emo (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church; First Hamilton (Ont.) CRC; and Bethel CRC, Lacombe, Alta. In 1974 the Vriends moved to Neerlandia, Alta., where he pastored the Neerlandia CRC and Barrhead (Alta.) CRC. Neil was dedicated to serving that community for 50 years, continuing to visit and preach well into retirement.

Neil was an artist. Of his many creative endeavors, he handcrafted beautiful chairs made from locally gathered wood. These chairs can be found in many homes in Alberta and beyond.

Predeceased in 2024 by his wife, Winny, and by a son-in-law, a granddaughter, and a great-granddaughter; Neil is survived by his six children; 18 grandchildren; and 36 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Philip Yancey, author of many influential books including *What’s so Amazing About Grace* and *Where Is God When it Hurts?*, resigned from ministry in January after confessing to an extramarital affair. In a letter to *Christianity Today*, which the magazine published, Yancey said he has withdrawn from all writing, speaking, and social media and entered a counseling program to deal with the damage caused from what he called an eight-year affair with a married woman. “I need to spend my remaining years living up to the words I have already written,” wrote Yancey, 76. “I pray for God’s grace and forgiveness—as well as yours—and for healing in the lives of those I’ve wounded.” Janet Yancey, Philip’s wife of 55 years, was also quoted in the *Christianity Today* article, saying she spoke “from a place of trauma and devastation that only people who have lived through betrayal can understand. Yet I made a sacred and binding marriage vow 55½ years ago, and I will not break that promise. I accept and understand that God through Jesus has paid for and forgiven the sins of the world, including Philip’s.” She asked for prayers and for God’s grace to forgive.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Stephen Jung

1925-2025

Stephen Jung was an easygoing man of quiet confidence whose kindness was evident in his care for many immigrants and newcomers. His son said one of his father's lasting legacies was an attitude of gratitude for all the blessings God had given him. Stephen, age 100, died Nov. 30.

Born in Hong Kong, Stephen immigrated as a teenager to the U.S. in 1941. At age 18 he enlisted in the U.S. Army and served on the front lines in Okinawa, Japan. After graduating in 1958 from Toronto (Ont.) Baptist Seminary and Bible College, Stephen returned to the U.S. and opened a clothing manufacturing company with his sister.

First as an elder and then as its pastor, Stephen served Crenshaw Christian Reformed Church in Los Angeles, Calif., from 1973 to 1979, during which time he was ordained in the CRC. He then returned to Canada and planted Zion Chinese CRC in Abbotsford, B.C., and Immanuel CRC in Richmond, B.C.

After retirement in 1988 Stephen led annual ministry trips to China. In 1988 he established a retreat centre in Langley, B.C., called Gethsemane Prayer Garden and in 1992 founded Christ Worship Centre, a Chinese (Mandarin and English speaking) church in Surrey, B.C.

He is survived by his wife, Sue; three children; seven grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

'One Book, One Body' Encourages Bible Read-thru 20 Years On



Heritage CRC in Byron Center, Mich., promotes the "One Book, One Body" reading commitment with a lawn sign.

Sixteen congregations from nine different denominations or church networks are part of a synchronized multi-church, community-wide effort in the Byron Center, Mich., area to read through the Bible in 2026.

"One Book, One Body" is being promoted by the Byron Area Ministerial Association, an organization consisting of pastors and ministry leaders across denominational lines in the small residential community about 15 miles south of Grand Rapids.

Six of the participating churches are Christian Reformed congregations, said Jim Heethuis, coordinator of the ministerial association and pastor of Pathway Church, part of the Christian Reformed Classis Grandville.

It's the third time the ministerial association has undertaken the "One Book, One Body" reading, and it comes 20 years after the first time it was tried in Byron Center. The roots of the campaign date back to when Heethuis and now-retired pastor of Pathway, Steve Elzinga, both worked for the Bible League in the early 2000s and sought to bring together various denominational and ethnic churches in the Chicago area to study Scripture together.

"When (Elzinga) came here to Byron Center, he said, 'Look, we're going to (do this). ... We're going to read one chapter a day, and whatever you read from, that's what I'll preach from,'" Heethuis said. Heethuis, who is a commissioned pastor, worked as an associate with Elzinga at Pathway at the time.

The Byron Area Ministerial Association did the "One Book, One Body" readings in 2006 and 2011. The association has done other Bible reading campaigns as well over the years, Heethuis said.

“Since I took the lead (pastor role) here, we read the Old Testament in a year, New Testament in a year. Then we did a four-year through-the-Bible reading plan,” Heethuis said.

Most of the participating congregations are offering “One Book, One Body” as a personal reading plan, but five churches, including Pathway, Heritage CRC, and Second Byron CRC—are preaching Sunday sermons that go along with the daily reading plan. Six pastors from the ministerial association meet for a lunch where they prepare and exchange sermon outlines connected to that month’s readings, Heethuis said.

Members of participating churches are encouraged to follow a reading plan on the YouVersion Bible app to keep current with readings outside of the church walls. At least 11 different reading groups have formed around the plan, with about 300 participants in total. They can post their own reflections on what they have read, Heethuis said.

Autumn Jelsema, who attends Pathway CRC, is thankful to be part of one of the reading groups.

“For me, this journey is very new as I did not grow up with any religion being instilled while I was young,” Jelsema said. “While it was very uncomfortable for me at first, I have grown to love this journey and am excited to continue learning every day.”

Fellow Pathway worshiper Laurie Schmidt also appreciates the daily habit. “Just amazing that out of each day, his Word enlightens us to grow,” Schmidt said.

Signs to promote the reading campaign are outside each participating church, and people can put a smaller version of the campaign sign in their homes, as well as obtain a wristband, pin, adhesive sticker, or pen to show others of their commitment to the reading plan, Heethuis said.

—Greg Chandler

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Dick M. Stravers

1927-2026

Dick Stravers was a kind and compassionate man with a gentle demeanor. “His passion for justice and desire for a better world were forefront in his beliefs,” a friend remembered in tribute. Dick died Jan. 12 at age 98.

After high school Dick joined the U.S. Army, serving on a year’s peacekeeping mission in Italy and for six months at Fort Ord in California. Funding through the federal G.I. Bill enabled Dick to attend Calvin College (now University), after which he taught Latin for five years at Grand Rapids Christian High School. Feeling called to pastoral ministry, he then entered Calvin Seminary, graduated, and was ordained in 1963 at the age of 36.

He pastored West Park Christian Reformed Church, Cleveland, Ohio; Southern Heights CRC, Kalamazoo, Mich.; Woodlawn CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.; and West Park CRC again, for 12 years, before retiring in 1992. He continued to serve several churches in the Holland, Mich., area, until age 85.

During his final years, Dick enjoyed reading and delighted in conversing with others, often on the bench in front of the Stravers home.

Dick is survived by Ruth, his wife of 74 years; four children and their spouses; 12 grandchildren; 19 great-grandchildren; and two great-great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Gerard Ringnalda

1928-2026

Gerard Ringnalda had a gift for pastoral care. Although he preached a good sermon, he relished making visits and teaching catechism. He encouraged others to seek justice, speak up for the oppressed, and be grateful in all things. Gerard, 97, died Jan. 25.

Born in the Netherlands, Gerard studied for the ministry at the Free University in Amsterdam, graduating in 1955. He first pastored a congregation in Oudehorne, Friesland, before immigrating to Canada.

Ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in 1958, Gerard served Jennings Creek CRC, Lindsay, Ont.; Maranatha CRC, Belleville, Ont.; Second CRC, Edmonton, Alta.; New Street CRC, Burlington, Ont.; Calvary CRC, Ottawa, Ont.; and Living Hope CRC, Orillia, Ont. In 1987 he transitioned to hospital chaplaincy within Classis Toronto and served as a chaplain until 1995 when he and his wife retired in Orillia, on the shores of Lake Couchiching.

Gerard loved the freedom, wilderness, and vast nature of Canada and its opportunities for fishing and water sports. He built his own boat at age 30. He put his whole self into whatever he did.

Gerard is survived by Nelly, his wife of 70 years; five children and their spouses; 15 grandchildren and their spouses; and 15 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus



Reformed Roots, Missional Imagination

By Scott Meekof, Resonate Global Mission

People in the CRCNA don't tend to view Church Order as a springboard for creative expression. And yet, church plants work within its framework to fill a new church, like a canvas, with all the potential of what a church can be. The CRC is seeing that, with the guidance of leaders and coaches as well as support from the parent church, the Reformed faith has opportunity, creativity, and relevance.

What's so Unique about Church Plants?

"I think because their starting point is so mission-driven and mission-centered, there's often a deep imagination about everything," said Tim Sheridan, Resonate Global Mission's director of church planting, speaking about the church plants he has seen. In his work he guides the denomination's newest churches using Christian Reformed traditions and structures as a foundation on which to build.

But what about Church Order? For CRC church planters, clear and winning advantages include the reputation of the CRCNA, its strong organization, its "big-R Reformed" theology, its many pathways into ministry, and its strong sense of relationship with other churches.

Creative expressions of church plants might look quite different from a "traditional" church—such as church plants employing bivocational or co-vocational pastors, taking forms such as microchurches or young adult communities, or bringing together diaspora and ethnic minority groups. But these church plants are rooted in the gospel and in the rich theology of the Christian Reformed Church.

"Church plants respect those boundaries," said Sheridan. "Style of preaching, content of sermons, worship style and who's involved in that worship, formation of young people, witness in the community ... these allow the needs and opportunities of a community to shape our church plants."

Resonate equips church planters with the tools, resources, and relationships they need to thrive. Through the prayers, support, and collaboration of people across the CRCNA, the denomination is investing in providing church planter assessments, bringing planters and parent churches together, providing guidance, and offering quality coaching and training. Resonate, with classis and parent church partners, walks alongside church planters on the planting journey.

One of the first things Sam Lee noticed about his community was the number of artists, so The Tapestry (Mundy Park, B.C.) hosted an art exhibition as one of its first community outreach events.

The resulting cohort of church plants in the CRCNA, 59 of them and counting, brings the strength of tradition and a different and necessary skill set that the CRCNA needs.

"I think a lot of churches have forgotten what it's like to not have faith in Jesus, and what it's like to have the church be a foreign space. ... Church plants have thought about the person for whom church is new and different," said Sheridan. "Church plants are always filled with people who doubt, people who think Christianity is ridiculous, people who are searching."

Art, Expression, and Mission

"Creativity is one of our values as a church," said church planter Sam Lee at The Tapestry Mundy Park in British Columbia. One of the first things he noticed about his community was the number of artists, so The Tapestry hosted an art exhibition as one of its first community outreach events. Those first steps, Lee said, helped "open the doors of imagination."

"I've always felt the need to find new and creative ways of gathering together in worship," said Lee. The church plant rearranged the seats of the sanctuary to face one another around the communion table, designed services to use that space in liturgy, incorporated theatrical presentations, and installed seven works of art in the sanctuary—representing the words creation, fall, promise, Christ, presence, flourish, and consummation.

"Creative expression is important because it's at the very nature of God himself ... inviting us to create with him in his mission to reconcile the whole world to himself in Christ," said Lee. "It gives members in our community an opportunity to exercise their unique gifts and talents. ... That generates more vitality and engagement in a congregation."

Help and ongoing support from Resonate was key for The Tapestry Mundy Park from the beginning, said Lee. "I really appreciated my assessment process before planting, as it helped me to discern my calling and to prepare me for the work."

The church's creative principles and focus on artistic creativity might contrast with a typical established CRC congregation's approach, but they have resulted in familiar types of ministry partnerships. The Tapestry Mundy Park started a free service for English-language learning and tutoring. They partner with a local ministry to feed the community. They are launching a one-on-one discipleship curriculum.

And their first artist-in-residence discerned a call to ministry and became a Minister of the Word.

“Together, these stories have convinced me that creativity is not peripheral to the church’s life,” said Lee. “It’s one of the ways God forms people, calls them into vocation, and draws the church more deeply into his reconciling work in the world.”

Inch by Square Inch

“One of the things I was really encouraged by when getting involved with the Christian Reformed Church was the idea that every square inch falls under God’s kingdom,” said Moises Pacheco, church planter at Grace in Garfield CRC in Chicago, Ill..

“The biggest help has been relational and networking. ... The conversations Brad (Meinders, Resonate’s director of North American Regional Teams) and Tim (Sheridan) have offered, along with introductions they’ve made for me to others, have been priceless.”

There aren’t many established churches in his neighborhood, said Pacheco. “I’m on the west side of Chicago. ... Trying to plant a traditional church in this context is creative because there aren’t a whole lot of people doing it.”

The idea to plant a church started several years ago when Pacheco was attending a church in the suburbs and decided to start something new. He leaned hard on worship traditions he knew would be deeply important and familiar to his neighbors. “One of our church members describes our church as ‘high house church,’” said Pacheco. Each Saturday, they use the *Book of Common Prayer*, have communion, and do so in a small but purposefully sacred sanctuary—a garage.

“You walk in now and it feels a little bit more intimate. But when we (first) walked in there, it was just a garage with bullet holes in the door,” said Pacheco.

Pacheco and the congregation at Grace in Garfield find themselves living out what it means to be uniquely equipped to reach a different group of people than an established church can. “Some of our regular attenders have come out of very negative church experiences,” he said. “Many people have found spiritual healing here.”

The church has also found itself with the opportunity to help redeem this hard neighborhood. “When we first opened ... there was a pretty significant heroin market in front of the church. To get to church you had to walk past 20-30 drug dealers. It was hard to do outreach that way. But the church was very instrumental in shutting that market down.”

The differences in their context have helped Grace in Garfield cultivate its own kind of creativity. “I think creativity is being adaptable,” said Pacheco. From the beginning he’s been convinced that if God wanted this church planted, he would provide opportunities. And he has—especially through the CRCNA.

Next Steps for Church Planting

Many churches such as The Tapestry Mundy Park and Grace in Garfield are taking their first steps, growing in mission and discipleship, and transforming their communities through the gospel. When they look at the faith and traditions of the CRCNA, they see possibility. They see hope. They find inspiration.

“The most encouraging thing is when I decided to plant a church within the Christian Reformed Church ... I’ve met a lot of people and pastors who have been very impactful, very encouraging,” said Pacheco. “I’m thankful for those relationships I’ve built and feeling like I belong in this denomination.”

Certainly there are more out there who can find belonging in this denomination. Synod 2025 addressed the issue of church planting at length, debating ideas to increase the denomination’s capacity to church plant and hearing from church planters and Resonate staff. Among their conclusions, synod declared “that church planting is a key strategy in building the health and vitality of our denomination. Therefore we encourage:

- » “All churches to take an extra step to connect with Resonate in order to build support for church planting.
- » “All churches and classes with current relationships with a church planter to check with their church planter to find out if they have raised enough support.
- » “All churches to encourage their classes to develop a church planting strategy or strengthen their current strategy in partnership with Resonate.”

Church planting has always been done in close collaboration with classes and parent churches. The renewed effort Resonate is making to expand church planting is focused on creating a garden where all types of churches can grow and each gets what they need to thrive. This is our work to accomplish together, by combining our rich traditions with the opportunities God gives us to be creative. **B**

Serving the Evolving Needs of Seminary Students and the Church

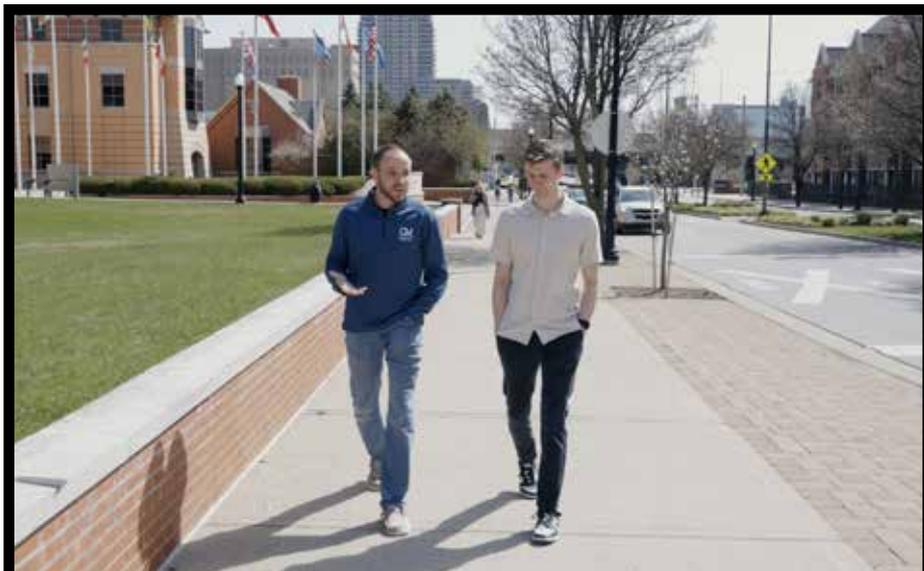
HAVE YOU EVER thought about how odd it is that you can spend years in school getting graded on everything with a scale of 1 to 100, or an “A” through “F,” yet the “real world” has yet to grade you the same way? Imagine being graded on your daily job. That IV you administered to a patient: B+. The part you engineered on a new product: C. Last night’s dinner you cooked for the family: A-.

It turns out that the school of life doesn’t grade you on mastery. Instead, it offers a more high-stakes grading system: pass or fail. Either you get that IV in or someone else does. Either the part you designed works or they all get recalled. Either your family eats your food or they revolt and demand take-out. When you step back and consider this gap between classroom grading and real-world demands, it is hard not to wonder how students, already working or serving in ministry, might benefit from an educational remodel.

Calvin Theological Seminary was born in a tradition that cherishes continual reforming. It was natural, therefore, to find itself working diligently at the forefront of reimagining theological education. For years, hunger had been growing for theological education that could be more conducive to people already serving in a local church. In 2022, Competency-Based Theological Education was piloted at CTS to meet the emerging needs of this shifting ministry landscape and the students entering it.

Rather than moving through courses at the same pace as in the traditional model, students progress by demonstrating real-world competencies in preaching, pastoral care, and leadership—all integrated into the context of their own ministries.

Director of admissions Justin DenOuden highlighted this emerging



Calvin Theological Seminary started a Competency-Based Theological Education program in 2022, and mentors are a key part of this initiative.

education model to new students by saying, “CBTE is a unique delivery method for our Certificate in Christian Leadership and our Master of Arts in Christian Leadership. It is a model that works well for those who are independently driven and have a strong support base in their community and church. It blends mentorship, ministry experience, personal formation, and personal edification together into one. It’s a cost-effective option and great if you are interested in growing within your home community.”

If CBTE students aren’t striving for As, then what exactly are they aiming for? To administer the IV correctly the first time. In the real world of these CTS students, this means having competency in the content, character, and craft necessary to navigate a call into ministry within their unique contexts. Students, many of them emerging pastors, church planters, and lay leaders working anywhere from California to Costa Rica and beyond, are being equipped and disciplined through CBTE for their local church.

Such a local-pointing task for a global church can only be possible through the work and presence of mentors. This spiritual and theological apprenticeship equips students to build character, skills, and knowledge by achieving competency for their context. Such a pursuit is where CBTE has actually remodeled theological education upon two solid pillars.

The first pillar is the Great Commission, found in Matt. 28:19-20, which says, “make disciples of all nations and teach them to obey.” The second pillar comes from the early church as seen in 2 Tim. 2:2, which entrusted reliable people to teach others. In other words, the theological education emerging to meet the needs of today’s church is simply the original model found in Scripture. Ultimately, the work of ministry cannot be defined by a letter grade, but by whether students become faithful leaders formed for the sake of serving the church. 

—Nathan Jansen,
Calvin Theological Seminary

The View From Here

Visions and Dreams

A UNIQUE QUALITY of modern North American Christianity is that, outside of Pentecostal circles, believers rarely report visions and dreams as experiences connecting them to God. When we have dreams and visions, we attribute them to the jalapeño nachos we ate before bed! Not so for the rest of the world. During my years living overseas, I noticed that visions and dreams were common and critical to the faith of many believers.

This is also true in Scripture. Almost all of the Old Testament prophets and patriarchs (Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) experienced God through dreams and visions. In the New Testament, on Pentecost, Peter explained that visions, dreams, and prophecy would be prevalent in the “church era.” Later, Paul’s vision of the man pleading with him to “come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16) led to the spreading of the gospel in Greece, Rome, and the rest of the Roman Empire. Dreams and visions are important ways that God has communicated with his people from the beginning until today.

What dreams and visions could the Holy Spirit be using to get the attention of CRC congregations and leaders today?

In 2024-2025 I participated in all 10 of the Gather events throughout North America. In every one of these meetings (attended by 630 CRC members and leaders in total), people shared powerful stories of how God prompted them to share their faith with non-believers. Many of those stories led to personal transformations. Some of them led to a major change in congregations or the initiation of new ministries. For me, these Gather stories were a vision of how the Holy Spirit is directing the future of our congregations.

Like most of the dreams and visions in Scripture, this vision comes at a time of challenge. Abraham had his vision of inheriting a Land of Promise when he didn’t have a pinch of it to call his own. Ezekiel had his dreams and visions of Israel’s restoration while sitting on a river bank in Babylonian exile. Saul experienced his vision of Jesus on his way to persecute believers in Damascus.

Christian Reformed congregations have struggled for many decades with evangelism and church planting. There were many stories of disappointment during the Gather events—outreach events missing the mark, leaders pleading with their congregations to be more hospitable to no avail, parents grieving for children who no longer practice their faith. Our CRCNA denominational survey has, over the decades, shown that speaking about our faith with non-believers is one of the biggest challenges for CRCNA folks. And yet...

God-given dreams and visions don’t describe a future that depends on our skills, intelligence, or capacities. Those kinds of things we call strategic plans. God-given dreams and visions describe a reality that only the Holy Spirit can deliver. And we are having them.

At Synod 2025 in Ancaster, Ont., I was amazed that the conversation that sparked the most energy was one about church planting. Just a few months from now, our denominational ministries, with Resonate Global Mission as the lead partner, will present a 10-year church-planting vision to Synod 2026 for its discernment and approval.

That vision will call CRC folks to become disciples who make disciples. It will encourage prioritizing the development of new leaders, especially diverse leaders. It will request intentional and

clear partnerships between congregations, classes (regional bodies), and denominational ministries. It will challenge churches near the end of their life cycle to consider a restart or making their resources available to CRC church-planting efforts. It will ask CRC congregations and classes to embrace and learn from global church planters. Finally, it will propose sacrificial giving to support the establishment of new churches in North America.

Presented in this “Our Shared Ministry” section are stories of Christian Reformed people obediently chasing God-given dreams and visions to share their faith and plant churches. God is giving all of our churches a vision for evangelism and church planting—not because we are good at it, but because God is.

This is the last column on the results from the Gather Initiative. I encourage you to read the short Gather report found at crcna.org/Gather. It provides an amazing vision for what God is doing in CRC congregations. 



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

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

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

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

Director's Desk: Meet Kevin DeRaaf

THE CRC 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 the directors of these shared ministries: Thrive, Resonate Global Mission, ReFrame Ministries, and World Renew, as well as the presidents of Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary. In this issue, meet Kevin DeRaaf, director of Resonate Global Mission.

In what ways does Resonate Global Mission equip local CRC people and churches to do kingdom work?

Our vision for leading the denomination on mission flows from Acts 1:8 where Jesus instructs his followers to wait for the Holy Spirit, and to be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In Resonate, we capture this missional call in three core initiatives:

- » **Local Mission:** Resonate has a number of resources to help local churches engage their neighbors and communities, such as a free evangelism course called Witness. Our *Discover Your Bible* assets continue to be a vital resource for evangelistic Bible studies such as Global Coffee Break.
- » **Global Mission:** Resonate supports the vital work of sending missionaries across the globe. We currently have 43 career missionaries sent by the CRC. Those of us in North America also need to remember that for Christians in the rest of the world, we are the ends of the earth. So our call is to help CRC churches engage the global church in a mutual way. I often say that a big part of Resonate's work is to help local churches in Canada and the U.S. participate in the big story that God is unfolding around the world.



Kevin DeRaaf

- » **Church Planting:** We see right away in the book of Acts that God was raising leaders to start new churches in places where the gospel was needed. This call remains today. Our goal through church planting is to cultivate a healthy ecosystem—through coaching, assessments, reviews, training, and relational support—that allows Christian Reformed congregations to form and lead new churches.

What's one thing about Resonate that you wish people knew?

We have every reason to be incredibly grateful for the good and gifted people whom God has called into mission through the CRC! My role allows me to witness the work of my colleagues in many different places in the world. Whether I am in Detroit, Kenya, or El Salvador, I have the same thought: "I am excited to tell my church family about this good work." The thoughtful, passionate, creative, deeply grounded work happening around the world through the Christian Reformed Church astounds me again and again.

What has been a highlight of Resonate Global Mission in the past year?

The CRC has come through some difficult years of theological struggle. It

often felt like we were distracted from our call to mission. But my colleagues and I have seen a real shift in the past year. We are seeing a resurgence of churches connecting with us in fresh ways to strengthen their partnership in local and global mission work. We saw synod issue a strong call for a renewed church-planting vision for the denomination that was highly encouraging. It is clear that the CRC continues to have a strong commitment and heart for God's mission.

Where would you like to see Resonate Global Mission in five years?

In five years, I would like to see every church in the CRC experience Resonate as their key partner to live out Jesus' call in Acts 1:8. This is the Church's mission. We understand our task as coming alongside the local church. We want to support each church in their call to serve God's mission in their neighborhood, participate in the call to multiply God's kingdom, and to engage in the big story of the movement of the Holy Spirit across the world.

How can we pray for you?

You can pray with us! Last year, synod tasked Resonate to produce a church-planting plan for the next 10 years in collaboration with the other agencies and ministries of the CRC. This plan is impossible if we do not rely fully on God's leading. We would love for the churches and members of the CRC to join us in praying for spiritual renewal, that the Holy Spirit would spark a vibrant passion for mission everywhere in the CRC. You can do that by signing up for the weekly email, Prayers for Church Renewal and Church Planting: <https://tinyurl.com/45hyrtmc>. 

—CRC Communications

Faithful Roots, Faithful Futures: A Shared Ministry of Renewal

THIS YEAR, Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary mark 150 years of shared mission and ministry. For a century and a half, God has been faithful—calling, shaping, and sending graduates into churches, classrooms, clinics, businesses, and communities around the world. That legacy is not only something to celebrate; it is something to steward.

“The landscape of higher education is changing rapidly,” said Greg Elzinga, president of Calvin University. Declining enrollment nationwide, rising costs, and new questions about the value of college—especially in an age shaped by artificial intelligence—create real challenges for Christian institutions. Yet these headwinds do not signal retreat. They invite discernment, courage, and renewed trust in God’s calling.

“At Calvin, we believe this moment calls for both rootedness and innovation: Rootedness in Christ and in the Reformed conviction that all of life belongs to God. Innovation in how we prepare students to serve faithfully in a complex, fast-changing world,” Elzinga said.

Calvin’s liberal arts foundation, sometimes questioned in utilitarian times, continues to prove its value. Calvin alumni data tells a compelling story. Pre-health graduates are accepted into medical and professional programs at almost twice the national average. Calvin’s accounting programs rank second among almost 300 mid-sized universities nationwide for CPA exam pass rates. These outcomes reflect more than technical preparation; they reveal the power of an education that integrates faith, intellect, and vocation.

Each year, more than 1,000 new students from over 60 countries join the Calvin community. They come to study nursing, ministry, engineering,



Calvin University provides students with rootedness in Christ and in the Reformed conviction that all of life belongs to God, as well as innovation in how to serve faithfully in a complex, fast-changing world.

education, business, and more—but they also come to be formed.

“Formation remains at the heart of our shared ministry. Faculty mentor students not only academically, but spiritually and professionally, helping them discern how their gifts meet the world’s needs,” said Elzinga

That formation is being strengthened through intentional renewal. Calvin is reaffirming its historic mission while responding boldly to today’s realities. Faculty are encouraged to innovate through interdisciplinary and experiential learning. Professional development in areas like digital pedagogy and ethical engagement with AI ensures educators remain thoughtful leaders in their fields. Across disciplines, students are learning civil discourse, intercultural understanding, and faithful engagement with difference, skills essential for Christian witness today.

Calvin University is also preparing students for meaningful work and life-long calling. “Employers consistently seek the strengths Calvin cultivates, like critical thinking, collaboration, communication, ethical judgment, and adaptability. Structured alumni mentorship, internships, and community-based projects help students connect learning to real-world service,” Elzinga said.

Looking ahead, Calvin is expanding pathways, launching new programs, and integrating AI and digital literacy across the curriculum, including the development of an AI-focused major grounded in Christian ethics. These efforts are not departures from the school’s mission, but expressions of it.

The world does not need Christian graduates defined only by what they know. It needs women and men shaped by who they are in Christ, agents of renewal who think deeply, act justly, and live wholeheartedly for God’s glory. That has been Calvin’s shared ministry for 150 years. By God’s grace, it will continue for generations to come. 

—John Zimmerman,
Calvin University

150th Anniversary Worship Service

On March 29, 2026, join a joyful Palm Sunday evening of worship and celebrate God’s enduring faithfulness to Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin University over the past 150 years. The service begins at 4:45 PM at Calvin’s Covenant Fine Arts Center. Tune in online at calvin.edu/150.



150th Anniversary Worship Service
MARCH 29, 2026

Arabic Ministry Expands Reach and Leadership Capacity

REFRAME MINISTRIES' Arabic-language ministry is reaching an important milestone as work continues toward the creation of the *Today* daily devotional written in Arabic.

The *Today* devotional celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2025 and is a cornerstone of ReFrame's English-language ministry. Starting as *Our Family Altar*, the print booklet was launched in 1950 as a way to meet the needs of listeners of the *Back to God Hour* radio program who wanted to know more about the Bible and grow in their faith. More recently, the devotional became known as *Today* and is distributed in print to 250,000 people worldwide, as well as online and in audio versions. Producing *Today* in Arabic is the latest effort to expand this important ministry's reach even farther.

The ReFrame ministry team has been working with Arabic audiences through a partnership with Christians in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt. The first Arabic-language project included translating the well-loved English devotional *Seeking God's Face*, and producing a corresponding mobile app to support devotional readers.

As part of its work, the team is intentionally working not only with formal Arabic, but also with the commonly spoken "street language," recognizing that many readers connect more easily with Scripture when it reflects the language they use in daily life. This approach aims to make Scripture more accessible while remaining faithful to the gospel message.

During a recent visit to ministry partners in Egypt, ReFrame Ministries director Kurt Selles saw encouraging progress on the *Today* translation



From left: Naji Umran (Resonate Global Mission missionary and Arabic translator), Rev. Youssef Adel Hanna (ReFrame Arabic ministry leader), Rev. Refat Fathy (general secretary of the Synod of the Nile), Kurt Selles (ReFrame director), and Nellie Kooistra (ReFrame director of administration).

effort. The work reflects years of preparation and growing capacity within the Arabic ministry team.

An additional milestone for the Arabic ministry is the recent move of Rev. Youssef Adel Hanna into a full-time role with ReFrame Ministries. This transition marks a significant step forward for a ministry that has been steadily developing over many years and seeks to proclaim Christ to seekers in Cairo and the larger Arabic-speaking body of Christ in 22 countries where Arabic is spoken.

"Both the progress on *Today* and the move to full-time leadership reflect long-term faithfulness," Selles said. "These are developments we have been

working toward for a long time, and they position the ministry well for continued growth and sustainability."

Together, these developments highlight ReFrame's ongoing commitment to strengthening global ministry through trusted leadership and thoughtful approaches to sharing Scripture in accessible and culturally meaningful ways. **B**

—Tiffany Kraker,
ReFrame Ministries

Foundation to Future: 2026

Canadian National Gathering

THE CANADIAN National Gathering will take place May 28-31, 2026, at Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ont. Held every three years, the Gathering brings together Christian Reformed churches from Canada to discern and explore what God's call is for the CRC as a community of churches. The theme for 2026 is Foundation to Future.

The Gathering will intentionally reflect on the history of the Canadian CRC, recognizing it as the foundation that has shaped the present. From this shared history, the focus will shift to how churches from across Canada can build on the strongest elements of that foundation to support one another and move forward together into a healthy and vibrant future.

The Canadian National Gathering will lean into the CRC's deep foundation in Scripture and theology, asking how these continue to speak with relevance and faithfulness in today's context and into the future. Participants will reflect on the past to shape what lies ahead, drawing on the wisdom, practices, and lessons of earlier generations to discern pathways for the church in the years to come.

Josh Sweetman, a member of the Canadian National Gathering steering committee from Classis Huron, said, "I hope people can walk away filled with joy, realizing what God is doing in our churches around Canada."

The Gathering is intentionally designed not as a traditional conference, but as a shared space for learning and discernment. Using a "flipped classroom" approach, participants themselves are understood to be the primary contributors, bringing experience, insight, and practice into the conversations. Rather than moving between multiple workshops, each participant will engage in a single stream throughout the time together, allowing for exploration, collaboration,



The Canadian National Gathering steering team, from left: Cathy Fraser, Elaine May, Nicole Van de Kraats, Ryan Nirula, Jenn Richards, Marco Vergara, Josh Sweetman, Kevin Lobert, Wendy DeJong, and Al Postma. Missing from the photo: Sam van Huizen, Brian Mol, Cathy Lubbers, and Elizabeth Brunsveld.

and discovery. Participants are invited and recommended specifically for their ability to contribute meaningfully within their assigned stream, with the goal of discerning where God is at work locally, regionally, and denominationally, and faithfully joining God in that work.

The six streams of the Gathering are leadership ecosystem, conflict navigation, faith formation for children and youth, discipleship pathways, community outreach, and building authentic community.

These streams were chosen by the Canadian National Gathering steering team, made up of one person from each Canadian classis. "While there are more than six important areas of ministry, the team believes that these six are key for the churches across Canada right now," said Al Postma, executive director for the CRC in Canada. "Every participant will be placed in one of these streams where they will go deeper into the ministry area alongside others."

Following the decision to discontinue exploration of a Classis-Quinte hosted

ecclesiastical gathering, the materials developed through that process have been received and will be reviewed as part of the planning for the Canadian National Gathering.

Springing from a 2013 report to the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA on "Cultivating Binationality in the CRCNA" (see Acts of Synod 2014, pp. 432, 440-42), the Canadian National Gathering is a time to strategically celebrate, discern, and envision bold next steps for the CRC in Canada locally, regionally, and nationally. Gatherings of this type take place in Canada every three years as a way to have national conversations about ministry in local congregations and as a national and binational church.

As the Canadian National Gathering approaches, please pray that this will be a time of discernment, worship, and community. Pray for the future of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada and that God would continue to move. 

—Kristen Parker,
CRC Communications

Thunderstorms

WE'RE ENTERING the spring season—a time known for powerful thunderstorms and, at times, tornadoes.

Thunderstorms are among the most intense weather events in nature. They can even spawn tornadoes, which produce the highest wind speeds recorded anywhere on Earth.

The United States—and North America in general—experiences more tornadoes than any other region in the world. This is largely because of our unique geography. To the north, cold, dry air sweeps down from Canada while, to the south, the Gulf of Mexico sends warm, humid air northward. As we move into spring and summer, these two air masses frequently collide over the United States and particularly the Midwest. Because cold air is denser than warm air, the warm, moist air is forced upward when the fronts meet. As it rises into the atmosphere, it cools and can no longer hold its moisture, which leads to rain. In fact, those cumulonimbus clouds from a big thunderstorm can soar seven, eight, or even nine miles into the sky!

As the storm develops further, the falling rain creates downdrafts. These downdrafts can create powerful straight-line winds that can damage homes and uproot trees. The falling

rain and fast-moving downdrafts can also create rotation in the storm itself. This rotation can lift raindrops miles into the atmosphere, where they freeze into hail. The stronger the rotation, the larger the hail becomes. Each time it rotates it adds a layer of rain to the hailstone. That same rotation is what gives rise to tornadoes. Often forming on the edge of a thunderstorm, tornadoes can drop to the ground with the most violent winds on the planet.

While these storms can certainly be destructive, this very cycle is also what gives North America such incredible agricultural potential. Spring rains arrive consistently and generously, creating ideal conditions for growth. Lightning, too, plays an important role by helping add usable nitrogen to the soil. Temperatures inside a lightning bolt can be hotter than the surface of the sun, and a single bolt carries enough energy to power more than 50 homes for a day.

So even though thunderstorms can bring destruction, they also provide what makes our land so fertile and productive. This often reminds me of the trials we face in life. In the middle of the storm it can be hard to recognize any good, and it certainly can be frightening. But often, when we look back, we can see the blessings that came out of the struggle. God is in control.

Of course, sometimes bad things happen and we never receive an explanation. Yet even then we can trust that God has a plan—just as he governs the storms—whether or not we can see what he is doing. Sometimes storms can be loud and scary, but we always know that God has control of them, just like he has control of our lives (Psalm 107:29-30).

So the next time you see a storm, take a minute to be amazed at the power of God in creation, and remember that even the storm can bring good! **B**



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



Avoiding a Mob Mentality

By Brandon Haan

There's so much I appreciate about the 2004 *mewithoutYou* album *Catch for Us the Foxes* that, although it's an obscure pick, I rank that sophomore release from the now-defunct, crunchy, hipster, at-one-time-Christian, post-hardcore band as my all-time favorite album.

Known for its inventive instrumental choices, wildly abrasive shifts in tempo and tone, and tortured, introspective lyrics about faith, life, and what it means to be a Christian, *Catch for Us the Foxes* became an instant classic for teenage punks like me growing up in the mid-2000s.

A few of the lines from one of the verses in the second-to-last song, "Carousels," still stick out to me. In his trademark spoken-word delivery, frontman Aaron Weiss talk-sings:

Oh, Christ, when you're ready
to come back

I think I'm ready for you
to come back

But if you want to stay wherever
exactly it is you are

That's okay too—

It's really none of my business

Those lines have stuck with me because, at least for me, they've always helped remind me that someday Jesus Christ is going to come back. Someday he will return. And far from that being an abstract or vague future possibility, that day could actually be quite soon. It could be this week. It could even be today.

But it also often leads me to a little thought experiment: If Christ were to come back soon, this week, even today, would I recognize him? Would I know him? And would I be able to see him for who he truly is—my Messiah, Savior, and Lord—or would I see him as something or someone else instead?

Recognizing Christ the First Time

I think about that sometimes at this time of year, too, around the events of Holy Week.

After all, many of the Jews, the people Jesus was originally sent to, including many of their most learned and serious religious leaders, didn't recognize him. And they didn't just not recognize him. Much to the contrary, they actively denied him, called for him to be arrested, and then, after he was taken into custody, repeatedly chanted, "Crucify him!"

Just like I sometimes wonder if I'll be able to recognize Jesus when he comes back, I also wonder, if I had been there among the crowds and religious leaders that first Holy Week, would I have been able to recognize Jesus then? Would I have seen him and known him for who he was—my Messiah, Savior, and Lord? Or would I have been part of that Holy Week mob, joining my voice with the others who condemned Jesus, calling for him to be arrested, put on trial, and crucified?

After all, we like to think that that sort of "mob mentality" is a thing of the past, that it was something people back then engaged in, but that we, enlightened people today, would never do.

Yet the unfortunate truth is that that sort of mob mentality is still very much alive and well these days.

The Mob Mentality

We don't always gather in rowdy in-person mobs to shout at our leaders the way the crowd did with Pilate that first Holy Week (though that certainly still happens from time to time). But the fact is that we still often engage in the sort of group-think outrage, anger, and piling on that the crowd of that first Holy Week did.

For instance, part of why I quit social media a number of years ago is because I noticed that sort of mob mentality at work online all too often. That kind of thing happens pretty much every day on the internet. Someone posts something, people read it, we take sides, and pretty soon there's an avalanche of different perspectives, opinions, and hot takes as people ghost each other, write each other off, and cancel each other into oblivion. If Holy Week were to take place today, we might not gather physically in a mob on the street to demand Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, but we would certainly Tweet it, post it, and Like or Dislike it. #crucifyhim!

Where Mob Mentality Comes From

In their bestselling 2018 book *The Coddling of the American Mind*, co-authors Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt explore some of the reasons we seem predisposed to that sort of "mob mentality." In the main part of the book they write about what they call "The Three Great Untruths," which they believe our culture has more or less uncritically adopted and which they say (and I agree with them) are deeply malforming us as a culture and society.

1. First, Lukianoff and Haidt write about what they call "The Great Untruth of Fragility," which is the idea that hard or challenging things are bad, and as a result, we should do everything in our power to avoid them.
2. Second, they write about "The Great Untruth of Emotional Reasoning," which is the idea that our feelings are always right and so we should always trust them and follow wherever they lead.
3. And, finally, they describe "The Great Untruth of Us Versus Them," which is the idea that life is a battle between good and bad people and,

Would I have been
part of that Holy
Week mob, joining
my voice with the
others who
condemned Jesus?

while we're on the good side (and so are those who agree with us), those we disagree with are on the bad side. Therefore we need to fight them and defeat them so that our side, the good side, wins.

These patterns come to us so easily because, as the Bible teaches, our hearts are already bent toward pride, self-justification, and seeing others as enemies. Yet it's clear that aside from the fact that those "Three Great Untruths" contradict the vast majority of philosophical, moral, and religious ethical wisdom (including Christian ethical wisdom), they're also practically bad ideas.

For instance, let's imagine a college student at a four-year university somewhere in the United States. One day the student hears that a popular thinker and influencer has been invited to his campus to give a lecture. The student, however, disagrees with some of the things this speaker has said in the past. Not only that, he's offended by them! Outraged, he tells a few friends and, together, they organize a demonstration to protest the speaker's invitation. The school administration hears about their efforts and tries to reach out to them. But they make clear, in no uncertain

terms, that the only thing that will pacify them is if the speaker's invitation is canceled. Nothing less will do. Either the college can support its students or it can support this speaker, but it can't do both.

That, Lukianoff and Haidt write, is what it looks like when these "Three Great Untruths" combine and are put into action. That's because the Great Untruth of Fragility means that no one should ever have to experience or hear anything one dislikes or disagrees with. The Great Untruth of Emotional Reasoning means that our emotions and how we feel about something are always right (like the student's feeling of outrage that the speaker is coming to his campus). And then the Great Untruth of Us Versus Them means that, as you trust your feelings, you should do everything in your power to fight those who are making you feel that way (like protesting the speaker's invitation and trying to get that person canceled).

You don't have to imagine that sort of scenario. Lukianoff and Haidt actually chronicle dozens of situations, all across the United States, where college and university students have increasingly done exactly that. Where they've become outraged by speakers who have been invited to their campuses, organized demonstrations and protests against them, and sometimes even resorted to violence as they've tried to physically block and bar those speakers from coming.

It's not just college campuses either. The simple fact is that those sorts of "mob mentality" outbursts have been playing out more frequently in our culture as a whole. Put simply, we've all become more inclined to believe the "Three Great Untruths" Lukianoff and Haidt describe. And, as a result, we've become more inclined to exhibit the sort of mob mentality they lead to.

How To Avoid a Mob Mentality

What do we do? How do we respond? How do we make sure that we, as Christians, rather than getting sucked into mob mentality, are more careful, even-handed, thoughtful, and considerate?

Well, if Lukianoff and Haidt are right that the “Three Great Untruths” of Fragility, Emotional Reasoning, and Us Versus Them are at least partially to blame for our current cultural predisposition toward “mobbing” each other, then part of the solution is to turn and do the opposite.

For instance, if fragility and being easily offended is a problem, we should train ourselves to become less offendable. Lukianoff and Haidt recommend intentionally getting our news and information from sources we disagree with. While it’s initially challenging to read and hear things we don’t like, over time it helps us become more nuanced and thoughtful; develop thicker skin; and, as Lukianoff and Haidt put it, become “antifragile.”

Second, if emotional reasoning and following our feelings is a problem because it makes us emotionally reactive and prone to knee-jerk reactions, we should give ourselves more time and space to think through how we want to respond to something that offends us. For instance, a few years ago I adopted a rule I find helpful and I know I’m not the only one to adopt it. Often known as “The 24-Hour Rule,” it advises you to wait 24 hours before responding to something that frustrates you. That’s because 24 hours is usually enough time to calm down, think more clearly about what we’re frustrated about, and then (and only then) take time to respond.

Finally, if the idea of us versus them and the idea that the world is divided into two types of people—good ones

who agree with us and bad ones who don’t—is making us more divided, critical, and willing to “mob” each other, then we need to actually get to know each other, spend time with those we disagree with, and truly listen to what they think and believe. Doing so might not change our minds, and it probably won’t change their minds either. But that’s not the point. Instead, the point is to learn to see those we disagree with as real people made in the image of God and deserving of the same inherent dignity, value, and respect that we believe we deserve because we were both made by the same Creator God.

More specifically, as Christians, we can also pray for those we disagree with, which Jesus himself tells us to do in Matthew 5:44. After all, praying for those we dislike or disagree with might not make us disagree with them less, but it does have a way of making us dislike them less because, as a friend of mine once put it, “It’s hard to keep disliking those you’re talking about to God.”

As Christians, we can also remember the grace and forgiveness we ourselves have received. When we remember the grace and forgiveness God has given us in Christ, it has a way of motivating us to extend that same grace and forgiveness to others as well.

I’m sure there’s more we can do, but those are good places to start. Can you imagine being swept up into the mob mentality that called for and pressured the Romans to crucify Jesus? And that often leads us to “crucify” others today? To work to avoid that, we can develop thicker skin and become “antifragile” by seeking out viewpoints and perspectives different from our own. We can give ourselves a bit more time and space to think through how we want to respond to difficult situations. We can get to know people who

are different from us and spend time with them. We can pray for people and learn to intercede on their behalf to God. And we can remember the forgiveness and grace that we’ve been given and graciously extend it to others as well.

Doing so certainly won’t solve all our problems. But hopefully, as Christians, it’ll help us avoid ghosting, canceling, and mobbing each other the way our broader culture does. And, as an added bonus, whenever Christ comes back, rather than finding ourselves in the mob calling out to condemn and crucify him, it’ll help us instead be people who recognize him for who he truly is: Our #Savior. #Messiah. #Lord. 



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.

1. The article points to the mob crying out for Jesus’ crucifixion and shows that we are no different. Why is it so easy to follow the crowd, even against Jesus? Can you think of a time when peer pressure made following Jesus hard?
2. How does social media tempt you to judge, attack, and “pile on” others? How can you do the opposite?
3. How does knowing your sin and Jesus’ grace change “us vs. them” thinking?

[READ MORE](#) [ONLINE](#)

Clipping Nails

To see someone who did their job with such pleasure was refreshing.



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*.

MOM WAS IN a skilled care facility, and part of her care plan was a checkup from a physician's assistant. Martha insisted we call her by her first name rather than referring to her as a doctor. She was kind, personable, and extremely patient dealing with Mom's early-stage dementia. Since I lived two hours away, I greatly appreciated her regular reports on Mom's condition.

Occasionally when in town to visit Mom, I had the opportunity to chat with Martha in person. It was a delight. She was bright, cheerful, and seemed to thoroughly enjoy her work. To see someone who did their job with such pleasure was refreshing. Mom loved her visits.

In Phoenix, on a Wednesday afternoon, I stopped by Olive Grove to say hello. "Come in!" Mom called when I knocked. "Look, I have company."

Martha was on her knees on the floor next to Mom, clipping her toenails for her. She looked up and said she was almost finished. I assured her it was fine and to take her time. She smiled and said, "I love chatting with your mother. She is such a joy to be around." I agreed.

I watched as she finished. She clipped nails with such tenderness and care. It reminded me of what it must have been like to have Jesus wash your feet. The way she so lovingly held Mom's foot and the careful way she collected the clippings and deposited them in the nearby waste can was sweet to watch. "Wow! That's quite the service," I said with a laugh. "I didn't know Medicare paid doctors to do pedicures."

She responded, "They don't. It's just something I like to do for my patients. It's really hard for older folks to trim their own toenails, so I offer to do it for them. It's a simple gift I can give them."

I pondered that. "I have to confess that watching you serving my mother like this reminds me a bit of when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples."

"Oh, I hope so," was her quick response. "I enjoy my time with your mother. We share faith in Jesus. Folks like your mother have such amazing stories of God's grace through the years. Stories I need to hear. It's a great encouragement to me to listen to your mother tell about God's presence as she struggled with being a young widow with four kids and then being widowed a second time. Her faithfulness through the years is remarkable."

Mom smiled. "I can't tell which is more fun, getting my nails clipped or having someone listen to my old stories. I'm glad I don't have to choose. If I had to choose, I think I'd probably pick getting my toenails clipped. It feels so good when she's done. It drives me crazy when they get long." Martha smiled.

Mom's insurance changed, and they no longer contracted with the company that employed Martha. It was sad to say goodbye and engage a new doctor.

A few weeks later I stopped by and found Martha holding nail clippers and down on her knees by Mom's chair. "Look who came by to visit on her day off!" Mom chirped. "Isn't it great that she just happened to bring her nail clippers along?"

It was. B

The Impossible Escape

On Sunday
morning,
Jesus rose
from the dead.

The chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while (Jesus) was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'" —Matt. 27:62-63

AS THE CLOCK STRUCK one minute, Harry Houdini struggled to free himself. Hidden behind a red curtain, he was holding his breath, hanging upside down in a water-filled glass chamber with feet bound in wooden stocks. As the audience fixed their imagination on the drama concealed from their eyes, they wondered if Houdini could do the impossible—escape the clutches of death.

At two minutes, some in the audience ordered the stagehands to pull back the curtain and break the glass, but they did not move. Pushing past three minutes, a dreadful silence filled the room because everyone was convinced that Houdini was still bound and now buried inside a watery tomb.

But Houdini was not dead. As the red curtain came up, there he stood soaking wet and alive.

On Friday, after Jesus was crucified, soldiers pierced his side to verify his death. Then he was taken down from the cross and placed in a new tomb carved from solid rock. To safeguard the burial space from thieves, the opening was barricaded with a large stone, sealed, and monitored by two security guards. On Sunday morning, Jesus rose from the dead. He removed the funeral cloth covering his face, folded it, and placed it on the ground. Then Jesus stepped from the dark chamber into the dew-drenched garden and started walking toward Galilee.

Houdini's Illusions

When Houdini began performing in 1891 as a playing-card illusionist, he had little success. Searching

for something that might set him apart, he grabbed a pair of handcuffs and broke free of them in a matter of moments, stunning onlookers. Early posters declared him "The World's Best Handcuff King and Prison Breaker." Later, surrounded by crowds on the streets of New York City, Houdini gained immense fame as he freed himself from increasingly complex entrapments—chains, straitjackets, ropes, milk jugs, and wooden boxes thrown into the East River. But nothing quite compared to his greatest act: the Chinese Water Torture Chamber, first performed in 1912. This electrifying stage performance thrilled audiences, defied imitation, and left audiences scratching their heads, wondering how he did it. Searching for explanations, some accused Houdini of using dark spiritual powers to disappear and reappear on command.

But Houdini's escape from the Chinese Water Torture Chamber was nothing more than a clever illusion. Moments after he was hidden from the audience, Houdini freed himself when the clasp mechanism holding his feet in the wooden stocks quietly opened after being "locked." A master of performance, Houdini was perfectly safe, patiently waiting for the right moment to pull back the curtain, raise his arms in triumph, and bow to thunderous applause.

Jesus' Impossible Escape

Through the centuries, the impossibility of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead has sent many searching for a more plausible explanation. Hoping to pull back the curtain and expose the trickery, some have suggested that Jesus slipped into a coma on the cross and woke up after three days. Others have speculated that Jesus had a secret twin brother who was seen walking around Galilee. Still others



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have surmised that those visiting the garden in the early morning hours were sleep deprived, got confused, and went to the wrong tomb.

Even a mere 20 years after the resurrection, people were already struggling to believe the impossible escape really happened.

The church in Corinth, established by Paul around the year 51, was a community composed of Gentile and Jewish believers. Each group was wrestling with Easter morning and searching for a more plausible explanation. Gentile converts, shaped by Greek philosophical ideas of a body/soul dualism, had no concept of a physical resurrection. Their solution was to turn the resurrection into a spiritual event unrelated to the body. On the other hand, while most Jews believed in a physical resurrection, they expected it to happen far into the future—at the end of time. So they were doubtful about one person rising before everyone else. Their solution was to deny the third-day miracle altogether.

Speaking into their questions about whether Easter might be a masterful illusion, Paul writes a letter to the church and in 1 Corinthians 15 addresses their puzzlement with two compelling arguments.

For the Gentiles, Paul addresses the physical nature of the resurrection by pointing to the powerful evidence that the resurrected body of Jesus was seen by a whole host of people. This section of Paul's letter is referred to by scholars as the "Corinthian Creed" because in these succinct verses Paul reminds them of the core tenets of the Jesus story articulated in Scripture and verified by eyewitnesses: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to

Cephas, and then the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep" (1 Cor.15:3-6).

Having named the three-act body drama (died, buried, raised) Paul insists that if the third act (bodily raised) was a spiritual event only, then the good news of God's physical incarnation at Bethlehem culminates in a burial—which is very bad news. Logically, he concludes that anyone with a body who would place their faith in a dead-end storyline for the body would be foolish. Good news must be good news from start to finish.

For the Jews, Paul puts the miracle of Easter morning into a larger context. He clarifies that the resurrection of Jesus on the third day is both a decisive victory over death and a sign pointing to God's promise to wipe away death entirely at the end of time. The miracle—now, not later—is a down payment on that future reality that also works to strengthen those who are suffering hardship in the present moment. Christians, with this down payment deposited in their hearts, can face persecution, poverty, and powerlessness with courage and patient endurance, trusting in God's promise of everlasting life.

A Call to Faith

On Halloween 1926, at the age of 52, Houdini died in a Detroit hospital when his appendix ruptured. Immediately rumors started circulating that Houdini would escape his bronze casket even as pallbearers carried it to his grave plot in Queens, N.Y. But Houdini never escaped. In the end, no hidden key or clever trick could unlock the chains of death holding him captive.

On Friday, Jesus died on a cross and was buried. On Sunday, God did the impossible—broke the handcuffs of the grave and raised Jesus, whom death could not hold (Acts 2:24). Still, the curious fact remains that the actual moment of resurrection was hidden behind a "curtain" of stone.

Ultimately, no argument can answer every doubt and no explanation can convince a hardened heart that Easter wasn't more magic trick than miracle.

Rather than merely an airtight case of irrefutable facts, Paul issues a call to faith and a hope rooted in that faith. This invitation extends to the first Christians and every generation since who feel a deep longing in their bones for a good-news storyline from beginning to everlasting end. Hold the Corinthian Creed close to your heart and believe the impossible escape really happened. 

1. Why does it matter that Jesus really died and really rose, bodily? What would change if the resurrection were just a symbol or an illusion?

2. The resurrection is described as a "down payment" on God's promise. How does knowing Jesus rose from the dead help us face grief, loss, or hard times today?

3. Why can't facts alone change a person's heart (Rom. 8:7)? What role must God play in opening hearts up to believe the gospel?

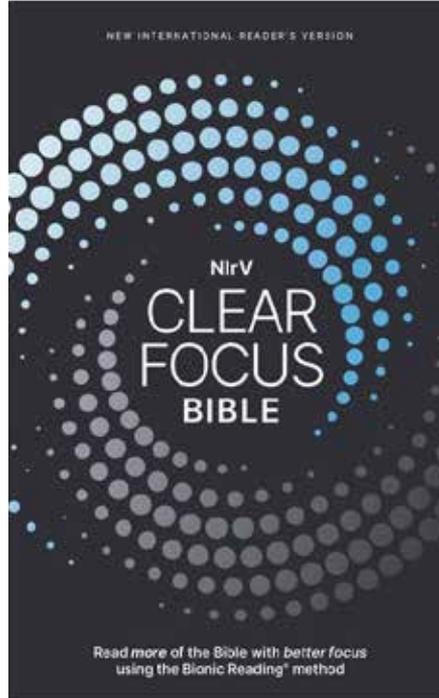
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The Clear Focus Bible

THIS NEW EDITION of the Bible exists to make Bible reading more accessible to readers of all ages and abilities. It is ideal for people who are easily distracted, lose focus, or become frustrated during their devotional times. This Bible is designed to be specifically helpful for those who have dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

The Bionic Reading method employed by The Clear Focus Bible allows the reader's eyes to "skip over words and text, like a surfboard that glides on the top of a wave." One can read the highlighted letters and grasp the entire word. The print on the page is not distracting, so the reading process becomes smoother and more meaningful. Generous line spacing and shorter, more concrete sentences help make for a smoother reading experience for people of different ability levels.

This Bible has the potential to help people with learning differences connect to their faith in engaging and exciting ways. The pages are clean and uncluttered; the words are manageable so that focus is more complete and uninterrupted. Text notes occupy their own pages at the end of each

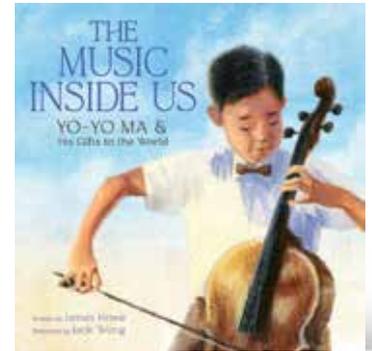


book and do not impede reading several verses or pages at a time.

The Clear Focus Bible is available in several different editions or versions. In addition to the NIV hardcover, there are also softcover editions: New American Standard Bible, New International Reader's Version, and NiRV for Kids editions; and a digital release available for people who speak Spanish. The Clear Focus Bible would be a more accessible addition to any Bible reader's collection. (Zondervan) 



Amie Spriensma is an online chaplain for ReFrame Ministries and a regional disability advocate for the CRC. She lives, works, and worships in Allendale, Mich., where she is a member of Rusk CRC.



The Music Inside Us: Yo-Yo Ma and His Gifts to the World

By James Howe.

Illustrated

by Jack Wong

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In this exquisitely illustrated picture-book biography, children meet child prodigy Yo-Yo Ma, who at 4 years old discovered his gift of playing the cello. Chinese-born and living in Paris, Yo-Yo and his sister were coached by their musically gifted parents. They learned the discipline of long hours of practice as they were taught ear training, harmony, and music theory, leaving little time for playing with friends.

When Yo-Yo and his family moved to New York City, they were soon famous for their musical abilities.

By sharing this book with children, parents and caregivers can talk about God's astounding gift of music across cultures and how he calls and encourages his children to worship him and to "sing and make music from your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). (Abrams Books for Young Readers)



Friendship, Vol. 1

By In Every Generation

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

In Every Generation is a gathering of artists and writers brought together by people at Belmont University in Nashville as part of a grant they received to study the intersection of worship and intergenerational ministries.

The result, an album called *Friendship, Vol. 1*, is an excellent example of what it could look like to create music that speaks to people from multiple generations.

The music itself features a variety of singers and a top-tier band. Songs can be used in worship or for personal listening, with “The Language of Your Love” a particular standout. *Friendship, Vol. 1* is an excellent album, and at least one of the songs has already found its way into a worship service at my church. (In Every Generation)



Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery

Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

The third *Knives Out* mystery plunges us into an interesting faith conversation: Shall you know them by their love—or by their power?

Father Jud Duplenticy (Josh O’Connor) finds penance costly. A former boxer, he’s punched a deacon and sent away to atone for his sins. Now at Our Lady of Perpetual Fortitude, he must serve a vitriolic priest, Monsignor Jefferson Wicks (Josh Brolin).

One day, halfway through the church service, the nasty Monsignor is murdered. But how? And why? Arriving to solve the mystery is Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig) who, although he has no interest in religion, cares about justice.

Director-writer Rian Johnson grew up in an evangelical home. Although Benoit Blanc snorts at anything supernatural, the movie, though sometimes crude and offensive, portrays the faith of Father Duplenticy as real—and beautiful. (Netflix, Rated PG-13)



David

Reviewed by Paul Delger

The animated musical movie *David* charts the biblical character’s rise from a shepherd boy to the king of Israel.

After the prophet Samuel anoints David king without telling King Saul, Saul finds out and makes David’s life miserable. But David earns huge Israelite points when he takes down the Philistine Goliath who had told David, “I will make you a snack.” Eventually Saul makes nice with David and realizes God did ordain David as king.

The movie’s language is a combination of biblical language and 2025 references. Brandon Engman voices young David, while singer Phil Wickham voices adult David and also sings throughout the movie. The visuals are stunning, and the film offers plenty of action and music. This is a hopeful movie that depicts God guiding individuals and history. (Rated PG, Angel Studios)

The Lowdown

A Finely Woven Thread:

In this book, siblings Muna, Nita, and Yakup have spent years learning to survive in a refugee camp in Nepal. But now they face their biggest challenge yet: a choice that will change everything. A true story of resilience, family, and the extraordinary courage it takes to build a new life from nothing by K.R. Burg. (Independent)

Starring Ryan Gosling:

In *Project Hail Mary*, science teacher Ryland Grace wakes up on a spaceship with no recollection of who he is or how he got there. As his memory slowly returns, he discovers he must solve the riddle behind a what is causing the sun to die out. (March 20 in theaters, Amazon MGM Studios)

For Downton Abbey Fans:

Writer Debbie Horsfield (*Poldark*) reimagines the classic novels in *The Forsytes*, which chronicles the lives of a wealthy Victorian-era stock-broking family whose generations find themselves torn between tradition and personal happiness. (March 22, Masterpiece on PBS)

Letters on Living the Faith:

A collection of excerpts from C.S. Lewis’s letters offer guidance and encouragement to correspondents struggling with intellectual questions, personal conflicts, or ethical dilemmas. (March 10, HarperOne)

The Belgic Confession

The Belgic Confession is a summary of Christian doctrine. It was not intended to cover everything the church believed.



Mary L. Vandenberg, Ph.D., is professor of systematic theology, emerita, at Calvin Theological Seminary, with a specialization in theological anthropology. Mary lives in Byron Center, Mich., and is a member of LaGrave Christian Reformed Church.

THE BELGIC Confession (hereafter BC) was composed in the Lowlands, territory that today includes the Netherlands, Belgium, and northern France. This territory was ruled by Charles V of Spain, a staunch Roman Catholic, who was determined to have all of his subjects submit to the Pope. His son, Philip II, was even more harsh in his zeal to rid the Netherlands of any Reformed teaching and persecuted anyone who was caught teaching, distributing literature, or preaching against Rome. Almost 100,000 people lost their lives during the reigns of Charles V and Philip II.

The author of the BC was a Reformed preacher from the southern Lowlands named Guido de Bres. As a refugee living in Geneva, he was influenced by John Calvin. The BC was secretly published in 1561. The Dutch and French churches in the Lowlands accepted it soon after its publication, and it was adopted by the underground Synod of Antwerp in 1566. The primary purposes of the document were to instruct laypeople in the basics of Reformed Christianity and to inform Philip II that the Reformed expression of faith was legitimate and not heresy. The BC also sought to make clear that Reformed people were peace-loving and not anti-government.

Overview

The Belgic Confession is a summary of Christian doctrine. It was not intended to cover everything the church believed. Unlike other documents of the era, it does not criticize Roman Catholicism by name. This is likely because of the hostility of the monarchs ruling the Lowlands toward the reformers. The BC follows the traditional loci of theology (the main headings of Christian belief): God and revelation, humanity, Christ, salvation, church, and last things, which is basically the story of Scripture itself.

Much of what is covered in articles 1-21 is what we might call “broadly Christian” because these articles cover the basics of faith, the beliefs that most Christians would also affirm. Nonetheless, there are also a number of places where the distinct ‘accent’ of Reformed thought comes through.

Highlights of the BC

Several highlights are worth pointing out to give a sense of this document.

First, Articles 5-7 emphasize the authority of Scripture for the church, a basic principle of the Reformation.

Articles 8-11 teach basic creedal information about the Trinity, including the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. These teachings have been affirmed since early in church history.

A distinctly Reformed accent of the BC is seen in Article 16’s brief description of the doctrine of election. God’s sovereign mercy in salvation is contrasted with the uselessness of human effort to bring ourselves into relationship with God. This emphasis on God’s sovereignty over all things is a hallmark of Reformed theology.

Finally, an example of the comfort of this sovereignty comes through in Article 13’s description of the doctrine of providence. This doctrine reminds us that God’s tender care for creation is such that not “even a little bird can fall to the ground without the will of our Father.” Here we see God’s sovereignty and our comfort going hand in hand. Echoing Jesus’ own words (Matt. 6:26), the BC assures us that since God cares so much for a little bird, how much more must he care for us, his covenant children?

This same theme of comfort appears again in the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, which we will look at next. 

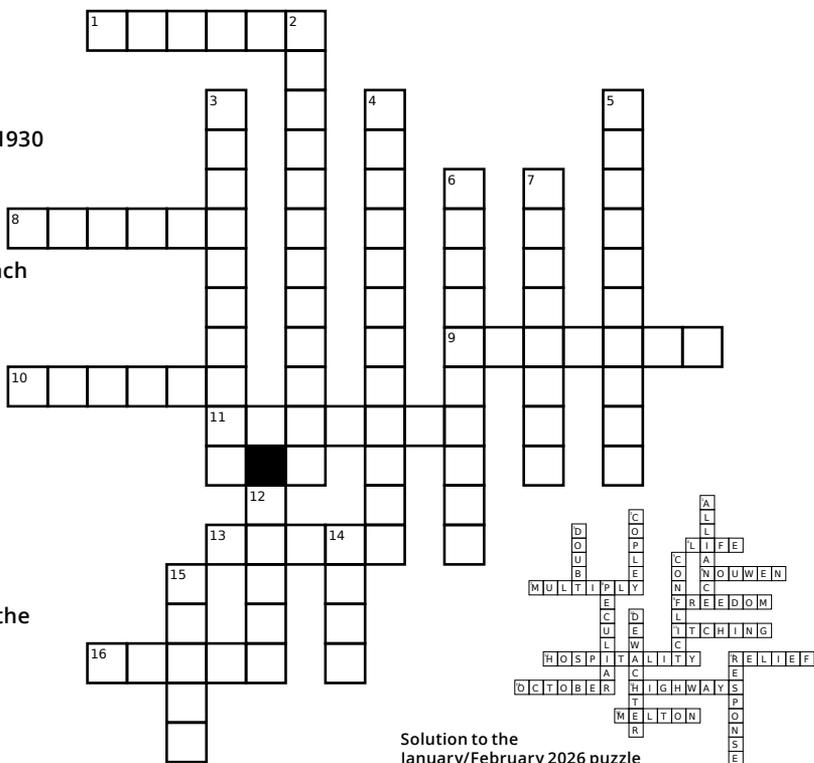
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle throughout this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions in the next print issue. (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

Down

- 2. Thunderstorm clouds that rise miles in the sky
- 3. When something is worth mentioning
- 4. Committee that oversaw *The Banner* and *De Wachter* in 1930
- 5. A congregational learning and discernment tool, Thriving _____
- 6. What mama birds push out of the nest
- 7. The _____: a church that hosted an art event for outreach
- 12. Name of the ReFrame Ministries devotional that is 75 years old
- 14. Our feet go where our _____ are looking
- 15. Game of chance that Cornerstone Prison Ministry uses to distribute Bibles

Across

- 4. The Clear Focus Bible uses the _____ Reading method
- 6. _____ Days at Maranatha CRC, in Holland, Mich.
- 9. Ryan _____ stars in *Project Hail Mary*
- 10. _____ Blanc is the detective played by Daniel Craig in the *Knives Out* movie franchise
- 11. Famous escape artist
- 13. *Catch for Us the _____*
- 16. A particularly friendly dog



Solution to the January/February 2026 puzzle

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

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

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

—Jess Sweitzer, founder and director, Project Bible Runners

BANNER

TheBanner.org/Ads **Expand your reach.**



160
YEARS

The Banner has gone from supporting the CRC to the CRC supporting it.

Subscriptions and Subsidies: Numbers Spanning 160 Years

THE CHRISTIAN Reformed Church's first denominational endeavors after its establishment were to publish a denominational magazine and open a theological training school, and for many years their financial fates were intertwined. *The Banner of Truth* (a monthly magazine in English) and *De Wachter* (in Dutch) each supported the school for almost 50 years, to the tune of hundreds of thousands

a matter of private soul care and the edification of the body of Christ."

As members of the CRC became more Americanized, *Banner* subscriptions rose to 9,300 in 1926, while *De Wachter's* had only 8,100, a trend that would continue until *De Wachter* was closed down in 1985.

While subscriptions lagged during the Great Depression, by the 1950s and 1960s readership was again on the rise. In 1962, there were 40,000 subscribers.



of dollars. But as the tides of opinion and economics changed over the past century, *The Banner* has gone from supporting the CRC to the CRC supporting it. And that is about to end.

The CRC took the reading of its publications as a serious spiritual matter. While subscribers to the publications totaled about 20,000 families in 1930, the Publications Committee, which oversaw the two publications, lamented that at least a couple thousand families were reading neither. "Families in which no church paper is read cannot be families that live as part of the church, and in which love toward the church dwells and seeks its good," wrote the committee. It said reading at least one of the two publications "is

But by the mid-1970s, even with subscriptions at an all-time high, *The Banner* was operating at a deficit. The subscription price went from \$5 to \$6 per year, and advertising rates rose 10%. The denomination's Board of Publications asked for support in the amount of \$1.50 per family in 1975. Synod was reminded that, for years, *The Banner* had supported Calvin College and Seminary. After some study, synod approved support of \$0.50 per family per year, eventually increasing it to \$4 per family.



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

Subscription numbers began to rise again. In 1984 *The Banner* was once again self-sustaining as the subscriber rate broke the 50,000 mark, eventually rising to 51,960, the highest it would ever be.

But as the 1980s drew to a close, numbers were again sliding. In surveys, readers said the magazine came too often or it was too expensive. As divisions in the CRC increased over the issue of women in office, subscription rates dropped to 38,000, but a denominational survey showed that 70

By 2004, with subscriptions languishing down near 21,000, synod made the decision to change from a subscription-based magazine to one that would be sent to every member, paid for by the denominational budget. In 2005, it became a monthly magazine.

Instead of counting subscriptions, *The Banner* was now counting issues printed. In 2006, it sent out over 100,000. Reader surveys showed

launched, reaching 8,000 pageviews each month.

In 2025, the print run was down to 60,000 copies, but website pageviews reached 85,000 per month, the app pageviews rose to 10,000 per month, and more than 15,000 people were signed up to receive the weekly email update.

The Council of Delegates of the CRC informed Synod 2024 that it would



percent of members were reading *The Banner*.

Ten years after *The Banner* had reached its all-time high, subscriber numbers had dropped by more than 16,000. The Board of Publications reported to synod that the primary reasons for this decline in subscribers was most likely due to a decreased interest in denominational matters, a continuing decline in interest in reading, and denominational division and schism. In 1997, the magazine moved from weekly to biweekly.

an increase in readership with 80% either very or somewhat satisfied. Success was not to last, at least measured by printed copies. In 2017, it was down to 83,500, even as surveys showed high reader satisfaction. Annual fundraising continued to raise more funds.

In 2011, *The Banner* launched its website and was soon posting fresh news and features each week. In 2018, even as print numbers went down, digital numbers climbed. Three thousand readers were receiving the weekly email update and the website was averaging 80,000 pageviews per month. That year *The Banner's* app was

require *The Banner* to once again become self-sustaining, receiving diminishing denominational financial support until July 1, 2027, when the level will be \$0. The intention to be free for every household hasn't changed.

Starting in 2026, its 160th birthday, the print magazine will be published six times per year, but its online presence will continue its robust activity. 

DEADLINES: Ads for the May/June 2026 issue are due April 10; July/August: June 13, 2026. Subject to availability. Details online at thebanner.org/classifieds, or for display ads see thebanner.org/ads. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

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

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Church Positions Available

BORCULO CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH in Zeeland, MI, is seeking to hire a part time Associate Pastor of Visitation. For more details about the role and its responsibilities, please contact Dave Huizenga at 616 299 2347.

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 - Faith Christian Reformed Church, located in New Brighton, MN (a northern suburb of Minneapolis and St. Paul), is seeking a full-time lead pastor to encourage, build up, and walk alongside our congregation as we seek to follow Jesus and build up his kingdom in the world. We are a multigenerational congregation with a strong sense of community, warmth and hospitality. For more information, please visit www.faihcrcmn.org, email the Pastor Search Team at office@faihcrcmn.org, or view our profile on the CRC Pastor Search portal.

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.

LEAD PASTOR: The members of Shalom CRC in Sioux Falls, SD, are prayerfully searching for a lead pastor. We seek a relationship-focused shepherd with a heart for people and a love for God's Word, to preach the Gospel, model Christ, and guide us in faith. Visit shalomcrc.org/opportunity for details.

PASTOR POSITION: Blyth CRC (Ontario) is seeking a full-time pastor to lead our congregation into a new season of ministry. As we approach our 65th anniversary in 2027 and celebrate a recently expanded facility, we value Biblical preaching, discipleship, pastoral care, and Reformed theology. Contact Val Shortreed at valerishortreed@gmail.com

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.

Church Anniversary

100 YEARS

THE FIRST CRC IN CHATHAM, ON, CANADA is celebrating its 100th Year anniversary as the first established CRC in Ontario with a worship service on Sunday May 10, 2026 @ 10:00 a.m. We invite former members to join us in a time of praise and celebration as we thank God for His faithfulness followed by a time of fellowship.

75 YEARS

WITH THANKS TO GOD for His Faithfulness, Holland Heights CRC of Holland, MI, will celebrate its 75th anniversary on May 31, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. We invite you to join us in worship, either in person or online, as we celebrate God's Faithfulness.

STRATHROY EAST CRC Is celebrating 75 years of God's Faithfulness Saturday March 28 1-4 Open House; Sunday March 29 9:30 Celebration Service Fellowship, coffee and refreshments to follow

EXETER CRC IS 75! Exeter Christian Reformed Church is celebrating 75 years of trying to be a church. Together we have prayed, sang,

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laughed, and cried, through it all we celebrate that God continues to have a plan for our church in these crazy times. Come celebrate with us on Sunday, April 26/26.

Obituaries

DE BOER, MERRIE LOU (BOSS) age 91 of Jenison, formerly of Grand Rapids, MI, went to her heavenly home on Dec. 19, 2025. Her love for God was the foundation of her life. Her strong love for family, friends, and music sustained her through difficult health challenges. She was a graduate of Calvin University (formerly College). She is survived by her husband of 70 years, Marvin, children, Barb and John Buteyn, Carol Buikema (Bill, deceased) and David and Jane De Boer, grandchildren and great grandchildren. She was dearly loved and will be greatly missed.



JELTEMA, PAUL, age 96, of Grand Rapids, went to his eternal heavenly home to be with his Savior on January 22, 2026. He is survived by his loving wife of 71 years, Fran; his children, Cindy (Rick) Verhey, Gregory (Carol) Jeltema, Linda (Larry) Doornbos, Jeffrey

(Linda) Jeltema, and Timothy (Cid) Jeltema; his grandchildren, Ian (Toni) Verhey, Sonia (Jake) Rose, Jacob (Lauren) Verhey, Amy (Brad) Van Prooyen, Melissa Jeltema, Gayle Doornbos, Christopher Doornbos, Lauren (Alex) Hastings, Adam (Kassidy) Jeltema, Paul (special friend, Taylor) Jeltema, Jordyn Jeltema, and Silas Jeltema; and his great-grandchildren, Connor, Fenna, Keegan, Jensen, Anika, Arie, Ryan, Jolene, Olivia, Everett, Vincent, Gavin, Sanford, Carson, Kaleb, and Rebekah. He is also survived by his brother, Marv, and numerous nieces, nephews, and dear friends. Paul was a lifelong member of East Leonard Christian Reformed Church, where he faithfully served as a deacon and elder and sang for many years in the choir. He deeply loved the hymns of the church and shared his gift of music by playing the trumpet for many years—at East Leonard CRC, at Pine Grove Church during the summer months, and at Nettles Island Church in Florida during the winter. Paul was a graduate of Davenport College and served in the U.S. Army. Along with his brothers, he was a co-owner of Valley City Linen. He was a past president of the Kiwanis Club and served on the boards of Camp Roger and Camp O'Malley, Christian Rest Home, and Grand Rapids Christian Schools. Paul enjoyed golf and sailing, but most of all he loved his family and friends. Funeral services will be held at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, January 31, 2026, at East Leonard Christian Reformed Church, 1027 Leonard St. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, with Rev. Ben Gandy officiating. Visitation will be held at the church on Saturday, one hour prior to the service, from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. Memorial contributions in Paul's memory may be made to East Leonard Christian Reformed Church.



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BANNER

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Yearbook is online!

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BANNER

WIERSMA, MARGE 97, passed to glory on 1/13/26 in Grand Rapids, MI. Her beloved John died in 2016. Survived by daughter Jane Thomas, son Mark Wiersma, 7 grandchildren, 6 great grandchildren. www.zaagman.com

Employment

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Dog Outreach

It's wonderful how many people who wouldn't even make eye contact with me will stop to greet her.



Kathy Vanderkloet worked for over 30 years in Nigeria with Resonate Global Mission, retiring in 2020. She and Ginny live in Toronto, where she attends Fellowship CRC Etobicoke.

GINNY, THE DOG, is the best tool in my outreach toolkit.

She's not my dog. She belongs to my nephew and his wife, but I get to walk her from time to time.

Ginny is my icebreaker. It's wonderful how many people who wouldn't even make eye contact with me will stop to greet her. Expressionless faces break into smiles when they see her. And she will happily adore anyone who adores her. People rarely ask what my name is but almost always ask hers.

I remember a time I was walking along the St. Clair River with her. Ahead of us was an older man, probably homeless, hunched over and looking down at the sidewalk as he shuffled along in his broken-down shoes. As we overtook him I shortened Ginny's leash and pulled her aside to pass. But Ginny would have none of it. Straining against her leash, she went right up to him and put her nose in his hand. He stopped, and for the next minute or two they exchanged love and adoration. Finally he turned his head slightly, peered up at me, and said, "Can I borrow her for a few days? I'm so lonely."

Caught completely unprepared, I stammered an inane reply to his question while ignoring his need and quickly moved on.

Then there was Easter Tuesday. The weather was glorious, there were signs of spring everywhere—a perfect day for a walk in the nearby cemetery. As we cut through a municipal parking lot we met a parking authority employee, broom and dustbin in hand, sweeping up the trash from the asphalt. As usual, Ginny headed straight for him. I thought he was a bit apprehensive at her approach, but when he tentatively put out a gloved hand, I let her come close. He smiled as he greeted her, then looked at me and asked

in heavily accented English, "Who create dis dok?"

I smiled back and replied, "God did!"

His smile increased, ear to ear, and he said, "Jesus is coming!"

"Amen!" I replied. "He is risen and he is coming indeed!" And we talked a bit. Rarely do people stop to speak to him. I probably wouldn't have either, if it weren't for Ginny. He is responsible for cleaning up 44 of Toronto's municipal parking lots. It's an endless job, between the garbage dropped by careless passers-by and blown in by wind gusts. I thanked him for his good work, and we moved on.

Ginny has taught me a lot. She makes no distinctions between class, gender, ethnicity, or religion. She treats everyone like friends. I'm learning to look strangers in the eye and greet them, stopping if they show any inclination to talk.

Did I say Ginny is the best tool in my outreach kit? Not true.

Ginny is the best teacher I know. 

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