

1866-2026



BANNER

JULY/AUGUST 2026

THE BANNER.ORG

A photograph of a woman with short dark hair, smiling and singing into a microphone. She is wearing a light-colored jacket over a white shirt and a colorful patterned guitar strap. She is holding an acoustic guitar. The background is a blurred indoor setting, possibly a church or a performance space.

Synod 2026

RENEWING HOPE IN EVERY STORY

STORIES often start small. Like 1000 days of healthy food and care to start a baby's life. But rarely do stories stay small.

When you give a gift to a mother and her child, you are changing the story of health for an entire family. Please give today.

Samita
MOTHER, KENYA

Give to a story:
worldrenew.net
worldrenew.ca



A Ministry of the Christian Reformed Church



STEWARDS FUND

Donor-Advised Fund

Streamlined Giving. Exceptional Service. Christian Values.

READY TO GET STARTED?

Begin the *simple process* of setting up your Stewards Fund account today!

 BarnabasFoundation.org

 info@BarnabasFoundation.org

 888.448.3040



"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.



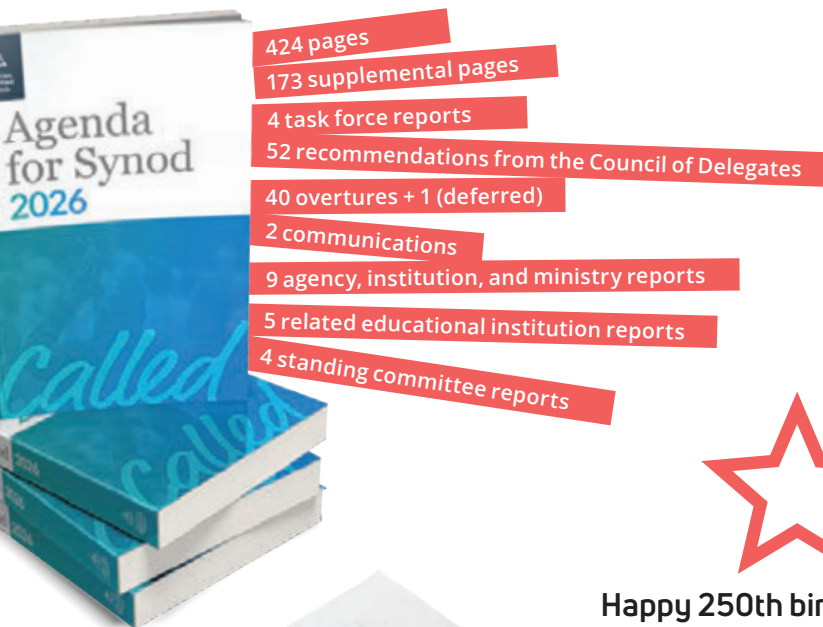
BANNER

BY THE NUMBERS

The *Banner's* reflections and coverage of Synod 2026 begin with newly appointed editor-in-chief Lora Copley's editorial on page 7 and continue with 22 pages of news from page 16 onward.

Here's a thumbnail of what synod covered.

Synod 2026's Agenda



WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » Church Worldwide: Preaching Peace Amid War in Congo
- » Book: *Gaudi: God's Architect*
- » Movie: *Remarkably Bright Creatures*
- » Music: *Woodcut*, by Big, Big Train

FEATURES



When Divorce Feels Like Losing the Church Too

Shaun Furniss // How do we respond?



Faith Matters: When it is Not Well with My Soul

Dan Veeneman // Sometimes you can't fake it.



Truth in the Inmost Being: The Slow Work of Character Formation

Chuck DeGroat // Character is not something we drift in and out of.



Cover: Cathryn Jo, Korean Connector with the Office of General Secretary, led a choir of Korean delegates during a Synod 2026 time of worship. There are more than 100 Korean churches in the denomination's total of 908 congregations.

NEWS

18 The Start of a Movement, the Next 10 Years in the CRC

26 CRCNA to Leave World Communion of Reformed Churches

38 Future-focused Canadian National Gathering

COLUMNS

7 Editorial: Magnify the Lord

Lora Copley // This was the big vision of Synod 2026.

10 Big Questions

Why do we practice child baptism?

14 The Other Six: The Ripple of Discipleship

Vickie Stromak // People can create a chain of faithfulness.

40 Candidates: God Builds His House

Susan LaClear // So what's our job?

43 The Banner Turns 160: Tale of the CRC Printing Press

Gayla Postma // It determined the size of the headquarters.

47 Confessional Corner: Basic Christianity: Heidelberg Catechism, Part 2

Mary VandenBerg // Let's take a deeper look.

48 Mixed Media: Golden Insights Await Theo Readers

Plus, a roundup of books and music for the summer.

59 Discover: Moon Notes

Cindy Verbeek // The moon does more than you might think!

63 Still: Good Ol' What's Her Name

Rod Hugen // Just a couple of mistakes.

Corrections

"Classis Watch: Winter 2026" (May/June 2026, p. 16) should have said Kristen Pikaart was honorably released from ministry via Art. 14-c.

The May/June article, "160 Years of Editorial Freedom" should have said, "In 1884, synod showed the continual difficulty in finding the right balance. Synod 1884 warned that *De Wachter*, the Dutch-language predecessor of *The Banner*, 'may not ... weaken the ecclesiastical and religious unity of our people. Synod reminds the writers to be moderate in their expressions.'"

OUR SHARED MINISTRY

Editor Kristen Parker, CRC Communications and Marketing



Healed Minds Bend Toward Justice

Naomi Bula // Healing trauma must happen first.

54 The View From Here: Leadership in the Wilderness

Zachary King // Maybe some things can only be lived, not taught.

BANNER

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

Editor Lora A. Copley

Associate Editor Sarah Heth Sundt

News Editor Alissa Vernon

Mixed Media Editor Lorilee Craker

Art Director Dean R. Heetderks

Contact Us 300 E Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208 info@TheBanner.org

Address Changes and Subscriptions 800-777-7270 or visit TheBanner.org

Classified Advertising 616-224-0725 classifieds@TheBanner.org

Display Advertising 616-224-5882 ads@TheBanner.org

Editorial 616-224-0824 editorial@TheBanner.org

News news@TheBanner.org

To Advertise: Place your classified ads, including obituaries, online at thebanner.org/classifieds, or email ads@TheBanner.org, or fax it 616-224-0725.

Published bimonthly. Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Mich., Postmaster, send address changes to: *The Banner*, 300 East Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506-1208. Canadian publications mail agreement #40063614. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: *The Banner*, 3475 Mainway, PO Box 5070, STN LCD 1, Burlington, ON, L7R 3Y8. Copyright 2026, Christian Reformed Church in North America. Printed in USA. *The Banner* (ISSN0005-5557). Vol. 161, No. 4, 2026.

Member of the Associated Church Press and Evangelical Press Association.



Christian Reformed Church

Loan Fund

DEDICATED *TO OUR* DENOMINATION'S TOMORROW

NOW LENDING TO CRCNA-RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

Schools and ministries can now access loans for real estate purchases, renovations, expansions, and new construction projects.

Together we are investing in faith communities for the next generation.

Financing for

- Churches
- Schools
- Ministries

Join the hundreds of CRCNA churches and thousands of investors who have trusted the Loan Fund since 1983.

Magnify the Lord: The Big Vision of Synod '26

Can this vision
catch fire
among our 49
classes and 900-
some churches?



Lora Copley is editor for *The Banner*. She and her husband Joel have four kiddos, one of whom recently married. The Copleys worship at Trinity CRC in Ames, Iowa.

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

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

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

My dad used to say, “Lora, there’s an invisible magnifying glass in your hand. You can put it on yourself and your problems look real big. Or train that glass upon your Savior. Magnify the Lord. Everything gets in perspective.”

I pray Synod 2026 will be remembered for a magnifying glass put on Jesus and his gospel. I pray it will be recalled for a bigger vision and a burning focus.

We saw it in Zach King’s “Antioch moment” speech, reminding that because of Jesus, the CRC can have “the humble pivot” that moves mountains.

We saw it in Chad Steenwyk’s final message, to “preach Christ, who makes the dead live,” in our respective callings.

We saw it in the unified and applauding commitment around a 10-year plan that calls for every congregation to grow “disciple-making disciples” and every classis to plant churches.

And we saw it in worship, prayer huddles, and the gospel confessed from the floor. Jesus was magnified.

Acts 2 dreams surfaced in hallways and over cafeteria trays: can we ignite prayer groups in our churches toward this big vision? Can we do one-on-one discipleship? Could we plant one new church in every classis before the next World Cup?

Is this even possible? Will we actually pull together, in the horsepower gifts of the Spirit, toward a common vision?

Synod 2026 said, “We will, God helping us.”

Yet the skeptic in me resists, “Simmer down, Pollyanna! We’ve seen initiatives come and go.” Is this synod yet another sparkler—beautiful, bright, and quickly burnt out?”

Can this vision catch fire among our 49 classes and 900-some churches?

It depends where the magnifying glass is.

We must not put the magnifying glass on our own strength—our resources, wisdom, skills, or systems. We say “no” to pride.

Nor can we put it on our problems—vacant pulpits, empty pews, diminishing offerings. We say “no” to despair.

We look to a risen Lord! We come on our knees, in awe and need, before him. It is only because of Jesus that we can, as Tim Blackmon put it, “have a healthy disregard for the impossible.”

My son used a magnifying glass to focus sunlight onto wood. The concentrated light created enough heat to char and flame, leaving an indelible mark. (Our picnic table bears the proof!) The power wasn’t in the magnifying glass. The glass simply focused on what was already there.

We are the wood. (At times, even blockheads.) As our magnifying glass is on Jesus, the “Sun of righteousness,” his gospel beam is focused among us. This energy is not ours to manufacture; Jesus makes and sustains the flame.

Whether the vision of Synod 2026 catches fire will not be decided in Burlington or Grand Rapids. It will be decided in the basement prayer rooms of our ordinary churches. It *will* be decided around kitchen tables, in elder visits, in disciple-making Zoom calls and in councils willing to be all in for the gospel.

I agree with those who say God is up to something in the CRC. It won’t be easy. At times we will disappoint and hurt each other. At times we will fall short of the vision we strain toward.

But what a Lord! And what a gospel we proclaim: the “power of God unto salvation.” The power of God unto a new day in the CRC.

“Come, magnify the Lord with me.” 



When Divorce Feels Like Losing the Church Too

By Shaun Furniss

I didn't just lose my spouse; I didn't just lose my marriage—I feel like I lost my church, too." That's the heartbreaking cry of many who've walked through divorce. The questions we as the church must ask are, "How do we respond? How do we minister to hurting people well?"

Twenty years of Christian counseling has taught me that no two individuals or marriages are the same. Though biblical principles are universal, applications are unique to the people and their circumstances. Attempts to provide cookie-cutter answers can be insensitive toward the complexities one might be facing and, in the end, might do more harm than good.

My goal is to offer a biblical lens for a challenging subject—how the church understands, relates to, and cares for those who have experienced divorce. Naturally, we begin in Genesis, where the story of marriage is introduced.

Why Marriage Is So Sweet

We read in Genesis 2:24 that marriage is a union between one man and one woman where they become one flesh. Our marital mathematics is $1 + 1 = 1$. God put this oneness together to go far beyond physical intimacy. It's about the covenantal and complementary union of a man and woman—socially, emotionally, legally, and spiritually.

Being made in God's image as male and female does not mean sameness but equality—within a complementary design (Gen. 1:26-28). Thus, the nature of the marital relationship (two persons, yet one flesh) was shaped by our heavenly Father to reflect the image of our triune God (three persons, yet one God) in a way we could not do on our own.

God intends that marriage reflect the oneness found within the Godhead. It's no wonder Satan intentionally moved to destroy the union God made between our first parents (Gen. 3). Our fall into sin inclines our hearts to rebel against our Creator. We reflect

our image rather than his through our selfishness and sin. What was intended to display the beauty of our triune God is now twisted to find in a spouse what can only be found in the Savior. When we feel as if our expectations are unmet or when our spouse is not the savior we had hoped them to be, the marriage is strained. It can break under the weight of selfish and sinful actions and expectations.

To guard against this, we seek and sustain marriage with God's purpose in mind. A sinner saved by grace approaches marriage saying, "Through Jesus, God has shown me amazing grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love. I'm called to pass this goodness on, especially in my marriage." The beauty of the gospel is that, in a way that was impossible before the fall, marriage can now display God's power through forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration within a covenant, just as Christ loves and forgives his church, with whom he is in a covenantal union (Eph. 5:22-32). When two Christians marry, they have the

opportunity to live out the unique oneness of marriage and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our marriages should make it easier for others to believe the gospel.

Why Divorce Hurts So Much

All this gospel beauty does not mean we are unaffected by our sinful nature or immune from the evil one who continues to attack marriages. As we live between garden gates and heaven, we experience brokenness, bitterness, and betrayal in marriage that can lead to divorce. When divorce is experienced within a family and within a church family, there is not only the spiritual, emotional, and legal aspects to be addressed, but the social aspect as well.

Though divorce is devastating for many reasons, one reason is it breaks the marriage math of $1 + 1 = 1$. Divorce divides the one back into two separate lives. Now, $1 + 1 = 2$. The oneness of marriage involves trust, intimacy, a shared history, expectations for the future, roles, responsibilities, and more, where our identity is intertwined with another. When that oneness is broken, healing can be slow. Finding your personal identity apart from the former spouse can be difficult. When the oneness is broken, there are ripple effects as immediate families change, extended family relationships experience tension, friendships are stressed, and church life feels complicated and uncertain.

The Church's Calling To The Brokenhearted

It's important for the church to recognize the shame and struggles people face during divorce, as well as the insecurity and isolation that might make it difficult to even walk again through the church doors. It is common to be plagued by questions and fears that

The church...
recognizes that
though divorce
might have
broken the
covenantal bonds
of a marriage,
the church must
not add to that
brokenness.

might include wondering what life looks like being single, what the future holds, and whether one will lose one's church family now that one's family no longer looks the same.

The church is called to understand and shepherd such fears. It recognizes that though divorce might have broken the covenantal bonds of a marriage, the church must not add to that brokenness by breaking another covenant and abandoning a brother or sister in the Lord. We, through Christ, are bound to one another in an everlasting promise based on his love and faithfulness. Satan would love to reinforce lies and isolation through the means of the church. Though divorce breaks the oneness in marriage, it does not remove a person from God's everlasting covenant in Christ.

What It Looks Like To Keep Covenant

So, what does this call look like practically? Here are a few suggestions:

- » Encourage gospel-oriented counseling.
- » Provide tangible expressions of care (meals, child care, car maintenance).

- » Discourage gossip; instead, communicate a commitment to walk alongside those who are hurting.
- » Minister through presence and listening, making space for grief and hurt.
- » Encourage healing through what's called "the ordinary means of grace" (for example, joining the church in worship, hearing God's promises in his Word, prayer, etc).
- » Recognize those hurting as brothers and sisters in Christ instead of labeling or defining people by divorce.
- » Reinforce our identity in Christ, the Spirit's work, and wisdom's slow pace. Discourage the temptation to rush into another relationship to experience oneness prematurely.

When life feels fractured and uncertain because of divorce, it can be the steady covenantal presence of the church that becomes the embodied reminder of the gospel and declares that Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you. When the church understands the covenant promises of God, it can minister to those who have experienced the heartache that comes when a covenant has been broken.

And when the church responds this way, we find that it, like marriage, can make it easier for others to believe in the gospel. 



Rev. Shaun Furniss serves as a pastor at Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Sparta, Mich. He earned his Master's degree in marriage and family therapy and counseling, and Master of Divinity from Reformed Theological Seminary.

BIG QUESTIONS

Church/Bible/Doctrine

Why do we practice child baptism?

The baptism debate is often framed as an either-or: either you baptize children (paedobaptism) or you baptize those who profess faith (credobaptism—either older children or adults). For some of our brothers and sisters in Christ, as in the Baptist tradition, this is a fair rendering of the debate.

For those of us in the Reformed tradition, however, we baptize children of believers and adults who come to faith (if, of course, they were not baptized as a child). Perhaps in your own church you have been witness to both, each a joyful and powerful sign and seal of God's promises to his people.

The Form for the Baptism of Adults (1978) in the gray Psalter Hymnal highlights our both-and in this way: "On the basis of the covenant the children of believers are to be baptized despite their inability to understand its meaning. Adults, however, should not be baptized until they have felt their sins and confess repentance and faith in Christ."

One of the persistent questions, then, is why we baptize children of believers. The baptism of those who repent and profess faith in Christ, for many, seems scripturally more evident (see Acts 2:37-39, 8:12, 8:35-37 for just a few

examples). Scripture explicitly tells us that adults who repented and believed were baptized; it does not explicitly tell us the same of children of believers (though it is difficult to believe that there were no children in any household that was baptized; see Acts 16:15, 16:33).

So why children? Theologian Herman Bavinck argues, "The validity of infant baptism depends exclusively on how Scripture regards the children of believers and hence wants us to regard them." And we firmly believe that Scripture regards children of believers as members of the covenant. The Form for the Baptism of Children emphasizes this as the consistent and persistent story of Scripture (Gen. 17:7, Acts 2:39, Mark 10:16, 1 Cor 7:14), reminding us that "since baptism has replaced circumcision, our children should be baptized as heirs of God's kingdom and of his covenant (Service for Baptism, 1976)."

God's call to baptize those who cannot yet outwardly respond to the gospel (children of believers) is also powerful testament to the reality that God calls us and has chosen his people from eternity, "by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of his will" (Canons of Dort I.7), not on account of what we have done but on account of his goodness. As such, he is the one who draws us, softens our hearts,

grants us faith and repentance, and calls us into his kingdom. What a gift of grace!

Jessica Joustra (Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary, Vrije Universiteit) is associate professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, serving formerly as assistant professor of religion and theology and director of the Albert M. Wolters Centre for Christian Scholarship at Redeemer University in Ontario, Canada.

Vocation

I enjoy my job, but my company is making it harder to combine work with a young family. Should I look for a new job?

We often think of vocation as our paid work, but a job is also a business contract. Furthermore, vocation is more than our jobs: God calls us to faithfulness in every area of life. While your current job might have been a good fit for a long time, it now seems to limit your ability to be present with your family.

Looking for a new job is indeed one option. This could give you more freedom to negotiate when, where, and how much you work, including flexibility around paid or unpaid time off. However, a job search takes time and energy you might not have, and it assumes there are job openings and room to negotiate.



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

Before taking that step, I recommend first praying, seeking to understand what fears, desires, and loves are shaping your thinking. Then try to understand why the recent decisions were made and whether there might be room for an exception, even a temporary one. Start by talking with your family about what would help most, including whether fewer hours or unpaid leave are feasible. If you have good relationships with coworkers, ask how recent changes have affected them and how they might be affected if you asked for an exception. Try to understand your workplace's and supervisors' values, such as collegiality, productivity, professionalism, independence, and/or profit, and use this knowledge to shape your request. When you speak with your supervisor, be honest about what you believe is best for you, while listening carefully to their concerns. Try to respond without getting defensive and ask others to pray that you speak wisely and graciously.

If changes related to your job aren't possible, talk with friends and family about what adjustments might be made in the rest of life to help you care for your family. This might include asking for help with childcare from your church or community, paying others to take care of household tasks, or simplifying meals. It might also mean setting aside work opportunities or extra activities for a season.

This is a lot, and there are no easy choices. As you look ahead, consider what you would most regret not doing in this season. Trust that God will give you wisdom, strength, and courage as you seek to be faithful in your whole life.

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

Digital Life

Should Christians use gendered pronouns for Alexa or Siri?

At a recent meeting of denominational publishers, a presentation was given by a vendor selling AI-powered software for publishers. Throughout the presentation, the salesperson talked about how our customers would be transformed if they could "Chat with your content." She said it so often, I had to interrupt and remind her we're talking about communicating with a machine, right? "Is it smart to use a word that suggests we are talking to a someone? Like a human someone?" I asked. She agreed it could be interpreted that way, but we couldn't come up with a nice, short way to say the same thing.

Then this "Big Question" came through. It's a good question, as studies show that the words we use for something affect how we think of that thing. And vice versa: what we think of something affects how we refer to it.

Humans alone are made in God's image; wisdom calls us to avoid blurring the distinction between people and machines.

That said, if we can all agree—and remember—that we are talking with a machine and not another human, I don't think it matters how we refer to it. In fact, for both Siri and Alexa, you can change the so-called wake word to anything male or female, animated or not. (For a machine that is always listening, "wake" seems misleading to

me, but I digress.) Maybe, to remind you that it's not a human, change the wake word to "machine," as in "Hey machine, how hot is it outside?" Or maybe, "Hey eavesdropper ..."

As fast as AI is progressing, though, I don't have high hopes that we, as a society, are going to be able to maintain the essential separation between humans and the machines, but we should try—and we definitely need to make sure our kids and grandkids know the difference. And for all to keep asking how these tools are shaping us and our understanding of what it means to be human.

Speaking of how to interact with these ever-more-natural-sounding machines, I ran across a good piece of advice for AI prompts (those written or spoken words we submit to AI hoping for a helpful and somewhat accurate response): Like that new kid at school who would say anything to make a new friend, AI is programmed to flatter you. It wants to be liked and kept close. But more often what we need is something closer to an old friend who will tell us the truth regardless. A columnist at Tech Brew (techbrew.com) suggested adding something like, "Please be critical but supportive; I want balanced feedback, not validation," to your prompt.

Dean Heetderks is director of CRC Ministry Support Services and art director of *The Banner*. What's your best idea for a more machine-like wake word? Tell him at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.

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

When it is Not Well with My Soul

My silence in that sanctuary wasn't a failure. It was worship in a different key.



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

THE HYMN began just as it always does.

"When peace like a river attendeth my way ..."

The congregation's voices swelled, the organ warmed the sanctuary, and something familiar rose up like the tide. I've sung this song dozens of times, maybe more. It's one of the great hymns of the faith, one I love deeply. The kind of song that feels like meeting an old friend in the pew beside you. Comforting melody. Steady truth.

But this time, something in me stalled.

As the chorus came, "It is well, it is well with my soul," I couldn't bring myself to join in. My lips stayed still. The words just didn't fit that Sunday. My body tried to sing, but my soul could not utter the words.

And I didn't want to fake it.

I stood among a sea of faithful voices, all proclaiming a deep, anchored peace. But I couldn't echo it. Not out of rebellion. Not from bitterness. But because, at that moment, it would have felt dishonest. I let the silence rise in me instead.

I stood in the sanctuary, the music moving all around me, and I asked, "Why? Why can't I sing? Am I doubting God? Am I just tired? Or is this a more honest kind of faith than I usually let myself live out loud?"

It wasn't just one thing weighing on me. There were many—a slow, quiet stacking of burdens. Some were close to home. Relationships that are frayed and needing repair. A loved one facing terrifying health news. A workload that had begun to stretch me paper-thin. Our church, stuck in a seemingly

endless pastoral search, and the waiting had turned from hopeful to heavy. And then there was the wider world, filled with wars, tragedies, divisions, and devastations echoing in every headline, inescapable every time I turned on any form of media.

Individually, perhaps I could bear each one. Yet together, they wore down the peace in me.

So no, that Sunday, it was not well with my soul.

For the first time in a long time, I allowed myself to admit it. Not just in the quiet corners of prayer, but right there, standing in the pews. I didn't sing. I couldn't. But I stayed. I let the words move around me, even if they couldn't come from me.

What surprised me in that stillness was that I didn't feel ashamed. I didn't feel weak or faithless or fraudulent. I felt invited. Not to perform. Not to push through. But to be still. To let God meet me right where I was, not where I pretended to be.

I thought of the Psalms, Psalm 42 in particular. "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him." Those three words, *I will yet*, have become something of a lifeline. They don't deny sorrow. They name it. But they also speak to something beyond the moment. A defiant hope. A faith that whispers from the valley rather than the mountaintop. A faith that doesn't need to shout, only to hold on.

Later that week, I reread the story behind the hymn. Horatio Spafford wrote "It Is Well with My Soul" after losing his four daughters in a shipwreck. He wrote it from the depths of grief. Suddenly the song sounded different to me. It wasn't a hymn of triumph. It was a hymn of survival,



a lifeline tossed from suffering,
anchored in Christ alone.

My silence in that sanctuary wasn't a failure. It was worship in a different key—a quieter key. I couldn't sing, but I was still there. Still listening. Still reaching. I believe that counted. In fact, I believe God heard it loud and clear.

One of the quiet mercies of the church is that we never worship alone. That Sunday, the voices of others carried what I could not. They sang the chorus for me. And someday, when someone else can't bring themselves to believe or sing, I will carry it for them. That is what it means to be the body of Christ. We do not all have to be strong at the same time. Sometimes, just showing up is enough.

Faith doesn't always sound like a mighty roar. Sometimes it sounds like a sigh. Sometimes it sounds like silence. Sometimes it's just standing still with open hands and a weary heart, trusting that the words will one day return.

They will. Not because of who I am, but because of who God is. He is faithful, even when I falter. He is steady, even when I shake. And he never once asks me to pretend.

So if next Sunday comes and I still can't sing, I will still come. I will still listen. I will still hope. Because even if it's not well with my soul, I know the One who speaks peace over the storm.

And that, even in silence, is enough. 

The Ripple of Discipleship

Multiplication
does not happen
all at once but
is passed, one
person at a time.

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." —2 Timothy 2:2

PAUL, WRITING TO HIS DISCIPLE

Timothy, shows multiplication does not happen all at once but is passed, one person at a time. The following story traces one such unfolding ripple of discipleship—ordinary men creating a chain of faithfulness.

Scott Vander Ploeg, senior pastor of Sunlight Community Christian Reformed Church in southern Florida, believed ministry prioritizes relationships. After seeing a calling in Jason that Jason didn't see, Scott began to meet with him to disciple him. Jason, a teacher, loved it! He served in youth ministry, but he never thought it would go any further. Nonetheless, Scott invested in him.

No matter how busy things were, Jason recalls how much it meant that "Scott always made the time for us to meet and made me feel like it was important to him." After this season of discipleship, Jason began to feel a further calling to full-time ministry. Scott then walked Jason through the process of obtaining his licensure to preach. Jason has gone on to become a church-planting pastor in Winter Garden, Fla.

Before that, God gave Jason the opportunity to disciple another. Jason met Jeff and saw his love and care for people, with a hunger for the Word as a foundation. Just as Scott saw it in Jason, Jason saw in Jeff that he was made for ministry before Jeff himself could see it. "Journeying through discipleship with Jason truly supercharged my faith!" Jeff said. "It forged a meaningful relationship that consistently challenged and encouraged (my) walk with Christ." Jeff is now the care pastor at Sunlight Community Church,

leading the church's care teams and community groups.

Jeff then discipled Nico, a faithful member of the church. During their time together, the same model was passed down from Scott, to Jason, to Jeff, to Nico: a meaningful relationship built through one-on-one discipleship. Nico's faith grew deeper roots as the discipleship journey helped establish key components of his faith. Like those that came before him, he was compelled to do more. Now, Nico recently received his Article 43, making him a preacher as his next step toward becoming a commissioned pastor.

Next, Nico discipled Nick, another faithful member of Sunlight Community Church with a thirst for knowledge about the faith he had become rooted in. Being discipled by Nico accelerated the calling Nick felt to pursue ministry. Nick said he was transformed by "experiencing the servant leadership that came before him" in Nico, Jeff, Jason, and Scott. Nick is now a preacher working on his Master of Divinity degree at Calvin Seminary.

This story is a visual testimony to how God uses purposeful relationships to grow people in the faith and compel them to see God's calling for their life and answer it. The model of servant leadership that prioritized people was a common thread throughout every one of their experiences in discipleship. There were many points when some of these men were asked about being pastors, and they all said, "No, it's not for me." However, God's plans were different. All of these individuals became licensed to preach in this denomination after their time in discipleship and had the unique experience of their discipleship mentor walking them through the licensure process.

Praise God for rewriting stories to be bigger than anything we plan for ourselves! 



Vickie Stromak resides in Fort Pierce, Fla., with her husband and daughter. Vickie's professional roles involve advocating for children in child welfare, but her passion for people extends to her involvement at Sunlight Community CRC.



THE STATE OF THEOLOGY

What Do Canadians Believe About God?

See for yourself with The State of Theology survey from Ligonier Ministries. For the first time ever, we've conducted this survey throughout Canada, revealing what people today think about core teachings of the Christian faith.

The 2026 key findings are now available and reveal significant confusion within the Canadian church, calling for clear and faithful Bible teaching. Explore the results today and gain insights for discipleship.



TheStateOfTheology.com/ca

Are We There Yet?

SYNOD 2026 NEWS

Reflections and reports from Synod 2026, which met on the campus of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich., on June 12-18.

Brought to you by:

Reporters: Gayla Postma, Isabelle Brown, and Ethan Meyers

Editors: Alissa Vernon, Sarah Heth Sundt, and Lora Copley

Photographer: Steven Herppich

Follow *The Banner* on social media:

» [Facebook.com/crcbanner](https://facebook.com/crcbanner)

Got a news tip?

Visit TheBanner.org/got-a-news-tip or contact the news editor at news@TheBanner.org.



This issue's synod team includes (from left) editor-in-chief Lora Copley; reporters Ethan Meyers, Gayla Postma, and Isabelle Brown; news editor Alissa Vernon; and art director Dean Heetderks.

The Christian Reformed Church in North America longs to be faithful. To be renewed. To be united. Members who served as delegates to Synod 2026 did their best to move the car a little further down the road, but there were bumps and swerves.

Mark Verbruggen, Classis Hamilton, observed, "Right now I feel like the doctrinalists are in the driver's seat, the pietists are riding shotgun, and the transformationists like myself have been relegated to the back seat, and that's OK. ... We're all in the same car, and we're all going in the same direction."

Direction—toward a 10-year plan for planting churches together—was set early on, with what seemed like enthusiastic buy-in for the blessing of a unified plan.

But the body began feeling less together as more of its advisory committees reported and floor discussion followed the familiar "for" and "against" pattern.

President Chad Steenwyk gently discouraged requesting vote counts, but the few that were given showed fairly even splits, for example 93 to 84, with one abstention, in favor of commissioning a study on Christian nationalism.

Votes sometimes swayed one way and then the other, such as over the recommendation to remain *in cooperation* with the Dutch denomination Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken. Amidst arguments against the move, synod chose to extend the *in cooperation* ecumenical status, but it also adopted instructions to narrowly guard the relationship.

In a few instances synod did not take the recommendation of its standing committee or interim committee and forged



The doctrinalists are in the driver's seat, the pietists are riding shotgun, and the transformationists like myself have been relegated to the back seat, and that's OK.

—Mark Verbruggen, Classis Hamilton

its own recommendations—dismissing a team formed in 2022 to promote the dignity of all members in situations of hurt in the church and exiting a communion of churches over moral and social justice stances that the majority of the body could not abide.

Synod said "no" to a study committee on ecclesiology, with some delegates saying such a report is too late in the game and the doctrine on what the church is to be is already clear; but synod said "yes" to redefining the CRC's mission and vision statements. It wants to keep meeting annually despite the cost and, although it rejected a request to allocate 50% of received ministry shares to the denomination's mission agencies, synod did ask for more financial transparency and recommended churches contribute 6-12% of their annual operating budget toward shared expenses, while hearing that some congregations can and do give more than that already.



Rules of the Road

Synod 2026 passed several changes to the CRC's ecclesiastical rule book, Church Order—updating the article for commissioned pastors; adding a supplement to describe how multisite congregations can function (p. 34); adding specifics to the article about consistories regulating worship services (p. 28); including “prayer” in the description of a minister’s call; adding provisions to Article 83 to allow discipline, in exceptional circumstances, by a broader assembly (p. 28); and adding a couple of words to the Article 5 gravamen process that has tripped up some congregations since Synod 2024 removed any ambiguity about the potential for long-term exceptions to doctrinal conscription (p. 31).

Changes or additions to the Church Order Supplement can go into effect now, but changes to the articles themselves need to be proposed by one synod and ratified by a subsequent synod. The Covenant for Officebearers, which serves as the doctrinal statement that pastors, elders, and deacons in the CRC sign to indicate their agreement with the confessional standards of the church, is referenced

in the Church Order. Synod decided that its proposal to remove reference to the contemporary testimony in the Covenant (p. 29) is significant enough that it should be ratified by a later synod.

Who Can Drive?

Synod considered changing membership requirements for Council of Delegates members, but decided not to restrict nominees to current or former officebearers (p. 24).

For board members of Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, and other denominationally appointed positions, Synod 2026 accepted the rubrics requested by Synod 2025, and synod made no change to the denominational employee policy of distinguishing between direct ministry staff and ministry support staff when it comes to requiring confessing membership in a Christian Reformed congregation. Synod was satisfied with Calvin’s efforts to see faculty and trustees in alignment with the church’s confessional convictions (p. 25).

Having decided last year that *The Banner* would “speak from a distinctly Reformed perspective in line with our confessions and synodical decisions, representing the CRCNA as its official publication,” Synod 2026 appointed the publication’s new editor-in-chief under the updated mandate (p. 32). The first woman to be appointed to the role, Lora Copley has been serving as interim editor since December.

Synod approved and celebrated 36 new candidates for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church. It also interviewed and appointed Christopher Fantuzzo, Ph.D, as professor of Old Testament to the seminary.

How Far Will We Go?

In some places we might contract. Previously established classes, such as Yellowstone and Grand Rapids East where the number of participating

churches has been reduced to five or seven congregations, have already been considering mergers or reconfiguring. Synod approved creating a task force to make recommendations about consolidations and/or overall restructuring of classes to Synod 2028 and it asked the Office of General Secretary to aid any current classes working toward mergers, without waiting for the report (p. 22).

In other places, the CRCNA is reaching further. Synod took note of the ongoing work of the Global Vision Team, expecting a report to Synod 2027. General secretary Zach King mentioned that the team, approved by Synod 2024 to strengthen relationships with churches outside North America, became necessary because of classes naturally making international connections. Venezuelan churches that have affiliated through Classis California South had representation at Synod 2026 in California South delegate José Piñero. And Synod 2026 heard presentations from several diverse communities within the CRC (p. 35), learning that 30% of the denomination is non-white.

The CRCNA longs to be faithful, renewed, and united. Are we there yet? No, but we just might be a little further down the road, in the same car, with a little bit of jostling for the wheel.

Synod president Steenwyk reminded the body that the way to keep the spark for the new vision that was ignited at Synod 2026 is to rest in God’s faithfulness to accomplish his purposes. “It is a new day in the CRC ... because his mercies are new every morning. Great is his faithfulness.”

—Alissa Vernon, news editor

The Start of a Movement, the Next 10 Years in the CRC

Synod 2026 adopted the 10-year strategic plan for church planting, presented by Resonate Global Mission on behalf of the collaborative team that worked to produce the strategy over the past year.

“Truly God has more for this denomination instead of an ongoing church decline,” said Tim Sheridan, Resonate’s director of church planting. He said the question of Synod 2025 was, “What are we going to do collectively?” And it only gave a year to return with a plan.

It starts with a plea for the church to lay a foundation of prayer and fasting, which Sheridan called “Project Antioch.”

From that foundation there are five other elements to prioritize: discipleship multiplication, leadership development, church planting pathways, legacy (or closing church) pathways, and funding and capacity development.

Sheridan said this is an action plan, not another report to sit on a shelf. It includes milestones: where does the church need to be in one year, three years, and five years in order to make these goals real? In one year the goal is that the CRCNA would have designed and aligned an ideal church plant journey with clear ownership across denominational agencies, classes, and congregations for each stage of multiplication—from disciple, to leader, to church planter, to launch—along with a funding plan to support implementation.

Both Sheridan and Kevin DeRaaf, Resonate’s executive director, emphasized there is no plan without the gospel. “At its heart it is the change of culture. ... It has to begin with a red-hot passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ,” DeRaaf said.

“The gospel has changed my life,” Sheridan said, and despite not having



I long to see the impact of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

—Tim Sheridan, Resonate Global Mission

ever imagined himself working in denominational ministry, he said God has led him to a place of deep conviction.

“To not allow the bureaucracy, or the fear of failure, or the voice that likes to whisper in my ear, ‘you don’t have enough,’ ‘you don’t have what it takes to pull this off,’ to set that aside. To cry out to the Lord, together, in unison and in desperation, and to lean in together for the sake of the gospel. I’m all in on this. I’m willing to give the next 10 years of my life to this. What could God do if we learn to trust one another and lean in together and sacrifice for the sake of this gospel?”

Scott Vander Ploeg, Classis Southeast U.S., who in 2023 and 2025 pushed to see the creation of this plan, said when it comes to moving from a plan to action, what synod decides “does very little.”

“I know that just voting won’t do it,” VanderPloeg said. “I would like to urge everyone to have a new commitment to the red-hot passion for the gospel. Start at the lowest level. I would urge everyone



Just voting won’t do it. I urge everyone to a new commitment to the red-hot passion for the gospel.

—Scott Vander Ploeg, Classis Southeast U.S.

in this room to commit to disciple two people intentionally.”

Ralph Wigboldus, Classis Ontario Southwest, echoed, “If you vote in favor of this, you are not just voting to tell other people what to do. You are voting to commit yourself to doing this.”

Sheridan said “activation” just takes responding in obedience to Jesus’ mission.

“Disciple-making begins with intentional relationships,” said Sheridan. True disciple-making depends on the transforming words of the Spirit, and growth occurs when disciples are entrusted with responsibility. “Disciples making disciples is a true mark that you have become a disciple.”

Ken Benjamins, Classis Niagara, asked about how to bring this passion to the local church and what are Resonate’s ideas to help them deal with the church’s current financial standing.

A 'Healthy Disregard for the Impossible'

De Raaf said there is no easy answer, but in the broader sense, "I don't think CRC has a cashflow problem, we have a vision problem," and if the church agrees to the vision together, the resources will come.

On April 30 one possibility to support funding came as an invitation from the Lilly Endowment to apply for a substantial grant to strengthen denominational growth for church planting, Sheridan said.

Jean Gomes, Classis Grandville, said, "One of the greatest difficulties in church planting is finding church planters." Gomes left Brazil in a local church where there were 11 church plants going on. He's now committed to a church plant in Grand Rapids, and his question was, "Can we have access to a pool of church planters ready to go?"

Sheridan responded in saying that the goal is to make disciples to make multiple generations of those disciples that will be church planters. "Our work is to come alongside them and support them in that." Though not everyone is called to plant.

"The tip of the iceberg is these global connections that just keep multiplying," Sheridan said. If God continues to bless connections, such as those being made recently with ministry partners in the Middle East, Resonate is open to receiving missionaries from other parts of the world who will come to North America to plant churches. By this they might find themselves in a pool.

Andrew Sytsma, Classis Yellowstone, also a church planter, said, "I'm all in, and I need your help." Praying together are muscles we need to exercise more, he said. Discipleship and church planting are things the church must learn from each other. "We need to do this together."

The vote to approve the plan was unanimous with standing applause, followed by synod singing together, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow."

—Isabelle Brown

Drawing from the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed (Luke 13:18-21), pastor Tim Blackmon reminded Synod 2026 that the Kingdom of God operates on a radically different scale as he led the all-synod service of prayer and praise on Sunday evening.

"A mustard seed is a speck," small and visually insignificant. "If the wind blows, it's gone." It's like a fleck of dust. "By any worldly measure it's nothing," Blackmon said.

Leaven is also small and ordinary, "easily overlooked." Jesus begins here, Blackmon said, because the kingdom starts small, ordinary and unimpressive.

In this kingdom, "the hidden, dark places are the laboratory of God. He's at work where no one is looking."

Blackmon, pastor of Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, Mich., the convening church of Synod 2026, admitted that past synods' "meticulous documentation of our exponential decline" gets to him. "It makes you wonder about the future, when all you have is a mustard seed. This is exactly why these two parables are so critical."

"You can have confidence in the future because God works in the hidden little ways. ... What if our greatest struggles are a divine strategy for getting us where we need to go?" This allows us to have confidence in God's word, in people's prayers, and therefore to have "a healthy disregard for the impossible."

Even when some say it cannot be done, or the challenge is too great, we can see "a landscape of possibility" because God



You can have confidence in the future because God works in the hidden little ways.

—Tim Blackmon, pastor of Second CRC in Grand Haven, Mich.

loves to redeem and work through the vast exponential power of the Holy Spirit.

A brass quartet and the organist, from Second CRC, shared in leading worship at Calvin University's Fine Arts Center. Elders and deacons served communion.

—Isabelle Brown

Synod Encourages Churches: Thrive is There

As Synod 2026 approved the 10-year church-planting strategy for the denomination, it also acknowledged a just-as-important need to seek renewal in existing churches. Receiving a renewal report from Thrive, synod invited churches to make use of the ministry's church renewal plan and made note of the staff's efforts to work with classes to address membership decline.

Thrive has a clear, facilitated process for churches to seek

and determine their congregation's call in God's plan, congregational renewal consultant Elaine May told delegates. "Nothing is more attractive than a church that knows who they are in Christ, understands the mission he has entrusted them with, and is sharing that mission broadly in their community," May said.

Gary van Leeuwen, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, testified to Thrive's effectiveness as a support. When his classis faced some problems, including with an individual church, "Thrive was there."

"There are a lot of good people in Thrive" who are very well qualified, van Leeuwen said, strongly encouraging synod to promote the ministry's availability and expertise.

Andrew Sytsma, Classis Yellowstone, expressed gratitude for Thrive's collaboration with Resonate, saying as the mission agency has just challenged all delegates to be "all-in," he's "encouraged and motivated to work together."

—Isabelle Brown



When my classis needed help, Thrive was there.

—Gary van Leeuwen, Alberta South/Saskatchewan

2005 Vision Statement (now under review)

The Christian Reformed Church is a diverse family of healthy congregations, assemblies, and ministries expressing the good news of God's kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide.

Mission and Vision Statements to be Revised

Synod 2026 agreed that the Christian Reformed Church in North America needs vision and mission statements that are more specific and better reflect the Christ-centered vision of the CRCNA. It asked the general secretary to form a group to work on this over the next year.

The decision came in response to a request from Classis Minnkota, which asked that the current mission and vision statements be replaced.

Synod said the new statements should "emphasize the work of the Triune God—revealed in Christ, proclaimed in the gospel, and lived out through the great commission—in keeping with our Reformed identity."

The vision statement was last updated in 2005, the mission statement in 1997. Delegates agreed it's time for a change, suggesting the current statement is too broad and doesn't explain what makes the CRC truly Reformed.

Brittany Clark, Classis Grand Rapids North, said it's important to know, as the CRC, what makes us specifically unique, and to be proud of who we are. "I think these statements are good for us as the church, and they're not just for us; they are for outsiders looking in to know who we are."

Darren Kornelis, Classis Central Plains, said, "I have been thoroughly encouraged by what appears to be a very positive vision and direction for the CRCNA with the 'desire for renewal and church planting.' New statements to reflect that make sense.

Kaitlyn Hofsink, young adult representative, agreed. "As we invite new people to participate in the CRC, we should be clear what that means. ... Having an opportunity to revise is a really timely thing right now."

—Isabelle Brown



These statements are not just for us; they are for outsiders looking in to know who we are.

—Brittany Clark, Classis Grand Rapids North

Synod Requests Study On Christian Nationalism

Responding to a request from Classis Grand Rapids East, Synod 2026 affirmed the Christian Reformed Church's historic teaching on church and state, as articulated in Belgic Confession Article 36, and approved a study committee to define the parameters of Christian Nationalism and offer pastoral response and guidance.



The vote for requesting the study was 93 in favor, 84 against, with one abstention.

Synod mandated the committee will have binational representation from the U.S. and Canada, include at least one faculty member from Calvin Theological Seminary, and report to Synod 2028. Delegates had extended discussion on the matter.

J.P. Trabbold, Classis Central California, spoke against the study. "Our denomination should not be seeking to respond to every buzzword that comes in the culture," Trabbold said. "It is a matter that's too broad to define. People that call themselves Christian nationalists, they fall into different camps."

Jeff Fisher, Classis Grand Rapids East, spoke in favor of further study. "As we've already affirmed ... the conflation of church and state needs to be addressed, and as noted, there's a broad scope of definitions for Christian nationalism, and that needs to be addressed."

Some delegates expressed concern about the study committee being able to provide clarity. "It's such a broad spectrum, I don't know how we define and put

Patriotism is a good thing, regardless of what country we live in, but it can very easily slip into becoming the ultimate thing.

—Brandon Haan, Classis Grandville

a corral around this term," Issy LaBrosse, Classis Greater Los Angeles, said. "We could spend a lot of money on better things than trying to define Christian nationalism."

Dan Tracy, Classis Heartland, also thought the study was unnecessary. "I think our local churches are qualified to do this (sort out concerning forms of Christian Nationalism)."

Brandon Haan, Classis Grandville, said. "Patriotism is a good thing, regardless of what country we live in, but it can very easily slip into becoming the ultimate thing. Anytime you have the conflation of nation and church, I think you start to lose what the true gospel is, and instead of baptizing people into the salvation of Jesus Christ, we start slipping into baptizing them into a certain ethnic, or national, or cultural heritage instead."



Our denomination should not be seeking to respond to every buzzword that comes in the culture.

—J.P. Trabbold, Classis Central California

Synod rejected "the conflation of the spheres of church and state assigned by God in his Word."

It requested a report that "defines the parameters of Christian Nationalism, describes its cultural appeal in the North America context, provides an account of its historical iterations world-wide, explores its doctrinal relation to the Three Forms of Unity and a Reformed approach to Scripture, and provides a pastoral response and guidance." One negative vote was registered.

—Ethan Meyers

Keep Parliamentarian, No More Annual Luncheon

Synod 2026 approved several changes to how the annual synod of the Christian Reformed Church operates after the Office of General Secretary completed a review at the request of last year's synod.

The most debated item was the role of a parliamentarian at each synod, a role that was established in 2019. Although the recommendation from the review was to eliminate the position because there are sufficient resources from staff, delegates disagreed.

"I've seen when things got contentious, and the parliamentarian speaks into things," said Jason Crossen, Classis Huron, who served at four of the past five synods. "(The parliamentarian) has more impartiality and comes up with something all of us missed."

Some things are changing:

- » Synods will no longer be expected to provide opportunities for ministry-related learning, a practice that had been happening for about 10 years.
- » Guidance for the annual synodical Sunday worship service now includes an expectation that all synod delegates will attend.
- » The deadline for having study committee reports in the hands of the churches has moved from Nov. 1 to Dec. 1 to give study committees more time to complete their work.
- » Synod will no longer distinguish between study committees and task forces, both of which are groups that study a specific issue to report to a future synod. Instead, only study committees will be appointed and will be distinguished by the nature of committee membership and timeline for reporting.
- » Synod suspended the practice of holding a noon luncheon to honor retiring denominational leaders and seminary professors and directed the Office of General Secretary to work with the officers of synod each year to identify the best way to accomplish these purposes within the synod's schedule.

—Gayla R. Postma

Continue to Meet Annually, Study Classis Restructuring

Synod 2026 rejected a recommendation from its Council of Delegates to move to a biennial meeting instead of meeting annually. Though there is a need to balance costs and revenue, that was a move delegates weren't willing to make. They noted that the savings are not enough to justify a change and that this is a significant time in the life of our denomination when unity and strengthening are needed.

Delegates spent more time discussing the options for restructuring classes and a proposal for a task force to advise on the best way to do that.

Brandon Haan, Classis Grandville, didn't favor a task force. "We do need to reorganize our classes," he said. "It makes sense that individual classes have the conversations first."

Gary van Leeuwen, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, urged delegates to remember that restructuring is about classis health above all, not just about money.

Josh Dykstra, Classis Illiana, was wary about gerrymandering. "We already have effectively theological classes—churches that should be in one classis (geographically) but are in another," he said. "There are so many factors here."

Ben Gresik, Classis Eastern Canada, noted that the last time synod did redistricting was in 1936. "We're asking a task force to make recommendations. The idea is to be helpful, not going in with authority."

Synod voted to establish a task force, including representation from each of the six classical regions, to make recommendations about restructuring to Synod 2028.

While the task force is doing its work, synod asked the Office of General Secretary to aid any current classes working toward mergers, without having to wait for the completion of the task force.

—Gayla R. Postma



The idea is to be helpful, not going in with authority.

—Ben Gresik, Classis Eastern Canada

Synod 2026 Discusses Ministry Share Spending and Giving

In a conversation about the financial health of the Christian Reformed Church, Synod 2026 recognized the need to rebuild trust in the ministry share system and how those funds are allocated.

Ministry shares are the pooled, undesignated gifts member congregations contribute to shared denominational costs. Before 2020 the CRC requested a certain amount (determined each year by synod) from each congregation. But in 2020 the denomination began asking each congregation and classis to pledge the amount it would contribute.

Whatever is pledged and received, synod wants to know how the funds are being spent, including reports on salary ranges, the number of full-time-equivalent employees by agency, and the head count. It asked the Office of General Secretary to provide each classis complete financial statements along with explanatory materials by November. Currently, consolidated financial reports for the denomination's various ministries are included in synod agendas.

Ren Tubergen, Classis Thornapple, said transparency should not be an issue. "This must be done at a more granular level than we are getting," Lucas tenBrink, Classis Holland, agreed, suggesting it's not unreasonable considering how great an influence the denomination has.

Jeff Fisher, Classis Grand Rapids East, noted that there are already existing tables and charts that help us understand the work being done. "It just needs to be presented in a way accessible to classis."

Al Postma, executive director-Canada, told delegates the audited statements are available in incredible detail. He said that he and Dan DeKam, director of U.S. ministry operations, know that the way they communicate about the finances is something that can be improved. "We've been looking at it, working in the background about communicating effectively



We know that the way we communicate about the finances can be improved. We're taking this to heart.

—Al Postma, executive director-Canada

about the finances," he said. "We're taking this to heart."

Synod also adopted a range of giving to help guide churches, recommending 6-12% of a church's annual operating budget. As giving reflects the way the Lord has blessed each church uniquely, some churches might and do give above this range.

Wilmar Bakker, Classis Huron, noted that delegates were questioning transparency in expenses but not transparency in giving. "It's important to have transparency on what people are giving" as well.

Michael Ten Haken, outgoing president of the Council of Delegates, said there really isn't a way to hold congregations accountable for giving, and it isn't wise. "It's a covenant (in which) we hold each other accountable when we agree to do these things together."

Synod turned down a proposal that 50% of all ministry shares be devoted to the



We hold each other accountable when we agree to do these things together.

—Michael Ten Haken, Council of Delegates

mission agencies Reframe and Resonate, noting that would actually hinder those ministries because it would reduce the shared support provided to all the ministries.

The good news? Since February, ministry share pledges have gone up by \$500,000.

—Gayla R. Postma

88

The number of first-time delegates to Synod 2026.

Synod Sets Three Categories for Commissioned Pastors

Synod 2026 accepted changes to the office of commissioned pastor, presented in a report from the denomination's Candidacy committee.

At one time called "ministry associate" and "evangelist," the office of commissioned pastor is one of two recognized pastoral offices in the Christian Reformed Church, along with the position of Minister of the Word.

A minister's ordination is to the denomination as a whole, while commissioned pastors are ordained within a classis for a specific role in that classis. That can now explicitly include "extending ministry into noncongregational settings, such as chaplaincy or missions."

Synod approved three general categories for commissioned pastors: specialized congregational ministers, church planters, and ministers in noncongregational roles.

Newly added to the general characteristics of commissioned pastors is that "these roles should have a primary function of equipping the body of Christ for the work of ministry" and "the job description should make clear that the role is 'pastoral' and 'representative' for the congregation, often—but not always—involving pastoral actions traditionally identified as 'official acts of ministry,' as described in Supplement, Art. 18."

The changes to the office of commissioned pastor come at a time when about 17% of churches in the denomination have no pastor. The Candidacy committee recognized that "training routes that were once the exception have gradually become more of the norm throughout recent decades."

As pastors come to the CRC from a wide range of educational pathways, the changes are intended to "foster the (potential commissioned pastor's) knowledge of Reformed theology and sense of connection to the classis and denomination," the report said.

—Ethan Meyers

18

women were delegated to Synod 2026.

Council of Delegates Members Don't Have to Be Ordained

Synod said no to a request from Classis Zeeland that membership on the Council of Delegates going forward include only current or former officebearers. While not restricted to pastors, deacons, and elders, all Council of Delegates members sign a statement of agreement with the beliefs of the Christian Reformed Church, similar to the Covenant for Officebearers.

The Council acts in the interim of annual synods. Delegates to synod

must be currently serving officebearers who have signed the Covenant that signifies their agreement with the Christian Reformed doctrinal standards.

Prior to the mid-1990s, the interim committee was all ordained people, and some delegates thought it should still be that way. Dirk Koetje, Classis Zeeland, said in times when the Council does the work of synod it functions as an ecclesiastical body. In 2020 and 2021, when no synods took place because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council of Delegates met in special session in lieu of synod.

Michael Ten Haken, chair of the Council of Delegates, told synod that every Council member signs the statement of agreement, and classes have latitude in who they nominate as their delegate. "I sense a lack of trust, but these individuals are vetted in classis and denominational process," Ten Haken said.

Kees Rystenbil, Classis Eastern Canada, favored keeping the criteria wide, saying the Council deals with many different issues, including legal and financial, and needs to be able to attract individuals with those skills.

Ashley Bonnes, Classis Northern Michigan, agreed. "This allows space for other voices to be heard." Mark Verbruggen, Classis Hamilton, concurred. "We have at-large members so that we can hear the voice of women," he said. "This (restricting membership to officebearers) would severely limit the voice of women in this denomination."

—Gayla R. Postma



This allows space for other voices to be heard.

—Ashley Bonnes, Classis Northern Michigan

Synod 2026 Accepts Calvin's Confessional Alignment Efforts



Synod 2026, meeting on the campus of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich., expressed appreciation for the educational institution of the Christian Reformed Church and encouraged the university to continue in its confessional alignment efforts, particularly in the area of sexual ethics.

Calvin president Greg Elzinga told synod, "When we hire faculty, we are not simply looking to fill a position. We are inviting them into a covenant community with a

When we hire faculty, we are not simply looking to fill a position. We are inviting them into a covenant community.

—Greg Elzinga, president Calvin University

dual commitment to confessional integrity and academic calling." Calvin is clear about teaching from a Reformed perspective, Elzinga said, and it provides a three- to six-year period of intentional formation for new faculty to study and engage deeply with the Reformed confessions. "We don't require every faculty member to arrive with a full understanding. Teaching at Calvin requires openness and commitment to the journey." In rare cases a faculty member can be given an indefinite exception on a particular point of doctrine.

"I think Calvin has done a good job to adhere to synod's guidelines," said Brandon Haan, Classis Grandville, noting that Synod 2025 said that too. "How many synods are we going to keep challenging what the university is doing? I think we can commend the university for working this out."

Synod encouraged the university to continue to pursue full confessional alignment of its Board of Trustees and affirmed the board's commitment to disclose to future synods, for synodical approval, any nominees who have confessional exceptions, and the rationale for trustee appointments.

The board has 31 trustees, 16 of whom represent classes of the CRC and must be confessionally aligned. The remaining 15 can be non-CRC delegates.

Elzinga reported that the vast majority of delegates are in alignment. "Since 2022, every trustee has been confessionally aligned."

—Gayla R. Postma

Synod 2026 Celebrates 36 New Candidates For Ministry



Charged to "faithfully carry the love and the truth of Jesus Christ into

the places where God has placed them," 36 new candidates for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church were presented to Synod 2026.

Fourteen of the 36 candidates for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church celebrated at Synod 2026.

That's almost double the number from 2025.

Calvin Theological Seminary president Jul Medenblik offered a message emphasizing the enormity of a pastoral calling. "You can't put God in a box, but we tend to be 'boxy' people," Medenblik said. "God will call you to more."

As delegates to synod gathered around candidates to extend hands toward each of them, synod president Chad Steenwyk prayed. "I thank you for raising up those who would take on the mantle, who would open your Word with your people, who would proclaim (your) gospel."

—Ethan Meyers



After celebrating with new candidates, Synod 2026 also recognized Tsunglin (Bosco) Jen, a commissioned pastor who was nearing candidacy as Minister of the Word before his unexpected death in January. He served Hyde Park CRC, a Chinese-English bilingual congregation in Classis Chicago South.

CRCNA to Leave World Communion of Reformed Churches

Following passionate speeches from the floor, Synod 2026 voted to leave the World Communion of Reformed Churches, a group that the Christian Reformed Church helped inaugurate in 2010. Delegates to synod expressed concern over other Communion members' theological positions and some of the organization's statements on moral and social justice issues. Philip Vinod Peacock, the WCRC general secretary, who was an ecumenical guest to synod, expressed sadness at the decision and read a letter of farewell.

The WCRC has more than 230 member churches, representing more than 100 million Christians in 107 countries, and was the result of the union the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The CRC has been part of the Reformed Ecumenical Council since its founding in the 1940s.

Those presenting the recommendation to cease membership referenced troubling perspectives in WCRC-connected publications around gender and abortion issues. Jeremy Williamson, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, spoke passionately about how these statements ran contrary to his long history as a pro-life advocate. "This calls for a harsh rebuke," Williamson said.

Jean Gomes, Classis Grandville, said the WCRC compromised Reformed values. "They have 'Reformed' in their name, but in their core, they are a secular institution with zero commitment to the



Just as I honor the discernment of this synod, I would ask you to honor ours.

—Phillip Vinod Peacock, general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches

Scriptures, to our Christian ethics, or to Reformed values."

Shirley Roels, chair of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, expressed concern that some of the positions of the WCRC were being misrepresented. The EIRC had submitted to synod a review of the CRC's membership in the Communion and had recommended it continue. The committee said, "The WCRC provides the broadest worldwide level of ecumenical engagement with Reformed denominations, many of whom already are ecumenical partners of the CRCNA" and "continued participation in the WCRC allows the CRCNA to offer a distinct confessional voice, influence, and

contribution to and among the denominations in the WCRC."

Darren Kornelis, Classis Central Plains, said he's seen the opposite effect. "We have found ourselves having to contend for the gospel because there are members who will promote sexual immorality. ... They (the Communion) have had a corrupting influence on us. We have not had a preservative influence on them."

Nathan van der Meer, young adult representative, said, "If we were to remove ourselves from the WCRC we would be doing a disservice to all the sheep (faithful Christians) who are members thereof, and they would be left even more confused than they already are."

CRC general secretary Zach King, who is the denomination's ecumenical officer, shared that the WCRC has been an avenue to "share our love and concern for our ecumenical brothers around the world." King traveled to Thailand in October for a gathering of the WCRC, where he had fellowship with pastors from the CRC in Myanmar and from the Reformed Church of Christ for Nations, one of the CRCNA's three ecumenical partners from Nigeria.

King encouraged Christian love. "We can stand firmly on our confessional convictions, and we can also show love." King said. Whatever decision synod was to make, "I'd just encourage you if you could show that kind of love, and that kind of care to our brother Philip and to others that are here tonight."

Peacock shared a statement with synod, expressing pain "because our union is breaking."

Saying he was not there to "relitigate questions that the synod has weighed with seriousness and prayer," Peacock instead asked synod to consider the nature of communion and what it means to be in fellowship with those who disagree.

Cooperation Status With NGK Approved, Direction Added

“The question before us was never whether to be faithful,” Peacock said. “It was whether faithfulness requires us to walk apart. And just as I honor the discernment of this synod, I would ask you to honor ours. The Communion to which we belong has also discerned, in conscience and through prayer, commitments that it holds as matters of faithfulness and justice.”

Jose Rayas, first clerk, prayed before Synod 2026’s vote to leave the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and synod prayed again after the “momentous” decision.

Nine negative votes were recorded, and although synod has no formal category of protest against a decision, the officers of synod noted that delegate José Piñero, Classis California South, a pastor from Venezuela, submitted a letter of protest about the WCRC decision.

—Ethan Meyers

24

The CRC’s number of
in communion and

21

in cooperation
ecumenical
relationships.

Synod 2026 voted to extend a church *in cooperation* relationship with the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken, the less-close of the two ecumenical relationships the Christian Reformed Church maintains. Synod also provided directions for a memorandum between the CRC and the NGK.

The Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken formed in 2023, resulting from a merger between two once-separated Reformed denominations in the Netherlands. Churches came into the NGK holding a range of positions on human sexuality, including some local congregations that support the full inclusion of Christians in active same-sex relationships. The CRCNA does not have that option for member churches, having affirmed its historic position in 2022 and made subsequent decisions for discipline and confessional affirmation without exclusions.

Ren Tubergen, Classis Thornapple Valley, said the *in cooperation* designation describes “relationships where we can engage in ministries together where there are (some) shared goals.” He added that as the new denomination is sorting out its path, the decision could be revisited.

Willem Delleman, Classis B.C. Northwest, spoke in favor of the *in cooperation* status, seeing a need for churches working together in the very secular environment of the Netherlands.

Several other delegates voiced unease about formalizing a relationship with a denomination that wasn’t settled on a matter that the CRCNA had already determined. “(The report) says the new denomination affirms the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism, as does the CRCNA. And yet ... the new NGK polity allows local congregations to hold varied positions about



If we can support them, why wouldn’t we do that?

—Willem Delleman, B.C. North-West

the full inclusion of Christians in active same-sex relationships,” Darren Kornelis, Classis Central Plains, said. “We as a denomination have already argued and clarified that this is not in bounds with the Heidelberg Catechism.”

A decision to ask the EIRC to reiterate the CRC’s position on human sexuality, and affirm the CRC’s willingness to “guide, mentor, and disciple the NGK on the issue of human sexuality,” received almost as much discussion, for and against, as the original recommendation.

Negative votes were registered on both matters: four against the *in cooperation* status and two against the additional instructions for the EIRC.

—Ethan Meyers

Classes and Synod Can Discipline Local Councils

If councils don't properly govern themselves, a broader body may step in, Synod 2026 affirmed.

Synod received the report of a task force that recommended procedures for the discipline of officebearers, which came out in October. The task force resulted from confusion about how or if a church council or classis can be disciplined by a broader assembly of the Christian Reformed Church, namely synod.

Synod took note that while the report was about discipline, the deeper concern is how the denomination sustains its covenantal relationships among local churches, classes, and synod. "Discipline and accountability are not merely procedural but expressions of our shared covenant identity within the CRCNA," read the report.

Synod recommended the task force report to the churches as a guide in the application of discipline by the major assemblies. It added wording to the Church Order Supplement, Article 27-b, stating that when necessary for the well-being of the churches, a classis or synod may guide discipline to a local council or classes even if not requested. "Maintaining accountability may include steps of special discipline," which include suspension or deposition, according to the adopted report. A church or classis that does not comply would be considered to have de facto disaffiliated from the denomination.

Synod added to Church Order Article 83 provisions for exceptional circumstances when a church's own classis may suspend and depose officebearers even when such action has not been initiated by the church's council.

Synod noted that "officebearers have a high level of responsibility to the church and therefore a high level of accountability as well. In situations where officebearers are violating the covenant they agreed to follow, they must be held accountable for the good of the church."



Classis and synod can guide discipline but they can't begin discipline.

—Justin Roukema, Classis B.C. South-East

Several delegates spoke in favor of the changes. Ralph Wigboldus, Classis Ontario Southwest, said, "Churches need to govern themselves, and if they don't, they ought to be disciplined."

Others were concerned about overreach and compromising existing Church Order. Justin Roukema, Classis B.C. South-East, said making these additions would not be in keeping with Church Order principles. "Discipline needs to start at the local church. ... If we allow a classis or synod to look over their heads, we've undone an entire process. ... Classis and synod can guide discipline, but they can't begin discipline."

Synod also closed a mandate to the general secretary to help churches navigate limited suspensions of officebearers not in compliance with the CRC's teaching on sexual ethics. It was part of special circumstances of the past few years and is no longer necessary.

—Gayla R. Postma

Worship as Covenant Dialogue To Be Included in Church Order

Corporate worship is distinct but tied to all life, and it is a covenant dialogue between God and his people, Synod 2026 affirmed. That will now be written into Church Order Article 52 and its supplement, pending ratification by a subsequent synod.

The principles for Reformed worship—that it is centered around God's Word, encourages the singing of psalms, and is sacramental, not performative—were previously referenced in the order, but not written out.

Richard Grift, Classis Toronto, felt cautious about the change, noting a need to be careful of legalism and wondering whether "every single item needs to be present in (every worship) service."

Others, including Daniel Vos, Atlantic North East, questioned if Church Order is where these details should be included. "I don't think the Church Order supplement is the right place for that."

There were questions about some archaic-sounding language to be included, coming directly from the Belgic Confession, one of the CRC's three doctrinal standards. "Rejecting all human innovations," Willem Delleman, Classis B.C. North-West, quoted. "What does that mean?"

Rob Toornstra, Classis Columbia, said the principle is that "worship should be done in a way God teaches us to do it in his Word."

Joshua Carpenter, Classis Minnkota, the regional assembly that originally requested the Church Order change, said the specifications would be helpful "resources for planning and leading worship," as well as for teaching elders what is necessary for worship.

Rob Golding, Classis Greater Los Angeles, said having the specifics "will serve our church as well as newcomers to the

Contemporary Testimony to be Removed from Covenant for Officebearers



It's the hazard of church work sometimes that we mistake complexity for faithfulness.

—Miles Davis, Classis North Cascades

CRC" by showing the distinctiveness of Reformed worship.

But Miles Davis, Classis North Cascades, questioned the inclusion of all the specifics. "It seems to me it's the hazard of church work sometimes that we mistake complexity for faithfulness," he said.

Synod adopted the replacement for the Church Order article on worship and the new supplement. It will be forwarded to Synod 2027 for ratification.

—Isabelle Brown

86

The number of articles
of the Christian
Reformed Church Order.

Synod 2026 agreed to remove mention of contemporary testimony "Our World Belongs to God" from the Covenant for Officebearers that elders, deacons, and pastors must sign to signify their agreement with the ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions of the Christian Reformed Church.

One of the reasons given is that the wording in the Covenant insufficiently distinguishes the binding nature of the Reformed doctrinal standards from the 'recognizing the witness of' a contemporary testimony. Another reason is the inconsistency that "Our World Belongs to God" is included in the Covenant while another contemporary testimony of the CRC, the Belhar Confession, is not. In 2025 synod declined to add it.

Brittany Clark, Classis Grand Rapids North, agreed with the change. "I think it just adds too much confusion. I agree there is a distinction, but it does not need to be in the Covenant."

Jeremy Scripps, also from Grand Rapids North, said that when "Our World Belongs to God" was crafted in the 1980s, it was never intended to be something officebearers would pledge themselves to. The testimony was updated in 2008 and included in the Covenant in 2012.

"We highly value this testimony, but it is not in the same space as doctrinal standards," Brandon Seaver, Classis Georgetown, said. "Synod says it is a doctrinal application to be used at the local level, as opposed to subscription to the creeds and confessions."

Will Brouwers, Classis Rocky Mountain, was against the move. "There are things that bind us and things that do not bind that we still believe. For many years our denomination (has been) getting



For many years our denomination has been getting narrower and narrower. How much narrower will we get?

—Will Brouwers, Classis Rocky Mountain

narrower and narrower. How much narrower will we get?"

The officers of Synod 2026 judged that removing mention of the contemporary testimony from the Covenant is a substantial enough change that it must be ratified by a future synod before it is adopted.

—Gayla R. Postma

Discipleship to Deepen Confessional Commitment of Members

While officebearers face higher expectations for confessional alignment, members should be disciplined as well through profession of faith classes and Reformed liturgies and forms, Synod 2026 said.

The discussion was in response to a task force report, created as a result of a request to Synod 2024, that studied the difference in commitment to the confessions required by members and officebearers. Synod commended the report's findings to the churches.

It noted that the confessions are central to the Christian Reformed Church's identity as a Reformed denomination and that officebearers have additional obligations to defend and teach the confessions. But becoming a professing member is a continuum from agreement with to full understanding of the confessions, under the guidance and instruction of the local council.

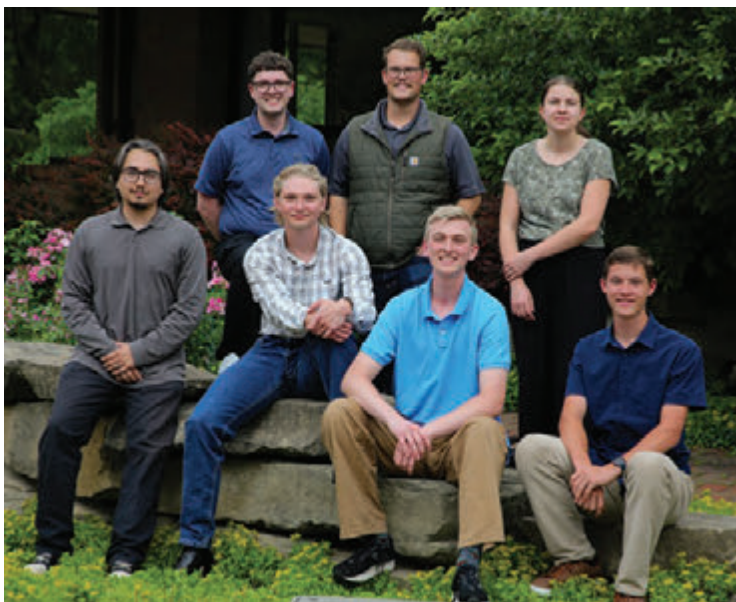
Discipling members "faithfully towards a deeper understanding of the gospel as articulated in the Reformed confessions" is the privilege and responsibility of the consistory.

Synod encouraged churches to use liturgical forms produced by the CRC or adaptations of them that conform to synodical guidelines for communion, baptism, and professions of faith. "The use of these liturgical forms will foster a greater shared understanding of membership across the denomination," the recommendation said.

Synod also encouraged churches to use materials for membership and profession of faith classes that foster a commitment to the confessions. "A number of churches are using resources developed outside the Reformed theological



Pastors Dave Ten Clay, second clerk; Jose Rayas, first clerk; Chad Steenwyk, president; and Derek Buikema, vice president, served as officers of Synod 2026.



Seven young adults served as participating (non-voting) representatives to Synod 2026: Cruz Menchaca, Kyle Vannus, Nathan van der Meer, Corey Viss, Kyle Hoekema, Kaitlyn Hofsink, and Benjamin Haan.

Synod 2026 Seeks Language Clarity For Gravamen Process



We can have a high regard for our confessions, but we can distinguish between general membership and leaders.
—Jim Kirk, Classis Wisconsin

tradition to invite people to membership in their congregations,” synod noted. “Discernment is important both to identify teachings that connect us to the wider Christian tradition and to recognize teachings that may tend to undermine our understanding of Scripture.”

Brandon Seaver, Classis Georgetown, said that this understanding allows churches to accept members while they are being taught to affirm the confessions.

Jim Kirk, Classis Wisconsin, agreed that “(membership) is the beginning of a process. We can have a high regard for our confessions, but we can distinguish between general membership and leaders.”

Synod also noted the necessity to translate liturgy resources into languages used across the denomination for communities where English is not spoken.

—Gayla R. Postma

Synod 2026 was asked by churches in Classis Grand Rapids East for clarity for local church councils when a proposed officebearer has a difficulty with one of the Christian Reformed Church’s confessional doctrines. “That will increase the opportunity and expectation that we grow ‘in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel,’” the classis wrote.

Synod 2026 reminded councils and classes of their call to discern each case as it comes to them, using good, pastoral wisdom as well as the existing Thrive resources to help them.

The Church Order calls an expressed difficulty with a teaching in the confessions a gravamen. The process is laid out in Article 5. A confessional difficulty gravamen is temporary and may be resolved through study, deliberation, and pastoral care. A confessional-revision gravamen is written when an officebearer has a settled conviction that one of the doctrines does not reflect biblical teaching, and he or she requests a revision to the confession on that basis. Synod 2026 did not change any part of the process but did adopt minor language changes.

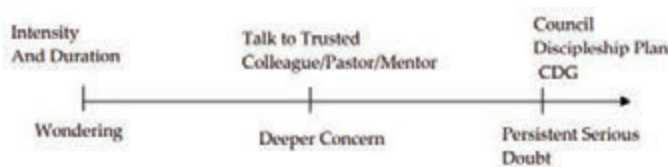
Synod approved changes to the supplement of Article 5, adding the words “persistent serious doubt” to describe when a concern about a teaching rises to the need for a difficulty gravamen. In the same supplement, it added the wording “a settled conviction” about a doctrinal teaching requiring a request for a revision to a confessional standard.

Andy Sytsma, Classis Yellowstone, was in favor of the changes, noting that churches need a wise pastoral response for those members who are uncertain about the CRC’s expectations for confessional alignment and where they fall within those expectations.



Churches need a wise pastoral response for those members who are uncertain about the CRC’s expectations for confessional alignment.
—Andy Sytsma, Classis Yellowstone

Synod adopted a graphic to help churches and councils struggling in the discernment process.



If a gravamen is rejected by a classis, it may be sent to synod with no disciplinary action against the officebearer. “The mere fact that the matter is being sent to a broader assembly shall not be a reason for suspending or otherwise disciplining an officebearer,” synod said.

Synod also clarified that when the Covenant for Officebearers says that the confessions “fully agree” with Scripture, it means that all of the doctrines contained within the three forms of unity are a faithful teaching of God’s Word.

—Gayla R. Postma

Christopher Fantuzzo Approved as Professor of Old Testament

Lora Copley New Banner Editor-in-chief

Synod 2026 voted to approve Christopher Fantuzzo, Ph.D., to a position as professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary. Among other positions, Fantuzzo previously served as a lecturer in Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and as a visiting professor of Old Testament at the Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine in Kyiv.



I feel like I've been on a kind of journey towards the CRC.

—Christopher Fantuzzo

Mark VerBruggen, Classis Hamilton, a member of the seminary's Board of Trustees, along with seminary president Jul Medenblik, presented Fantuzzo to synod.

Aaron Vriesman, Classis Zeeland, interviewed Fantuzzo before taking questions from the delegates. He answered questions about covenant doctrine, Reformed hermeneutics, the historicity of the Old Testament, and his agreement with the CRC's position on human sexuality.

Fantuzzo is ordained in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

"Looking back, I can see the Lord's hand in various ways," Fantuzzo said of his academic trajectory. Noting his faculty adviser at Westminster Seminary was an ordained CRC minister, and some of the first books Fantuzzo read as a Christian were from Christian Reformed theologians, "I feel like I've been on a kind of journey towards the CRC."

President Chad Steenwyk announced that Fantuzzo's appointment had been approved "overwhelmingly."

John Lee, Classis Iakota, led synod in a prayer over Fantuzzo and his wife Emily.

—Ethan Meyers

Synod 2026 approved the appointment of Lora Copley as editor-in-chief of *The Banner*, magazine of the Christian Reformed Church. Copley has served as interim editor since December.

Copley, a campus minister at Iowa State University since 2022, has served in several ministerial and teaching roles, including minister of congregational life at Calvin CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., and instructor with the Classis Red Mesa Leadership Development Network.

Mother of four, Copley is the first woman to serve as chief editor in *The Banner's* 160-year history.

Dan Tracy, Classis Heartland, interviewed Copley prior to the vote on her appointment. She shared that editorial work at *The Banner* has theological, writing, and leadership components. "*The Banner* exists in a very interesting space ... we don't speak for the denomination," Copley said. "We really exist to speak with and within the denomination."

Copley also shared theological groundings for the work of journalism. "We are people of the Word; our job is to communicate." She emphasized that her experiences in spaces of tension will inform her tenure.

Votes on personnel matters, such as appointments, are taken in closed session. When observers and Copley returned after the vote, president Chad Steenwyk congratulated Copley on her appointment, to standing applause.

Copley's husband Joel Copley, a delegate to synod from Classis Northcentral Iowa, led synod in prayer for Lora's work.

The previous editor-in-chief, Shiao Chong, left the role last June over changes to the publication's mandate.

—Ethan Meyers



Joel Copley, Classis Northcentral Iowa, in prayer for Lora Copley, newly appointed editor-in-chief of *The Banner*.

Leaders for World Renew-Canada, ReFrame Ministries and Thrive, All New Since Last Synod



Our connection to the CRC is as strong as it can be.

—Peter Timmerman

Synod 2026 accepted a review of the work of World Renew, part of a rotating evaluation schedule of Christian Reformed agencies adopted by Synod 2025.

It recommitted to the CRC's covenantal relationship with the relief and development agency and encouraged congregations to create opportunities for World Renew to report and share its many resources and campaigns. Congregations are encouraged to take four offerings per year for World Renew, which does not receive ministry shares from the denomination.

Carol Bremer-Bennett, U.S. director of World Renew, and Peter Timmerman, Canadian director, shared a presentation, including testimonials, of the agency's work to join with communities around the world to renew hope, reconcile lives, and restore creation.

It was Timmerman's first synod since his appointment in September.

—Isabelle Brown



Through devotionals, podcasts, radio, (and) digital content, ReFrame focuses on proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord.

—Darrell Delaney

Darrell Delaney, director of ReFrame Ministries since May, asked Synod 2026 delegates the Romans 10 questions, "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Rom. 10)

His answer in part is ReFrame, the media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church. "Through devotionals, podcasts, radio, (and) digital content, ReFrame focuses on proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord," he said. "ReFrame can get into the dark places of the world."

He told delegates that the work is too big for one person to carry. "The call moves to all of us. It belongs to our shared ministry. We need your prayers, encouragement, partnership, and support."

Delaney urged delegates, "Take our resources back to your homes and churches, share them with your friends. Help us stay connected with the churches."

—Gayla R. Postma



Thrive is a ministry of companionship.

—Lee Carter

Lee Carter, new director of Thrive, told Synod 2026 that in his short time at the congregational support agency, he has discovered that the staff understand that they serve, not steer, congregations, acting not "for" but walking "with" churches. Thrive supports Christian Reformed congregations in areas of abuse prevention, chaplaincy, worship, church renewal, and more.

"Thrive is a ministry of companionship. We must not do work entrusted to the church. We encourage, support, listen to, and strengthen churches," Carter said. "(Our) mandate is (to be) a companion and guide, to gather and share wisdom, equip and consult with churches and classes in challenging contexts."

Synod ratified Carter's appointment, made in May by the Council of Delegates. Carter steps in after the retirement of Lesli van Milligen, whose last day as director was May 29.

—Gayla R. Postma

Synod 2026 Provides New Guidelines On Multisite Church Leadership

Synod 2026 commended a task force report on multisite churches to congregations considering multisite developments.

The report, requested by Synod 2024, offers multiple possible pathways for multisite expressions of church to relate to one another. Additionally, the report provides advice on multisite church governance, mergers, representation in assemblies, and pastoral accountability.

Andy Sytsma, Classis Yellowstone, was grateful for the report's "clear ecclesiastical guidance," which, he said, would be helpful to church planters. "It's not just a pragmatic model, it's grounded in Reformed polity."

Some delegates expressed concern that the new guidelines would mistakenly encourage multisite churches to create authority structures outside the denominational structure of classes (regional assemblies) and synod.

Issy La Brosse, Classis Greater Los Angeles, asked for clarification on what types of multisite churches were being considered and expressed concern about multisite churches that rely on video messages from one pastor.

11

CRC locations that identify as being part of a multisite church.

"We offer strong cautions in our report against a group of satellites that are all just putting up the videos of one centralized preacher," said Derek Buikema, vice president of synod, who served on the multisite task force. "We stress a couple of things throughout the report: one is the importance of local, established leaders ... local preaching, (and) local administration of the sacraments." In the Christian Reformed Church, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are administered by the authority of the consistory in the public worship service by a minister of the Word, a commissioned pastor, or, in the case of need, an ordained person who has received the approval of classis (Art. 55 of Church Order).

Martin Spoelstra, Classis Quinte, spoke in favor of the report. "I think the beauty of this report is that it allows us to think differently and more creatively about how we do church."

Several delegates shared personal experiences where they saw multisite models increasing the health of their local churches. Michael Yang, Classis B.C. Northwest, said he currently pastors a congregation that's part of a multisite church in the Vancouver area.

"Each campus has localized, established leadership. We have a shared council, so every campus has at least two representatives that sit on that shared council," Yang said. He emphasized the importance



One of our current campuses was a dying church that our church came alongside.

—Michael Yang, B.C. North-West

of accountable leadership in any church model, whether single congregation or multisite.

"One of our current campuses was a dying church that our church came alongside and had many conversations with," Yang said. "They didn't have to join our multisite model or become a part of this, but they wanted to."

Synod additionally directed the Office of General Secretary to develop and implement a method for collecting and reporting membership and leadership data for various multisite arrangements "in order to support pastoral accountability, ecclesiastical transparency, and accurate denominational understanding."

Synod adopted a supplement to Church Order Article 35, with guidance for multisite churches, including a template that potential multisite partners can use to establish and describe their partnership arrangement.

—Ethan Meyers

Synod Celebrates, Hears From Diverse Groups Within the CRC

"Renewal has been happening within the Christian Reformed Church. Right now 30% of the Christian Reformed Church ain't white. That's a good thing," Reggie Smith, diversity consultant with Thrive, said to begin a presentation of the Diversity Connection Advisory Committee.

Smith's remarks ahead of the first diversity group presentations at synod echoed what the assembly heard earlier in the week—"God is up to something new," expanding what had been a historically Dutch denomination. "And that's a good thing," Smith repeated.

Synod 2026 approved changes to how data on membership diversity within the CRC is collected and instructed the Office of General Secretary to work with the Council of Delegates to provide annual reports to synod. It also approved making space to hear about and celebrate the work God's Spirit is doing within the denomination's major ethnic communities. Providing a formal way for these groups to share with synod was a request of Synod 2024.

Joseph Hun-Suk Bae, a delegate from Classis Lake Erie and former chair of the Korean Ministry Association, presented on behalf of that group.

Jose Rayas, first clerk to Synod 2026, reported for Consejo Latino, a group that works in conjunction with Resonate Global Mission and with the CRC in the efforts of church planting with Hispanic Reformed leaders, not only in North America but also Venezuela, Mexico, and, in the past few years, the Dominican Republic.

Classis Red Mesa connects the approximately 20 churches and missions in northwest New Mexico and northeast



We are in a time of transition in classis Red Mesa.

—Caleb Dickson, Classis Red Mesa

Arizona, which were formed as a result of the CRC's first missionary outreach to Navajo and Zuni communities. Delegate Caleb Dickson from that classis shared blessings such as the Red Mesa Leadership Development Network and 106-year-old Cottonwood Pass Bible Conference, as well as concerns such as a severe lack of ministers of the Word in the classis.

Smith presented an update from SEAPIC, a group representing Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, and Chinese members of the CRC, and he presented a report on behalf of Black and Reformed, a group of African-American leaders in the CRC. That group "has gone through a very, very tough time because of the disaffiliation of a lot of our multiracial churches," Smith said. He acknowledged that many urban churches with a large African-American presence have disaffiliated in recent years, leading to a "loss of key leaders who were affiliated with those churches."

—Isabelle Brown and Ethan Meyers

Virtual Ministries Not 'Churches'

Synod 2026 agreed to the request from Classis Atlantic Northeast to bar presently exclusively online ministries in the Christian Reformed Church from being described as "churches." Synod said it has a responsibility to maintain the confessional understanding of the church and to guard the use of the term "church" within the CRCNA.

In 2025, synod encouraged online ministries to continue experimenting while providing to their classis "a clear ministry plan ... including especially how they plan to fulfill the marks of the true church in their context and how they plan to address the importance of embodiment and in-person gatherings." Synod 2025 said it was "premature" to make a decision about whether a purely digital congregation constitutes a church. Synod 2026, however, declined to establish a study committee on Reformed ecclesiology—the nature of the church—so revisiting the question was within bounds.

Tony Krossman, Classis Lake Superior, read from Acts 2:42-47, saying God has given, through his Word, a description of what the church is: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

—Ethan Meyers

Synod 2026 Dismisses Dignity Team

Synod 2026 discussed the need and value of the denomination's Dignity Team, a group established in 2022 to work "with those who feel they have been victimized by abuses of power in the CRCNA to offer direction and support." The Council of Delegates, the governance board that serves synod between meetings of synod, recommended a five-year renewal of the team's mandate. Synod, after discussion, voted to end the team's work. It asked the Council of Delegates to work with current team members to resolve any current cases of support within a year.

Created as part of the work of an ad hoc committee assigned in 2019 to work on the prevention of abuse of power in the Christian Reformed Church, the Dignity Team was formed to be available to respond "to less tangible and less clearly defined abuses of power that occur within CRC circles, but may fall between or outside the scopes of the systems addressed elsewhere in the CRCNA's system."

Jim Kirk, Classis Wisconsin, was part of the committee recommending dismissal. "We think the right response is to strengthen those parts of the church that should be doing the work," and to make those spaces safe for people who come forward.

Synod reminded "all CRC church assemblies, committees, and boards of the principles of responsible use of authority ... especially as they relate to shaping a culture of dignity and respect, and to take greater responsibility for these matters."

Rob Toornstra, Classis Columbia, and a member of the Council of Delegates,



If we remove the dignity team, we will never know the damage.

—Merick Roragen, Classis Pacific Northwest

spoke against dismissing the Dignity Team. "We (the Council) listened to the people who served and the work that they were doing and what their perspective was. We heard that yes, it is important to shift this work to local bodies ... but to do that now would probably be premature."

Merick Roragen, Classis Pacific Northwest, said, "If we remove the Dignity Team we will never know the damage" coming from that decision.

John DeVries, Classis Holland, contended that a team operating from a long distance could be prone to errors.

Synod 2026 voted to dismiss the team "with thanks for the work done in response to instructions from previous synods."

—Isabelle Brown

Other Decisions of Synod 2026

Synod 2026:

- » Approved the **transfer of Orange Korean Church** from Classis California South to Classis Ko-Am.
- » **Removed parts of Church Order Articles 4 and 7, no longer relevant to Classis Red Mesa.**
- » Assigned responsibility for the **nominations of Judicial Code Committee members** to the committee, rather than the Council of Delegates. The practice now lines up with nominations of synod's other standing committees.
- » **Amended Church Order articles to include "prayer" in the description of a minister's call and function.**
- » **Encouraged each classis to set aside time to give thanks for and celebrate those retiring from ministry,** instead of inviting ministers who are retiring to come to synod for celebration, as requested by Classis Heartland.
- » **Expressed appreciation for the retiring volunteers from:**
 - the CRC's Historical Committee: Stanley Jim, Christian Oh, and Janet Sheeres
 - the Council of Delegates: Rachel Bouwkamp, Thomas Byma, Jill Feikema, Tabitha Manuelito, Drew Sweetman, Michael Ten Haken, and Melissa Van Dyk
 - the Minister's Pension Plan trustees: Lloyd Bierma
- » Received reports of **26 retirements of ministers of the Word** and **six retirements of commissioned pastors** since the previous synod.
- » Removed the requirement of the Office of General Secretary to produce an **annual Yearbook in printed form.** It requested the office focus instead on alternate ways to make the material available electronically.
- » Received **rubrics used by the various boards of the denomination and**

agencies to select new members.

The rubrics ask a number of questions, including about a nominated individual's commitment to Jesus Christ and the doctrinal confessions of the CRC. Provision of the rubrics fulfills a request by Synod 2025.

- » Affirmed that **individuals can still send overtures** to classis or synod if they haven't been approved by their local council.
- » Mandated that before handling an appeal involving allegations of abuse against a church leader that have been taken up by an advisory panel process, **classis delegates will participate in a 60-minute safe church orientation and training from Thrive on due process, abuse awareness, and response.**
- » Noted that **Calvin Theological Seminary is in full compliance with the CRC's doctrinal standards.** All faculty must sign the CRC's Covenant for Officebearers, indicating their agreement with the ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions.
- » Approved **transferring administration of the retirement plan for unordained employees** to the respective ministry organizations.
- » Affirmed pension plan changes that **established the target for a combination of governmental benefits and the amount provided by the plans as "full benefit" for a "normal career" to be 75-85% of the sum of the final average salary and the average housing allowance applicable in the year of retirement.** This level of income replacement is judged by actuaries and others knowledgeable in the field as the level needed to sustain a reasonable level of postretirement needs.
- » Ratified **changes that the CRC Loan Fund made to its articles of**

incorporation, expanding lending eligibility to CRCNA-related organizations, and no longer solely congregations.

- » Approved **Cascade Fellowship CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., as the convening church for Synod 2027.**
- » **Recommended a ministry offering schedule,** including special offerings for Resonate Global Mission, World Renew, Calvin Theological Seminary, Calvin University, Canadian Justice Ministries, ReFrame Ministries, and Thrive.

Synod did not:

- » **Accept a request to require all denominational employees and those on volunteer boards to show they are professing members of a congregation in the CRCNA.** Instead, the CRC's current personnel policy, which distinguishes between direct ministry positions and ministry support positions, remains in effect.
- » **Alter the typical Friday to Thursday meeting schedule for synods.**
- » **Appoint a standing committee to advise the Council of Delegates and synod on Church Order matters.**
- » **Appoint a study committee to articulate the CRC's Reformed beliefs about the nature of the church,** as requested by Classis Wisconsin.
- » **Alter Church Order Article 38 to require synodical deputy involvement in the processes of organization, affiliation, disaffiliation, or disbanding of congregations.** The article already "provides a helpful pathway of classical accountability" for these processes.

- » **Impose a word count for future study committee reports,** noting that it risks losing the deep thinking, theological rigor, and pastoral warmth in the reports.

- » **Sustain two appeals from an elder in Classis Columbia** who requested a confessional revision of Question and Answer 96 of the Heidelberg Catechism, "What is God's will for us in the second commandment?" and of Articles 30-31 and a related part in Article 34 in the Belgic Confession.

- » **Sustain an appeal, from members of Sovereign Grace Church in Classis California South.** "The appellants' case did not adequately show that Classis California South violated Church Order procedure or biblical foundations for ecclesiastical justice in the deposition of pastor Gabriel Colangelo."

- » **Provide specific instructions to the Calvin Theological Seminary board of trustees regarding sought-after qualities in the next seminary president,** but asked that the board receive Classis Grandville's request on the matter and "forward it to the nominating committee for their prayerful consideration."

—Gayla R. Postma and Alissa Vernon

Future-Focused Canadian National Gathering



With the theme of “Foundation to Future,” the Christian Reformed Church in North America’s fourth Canadian National Gathering met May 28-31 in Ancaster, Ont., 10 years after the inaugural event.

Gathering steering team member Wendy DeJong, Classis Niagara, said this year’s format was very different from the 2016 Waterloo, Ont., event where small-group discussions followed keynote-style speakers. This year, six feeder groups worked together on areas of interest to contribute information for the whole group. Streams included building authentic community, faith formation for children and youth, conflict navigation, discipleship pathways, and community outreach. DeJong was in the leadership ecosystem stream.

The CRC’s 12 Canadian classes were asked to nominate participants such as seasoned pastors, elders, or deacons; conflict negotiators; cross-cultural ministers; young adults; and leadership developers, who had particular experience or expertise to contribute.

“Being specific about what experiences we are looking for to come into this space can be really helpful,” executive director-Canada Al Postma said. In that way, “you don’t simply have people who like to

come to gatherings, but they know what they’re bringing.”

Stream leaders, including staff from Thrive, Calvin Theological Seminary, Canadian Intercultural Ministry, Diaconal Ministries Canada, and Resonate Global Mission, designed the sessions so that participants would glean wisdom from one another, guided by Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

Drawing on the theme of the parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24-27), participants closed the event by sharing what they believed to be foundational wisdom on which to build.

“It seems the Holy Spirit is suggesting us to invest relationally into people,” one said. Another added, “Remember the importance of ‘Word and Spirit’—not just be informed about God but formed by the Word of God.”

“Be gospel-centered, focused, and oriented,” said another. And, “The question before us is not what are we going to do, but who are we going to be—it’s not the path before us but who holds the path.”

Postma said the event’s budget was covered through denominational ministry shares from Canadian churches, with small contributions from the classes and some individual donors. One hundred eleven participants and 25 staff attended.

—Alissa Vernon

ThereforeGo Ministries Appoints New Director



Amanda Roozeboom became executive director of the youth and young adult-focused ThereforeGo Ministries in April, after serving the organization for 10 years in other roles.

“I’ve had the privilege of walking alongside teens in youth ministry for nearly 30 years,” she told *The Banner*, noting it started with a volunteer role and later youth and ministry coordinator at Seymour Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. “It was at Seymour that I was first introduced to SERVE and attended five SERVE trips with the youth from the church.”

This summer, 19 sites in the U.S. and Canada are hosting over 900 participants for ThereforeGo’s popular SERVE mission trips, where youth groups from across North America travel to serve host communities, often with work projects.

ThereforeGo started more than 100 years ago as the American Federation of Reformed Young Men’s Society. In 1957 it merged with a parallel federation for young women, forming the Young Calvinist Federation. In 1993, the name was changed to Youth Unlimited, and was changed again in 2020. “We changed our name to ThereforeGo Ministries to better reflect our calling to equip not just the youth of the church, but to support intergenerational communities within the church,” Roozeboom said. Rick Zomer, currently a faith formation consultant with CRCNA’s Thrive, was the previous executive director.

—Gayla R. Postma

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Gerard (Jerry) L.
Dykstra*

1950-2026

Jerry Dykstra, who served in lay ministry in Arizona after leaving CRC denominational leadership in 2011, died April 27 after a 19-month illness. He was 76.

Dykstra was born in Holland, Mich., to a pastor's family that moved often. He met his wife, Linda, as a high school senior in southern California. The couple attended Calvin College, and after graduation he pursued work in construction and business.

Fourteen years later, he tested what felt like a call to ministry with a year of study at Westminster Seminary, before moving his family of six to Grand Rapids, finishing studies at Calvin Seminary while working part-time for Ada (Mich.) CRC. Dykstra served Cascade Fellowship CRC, Grand Rapids, and Faith Fellowship CRC, Walnut Creek, Calif. He was director of ministries for the CRCNA from 2005 to 2006 and served as executive director until 2011.

Linda, Jerry's wife of 55 years, said he was passionate about helping people understand the amazing grace of God. A "fix it" kind of guy, she said he sometimes had to hold himself back from fixing broken things at hotels, VRBO rentals, or wherever he saw a need. He remodeled about 20 kitchens, including a church kitchen, over the years.

Active after retirement in Christ's Community Church in Glendale, Ariz., Dykstra preached often and led a "Foundations" class.

Predeceased by their daughter, Stephanie Lee, Jerry is survived by his wife, Linda; three children and their spouses; and 11 grandchildren.

—Alissa Vernon

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Peter William
De Bruyne*

1932-2026

Described as a compassionate and selfless man with a pastoral heart who blessed all who knew him, pastor and chaplain Peter W. De Bruyne stepped into brokenness and suffering around him, loving people through difficult journeys. He died May 11, at age 93.

The third of six children, De Bruyne was born in the Netherlands village of Vrouwenpolder. After his mother's death when he was 12, his father remarried and two more sons were added to the family. At 22 in 1955, De Bruyne immigrated alone to Calgary, Alta. He married Anne Heerema in 1958 before moving to study in Grand Rapids, Mich., graduating from Calvin Theological Seminary.

Ordained in 1963, he pastored Sonlight CRC, Regina, Sask.; Ottewell CRC, Edmonton, Alta.; Victoria (B.C.) CRC; CrossPoint CRC, Brampton, Ont.; and Mountainview CRC, Grimsby, Ont. He then became chaplain to the retirement community of Shalom Manor in Grimsby.

De Bruyne enjoyed reading, camping, playing games, music, painting, traveling, curling, beach combing, and spending time with his family. He had a great sense of humour and loved to laugh.

He was predeceased by his wife, Anne, in 2023, and is survived by their four children; 12 grandchildren; and 36 great-grandchildren.

—Alissa Vernon

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Douglas
Arthur Warners*

1941-2026

Douglas Warners was a man who loved people and cared deeply. "When you spoke to him," said his daughter, "you knew that you had his full attention, that he was listening and would be praying for you." Doug focused on living for Jesus in each small thing, and it showed in all the big areas of his life. After several years with dementia, Doug, 84, died March 19.

A graduate of Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, Doug was ordained in 1967. Before his first pastorate in 1976 at First Christian Reformed Church of Detroit in Grosse Pointe, Mich., he was a Christian high school teacher in Kalamazoo, Mich., and Denver, Colo. He went on to serve First CRC of Artesia, Calif.; East Leonard CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.; and Woodville Community Church in White Cloud, Mich.

Doug enjoyed singing, evangelizing, playing games, spending time in nature, and being in his boat on Lake Michigan. After retirement in 2007, Doug and his wife volunteered with World Renew and enjoyed spending time with family and friends at their home on Hess Lake, Mich.

Doug is survived by Judy, his wife of 61 years; three children and their spouses; nine grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

God Builds His House

The Apostle Paul's
vision of the
unified, mature
body that fully
resembles Christ
is a vision of
God's house.



Susan LaClear is an ordained minister who serves as the director of Candidacy for the CRCNA. She lives in Hudsonville, Mich., and she attends Westend CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

"GOD SHOULD HAVE A NICER HOUSE," thought David as he admired his own upgraded cedar-built accommodations. He felt embarrassed to be living in a swanky new house while the ark of God's presence still dwelled in a shabby little tent. After a long period of fighting battles and living on the run, David might have also surmised that building God a permanent house would bring stability.

Pastors today might set out to build their local church with a similar mix of noble and self-protective motivations. Embarrassed by the glaring insufficiencies of aging church buildings, weak volunteer bases, and shrinking budgets, we might throw ourselves deeply into restructuring programs and improving services—both for the glory of God and the sustainability of the church. Those in our congregations might eagerly affirm our drive to build. We might expect God to bless every plan we make toward that end.

David expected God to bless his building plans. But instead, the God who had condescended to meet with his people in rugged mountains and desert landscapes told David he wasn't looking for a fancy house. In fact, God announced he would instead build David a "house," an eternal kingdom from David's biological line (2 Sam. 7:11). He would have his son, Solomon, build a glorious temple. But then centuries later, he would lay the cornerstone for an everlasting spiritual temple. God's own Son would take on the punishment for sins so that his holy presence would make a dwelling place within the fragile hearts of those who believe.

"Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope of which we boast" (Heb. 3:6).

If "God is the builder" of his house (Heb. 3:3), what role do church leaders

play in that great project? They work to build up the faith of the believers so that they can hold firmly to their confidence and hope in Christ. They serve to "equip God's people for the works of service so that the body of Christ might be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13). The Apostle Paul's vision of the unified, mature body that fully resembles Christ is a vision of God's house. As inadequate as each member might look by human standards, God has made them all "living stones" (1 Pet. 2:5) in his perfect design. So church leaders are called to the long, patient work of discipleship that nudges each stone toward its great purpose—to "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" throughout their lives (1 Pet. 2:5).

God's house of living stones can't be built through a pastor's skills or charisma. Even the most impressive ministry initiatives won't move our congregations toward the fullness of Christ. Since it's the Spirit of God who builds God's house (Ps. 127:1), the most essential activity in our lives and ministries is prayer. Church leaders need to seek God regularly, asking him to work powerfully in the lives of their congregations. And all ministries should be aligned with God's vision of his house as a "house of prayer for all nations" (Is. 56:7, Mark 11:17) with the goal of drawing people into deeper communion with Christ.

As these new candidates enter ministry, may the Lord keep them rooted in prayer and devoted to the work of equipping, so that the living stones of God's house overflow with the presence of Christ. **B**



Laurel
Ackerman-Lindholm



Arthur N. Agu



Jason C. Blunt



Bryan J. Branderhorst



Daniel Jihoon Choi



Kwangjun Choi



Victor Chua



Jonathan P. Coupal



Brady J. De Boer



Travis J. Deur



Joshua D. Dykstra



John A. Hall



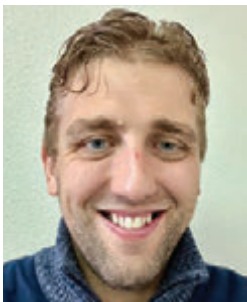
Caleb J. Horjus



Nathan L. Jansen



Yexiang (Debbie) Jin



James A. Kostelyk



Devin B. Lunshof



Eric W. Lynch



Amanda D. Mason



Curtis J. Meliefste



Grant R. Mensonides



Aaron Solomon-Mills



Samuel Moon



Trevor M. Mouw



Karlos Palacios



Jin Soo Park



Sungjin Park



Frank J. Quijada



James L. Reed



Justin P. Roukema



Dai Shi



Jacob P. H. Toman



Joseph A. Tuttle



Nicholas B.
Vander Ploeg



Zihan Xu



Jared M. Yaple



For almost 90 years the printing press had an outsized effect on the location and size of the CRC's denominational facilities.



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

Tale of the CRC Printing Press

IT WASN'T GUTENBERG'S PRESS, but for almost 90 years the printing press had an outsized effect on the location and size of the Christian Reformed Church's denominational facilities in Grand Rapids, Mich.

After 50 years of publishing *De Wachter* (in Dutch) and *The Banner* (in English), the Publications Committee of the CRC purchased a printing press in 1918.

Those early years were complicated by both world wars and by poor quality "war paper," in amounts limited by the government. Conscription caused a lack of manpower. Its initial rental space on the third floor of a building proved troublesome. The committee reported to Synod 1922 that "when (the press) is in operation the floor shakes and the papers suffer. (We have) attempted to reinforce the floor but it has not stilled the vibration entirely."

In 1923, the committee purchased a two-story property on Market Street in Grand Rapids for \$13,000. For the first time the denomination had office space in a building of its own. Within three years it was free of debt.

The enlargement of *The Banner* taxed the capacity of the printing plant, so a larger press was purchased, making it possible to print 24-32 pages of *The Banner* instead of just 16. And the committee found a larger property on Jefferson Avenue.

By 1950, what had started as a small operation had become a full-fledged CRC publishing house. More machines were purchased.

In 1953, land at the corner of Kalamazoo Avenue and 28th Street in Grand Rapids was purchased. When costs exceeded what was allocated, the Publications Committee picked up the cost and paid it from its publishing profits.

In 1958, more than two million copies of *The Back to God Hour* radio messages

were printed. Each month 113,500 copies of the *Family Altar* booklet were printed and mailed, in addition to 1,185 Home Study Courses. In 1962, a two-color offset press was acquired, and that year *The Banner's* Easter and Christmas covers were printed in four colors.

By 1981, the printing operation was producing millions of dollars of services annually in its production unit. It provided duplicating, short-run printing, copying, mailing, purchasing, service contracts, and mailing list usage. The scope of work included writing, translating, art, layout and design, composition, copy editing, copyrighting services, printing, binding, pamphlets, books, church school materials, music and liturgy resources, audiovisual materials, and, of course, *The Banner*.

When an onsite warehouse was added, denominational agencies, including the printing plant and warehouse, occupied about 127,000 square feet.

The 1989 decision to purchase a new four-color press for \$1 million committed the CRC to stay in the printing business for the foreseeable future. That future lasted almost 20 years.

As technology changed, so did the requirements of publishing. Paper was getting replaced by pixels. In 2007, the printing plant was closed. The creative, print, and distribution activities remained in-house.

As the denomination's staff diminished, more space went unused. In 2026, the building that had been the face of the CRC in Grand Rapids was sold and demolished. The new CRC-U.S. Ministry Support Center, located on the East Beltline, contains 25,000 square feet.

The Banner continues to be produced by editors and artists in the new building, but the thundering noise of ancient presses has been replaced by the quiet hum of computers. **B**

Truth in the Inmost Being: The Slow Work of Character Formation

By Chuck DeGroat

That's not the man I know. I remember thinking that after a prominent elder at our church was arrested for murdering his wife. When I was in high school, I had been a little hesitant to talk to someone so important. When the grisly details came to light, a secret life was exposed and a congregation was left heartbroken and confused.

I've logged almost three decades as a pastor, professor, licensed therapist, and consultant navigating issues of abuse, conflict, relational rupture, and character malformation—mostly in churches and Christian institutions. These realities grieve God's heart (Ez. 34). I hear a familiar refrain whenever yet another scandal erupts: "That's not the person I know. That was out of character."

But this misses something fundamental about character: Character is not something we drift in and out of. Rather, character is who you are, revealed over time in the consistent habits of the heart and quietly rooted in choices that run deeper than the whims of circumstance.

The word *character* comes from the Greek verb *charassō* (χαράσσω), a word that originally referred to the careful work of engraving or inscription. Imagine a sculptor carving an image into stone or a metalworker imprinting an image onto a coin. Imagine the deep and growing roots of a tree that sustain it over time, even amid life's changing weather patterns (Jer. 17:7-8).

Unlike the word *personality*, which stems from *persona* (a theatrical mask) and often reflects how we show up—funny, shy, pensive, charming, bold, or sarcastic—character suggests something more enduring: the deep

moral, relational, and affective grooves etched over time.

So what looks like a sudden failure is usually the fruit of a long, quiet formation—one that unfolded beneath the surface, unnoticed and unnamed. No, we do not put character on and take it off like a mask. We are shaped into it.

Formation Is Always Happening

Whether we intend it or not, formation is happening all the time. We are shaped within family systems, which hold sway long after we've left the nest. We are shaped within cultures and subcultures, which teach us (subtly or not-so-subtly) about what it means to be human, how to deal with pain, or what should be spoken or left unspoken. We are shaped by internal and external threats, by what we love and trust, our bodies habituating to postures of connection or self-protection. Our everyday dispositions have a story—one that dates back to our earliest moments.

Doug came to see me after everything fell apart.

He was the pastor of a small church—the kind where trust is personal and betrayal cuts deep. When it was discovered that Doug had been stealing cash from the weekly offerings for years, the shock rippled through the congregation.

This seemed so out of character—on the surface. Doug was relentlessly generous with his time. He showed up early, stayed late, visited the sick, helped people move, fixed what was broken. If someone needed help, Doug was usually the first one there.

But that visible version of Doug wasn't the whole story.

Doug grew up in a home where money was never talked about but always

felt. His parents worked long hours and were perpetually stretched thin. There was a constant, low-grade anxiety in the house—a sense that one unexpected expense could tip everything over. No one said this out loud, but Doug absorbed it in his body.

He learned early to be good, helpful, and low-maintenance. He learned to read the emotional temperature of the room and not add to the stress. Kindness became a way of staying safe.

But the anxiety never left.

By middle school, Doug discovered that taking small amounts of cash quieted the fear and gave him a sense of control in a world that felt precarious. What began as a coping strategy became a secret pattern—one he carried into adulthood.

This is where the language of "out of character" breaks down.

Doug didn't suddenly become someone else when he stole from the church. He was living a divided life long before anyone noticed (James 1:8). On the outside, he appeared generous and faithful. On the inside, he was anxious, vigilant, and shaped by scarcity.

Stealing wasn't a departure from his character. It was an expression of a character formed under chronic insecurity, a manifestation of a life forged in hiding and self-protection rather than trust and security.

That doesn't excuse the harm. People were betrayed. Trust was broken. God's character was misrepresented. Accountability mattered. But if we stop at moral outrage, we miss the deeper question: What kind of formation produces lives that look faithful on the outside but are driven by fear underneath?

Doug's story is unsettling because it presses the question back onto us: Where are we living divided lives—competent, kind, and generous on the outside, but anxious and afraid within? And who are we becoming because of our inner divisions?

The Futility of Sin Management

Doug's story makes something painfully clear: When we reduce sin to mere outward behavior, we miss the heart of the matter entirely.

We who claim to take sin seriously often pride ourselves on moral clarity. We name the rules, draw the boundaries, enforce accountability. We believe that if we can identify the wrong behavior and stop it, transformation will follow. But Doug's story (and the biblical witness) reveals that behavior is often the symptom, not the core problem.

When we collapse sin into outward behavior, we settle for what Dallas Willard once called sin management—a shallow attempt to control outcomes without attending to the deeper work of transformation. It keeps us busy, but it rarely makes us whole.

Sin management focuses on outcomes: Don't do this. Start doing that. Try harder. Set up safeguards. While these measures can be helpful, they are profoundly limited. They assume our primary problem is a failure of willpower or conviction. They rarely ask what fear, wound, or attachment pattern drives the behavior in the first place.

Doug didn't steal merely because he had a deficient theology. Doug passed his ordination exams with flying colors, and his explicit theology was seemingly flawless.

When we
reduce sin to
mere outward
behavior, we miss
the heart of the
matter entirely.

Doug stole, in part, because anxiety and scarcity had shaped him long before he could name them. The behavior was wrong, but it made sense given the world his nervous system had learned to inhabit. He'd developed an implicit theology, one with an echo of Genesis 3—"I'm going to have to forge a life on my own." This was the theology he was living.

This is why sin management so often fails. You can tweak a behavior in the short-term, but the heart's habitual dispositions will eventually be revealed. You can play the public role, but what's been shaped in secret quietly animates who you are and everything you do.

How Were You Shaped?

Long before you could articulate beliefs about God, you were learning how relationships work. You were discovering whether closeness was safe, whether needs were welcome, whether mistakes led to repair or rupture. These experiences shaped your nervous system—your expectations about connection, conflict, and care. And these experiences formed your habits and dispositions—your way of being in the world.

Calvin University professor James K.A. Smith's work on character formation echoes this. He notes that character is "the web of dispositions you've

acquired that work as automaticities, disposing you to act in certain ways" (*You Are What You Love*). I'd add that these so-called "automaticities" are reflexive responses of the human nervous system. But on the surface, that's not what we see.

Sarah learned that love came through achievement in her home. Her father rejoiced at A's on tests and trophies at the end of sporting events, but ignored her tears. She learned to bury sadness, confusion, and shame.

After attending college and getting married, Sarah settled into part-time work at a Christian publisher and began having children. But that nagging sense that she wasn't doing enough or performing well followed her. Other moms seemed to handle stress better. Other wives seemed to balance their many tasks more easily.

Sarah didn't suffer a scandal, like Doug. The quiet formation of her character left its own divide within, however. On the outside, she was bubbly and personable. On the inside, she navigated a never-ending ache, a sense of impending doom. She'd go from doctor to doctor looking for medical answers. Not even her husband was attuned to her silent suffering.

The work of character re-formation is not just the work of addressing what is seen. More fundamentally, it addresses what is unseen.

Many Christian environments reward performance far more than presence. We celebrate certainty, productivity, and confidence. We rarely slow down enough to ask what these traits are protecting us from.

Performative faith looks faithful on the outside but is often driven by fear

on the inside—fear of being exposed, fear of being irrelevant, fear of being abandoned, fear of failure. Over time, this performance disconnects us from ourselves and from God. We become managers of image rather than people of integrity.

Integrity, after all, comes from the word *integer*—wholeness. Not perfection. But an inner cohesion. It's the wholeness Jesus envisions when he says, "Blessed are the pure (*katharos*) in heart" (Matt. 5:8).

A person of character is not someone without struggle. It's someone who is no longer split between who they appear to be and who they actually are, echoing God's promise: "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh" (Ez. 11:19).

From Fixing to Being Found

Much of Christian formation has been built around fixing—fixing sin, fixing behavior, fixing leaders. It's what we've known since we grasped for the fruit in Eden, fleeing the scene and sewing fig leaves of self-protection. It's an exhausting pursuit that we're ultimately only relieved of when we realize we no longer need to hide, but we're "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

In their own time, Doug and Sarah each found their way to me for a five-day soul care intensive. Their stories brought sadness, not because they came from tragically broken homes or abusive situations, but because they described their families as ordinary, normal, Christian.

Our work was not to target their parents as bad—most of us are doing the best we can. Rather, the work was to grow in curiosity about their formation. They began to see the subtle movements of their hearts and

formation of their habits, even in their earliest years. In time, Doug and Sarah experienced a growing "truth in the inmost being" (Ps. 51:6), an unfolding story that not only needed to be told, but held with grace and tenderness. Slowly, with care, they were living into a new story, with growing integrity, maturity, and wholeness.

Can we cultivate the kinds of honest spaces where these stories can be seen, heard, and told? Can we create room for each other, even for truth in the depths of our being? It's challenging when it seems that performance and posturing are more encouraged, not least through social media. It's challenging when definitions of faithfulness prize only outward manifestations and don't consider the habits of the heart.

Jesus rarely confronted failure the way we do. Rarely did he begin with exposure or explanation, but instead with presence and parables to invite a new way of imagining life. When he encountered divided lives—religious leaders skilled at performance, disciples full of bravado and fear, women hiding in shame, men protecting themselves with self-certainty—he did not reduce them to their behavior. He often spoke directly to the heart beneath it.

Again and again, Jesus' first move isn't in the direction of mere behavioral modification but heart transformation:

*"Who are you looking for?"
"What do you want me to do for you?"
"Do you want to be made well?"*

Jesus relieves us of the exhausting pursuit of security, worth, belonging, or satisfaction on our own.

Jesus was not interested in creating better-managed selves. He came to heal divided ones. He named hypocrisy not as moral failure alone, but as a life split between outer

righteousness and inner fear. His harshest words were reserved not for those who struggled, but for those who refused to see their own division.

At the same time, Jesus was endlessly patient with those willing to tell the truth about their inner world. He met Zacchaeus not with condemnation but with presence—and restitution followed. He met Peter not with disqualification but with a fire, a meal, and a question about love. He met the woman at the well not with a lecture, but with a conversation that named her story without shaming it.

This is the way of character formation Jesus models: not fixing from the outside in, but healing from the inside out. Not fear-driven performance, but love that reorders the heart. Not sin management, but transformation that emerges as we are seen, known, held, and forgiven.

The question before us, then, is not simply: What have we done wrong? It is: Who are we becoming?

Character is not formed by pretending, posturing, or perfecting. It is formed as we bring our whole selves—fear, longing, failure, and hope—into the light of Christ's attentive, healing love. And in that light, slowly and sometimes painfully, divided lives begin to come together.

It won't be easy. But it will be holy. 



Chuck DeGroat is an ordained minister in the RCA, a professor at Western Theological Seminary, a therapist, and author of seven books including the forthcoming *Who You're Becoming: The Slow and Courageous Work of Cultivating Character In a Narcissistic Age* (Tyndale, 2026).

Basic Christianity: Heidelberg Catechism, Part 2

One of the hottest topics in the 16th century was the sacraments.

MY PREVIOUS ARTICLE explored the historical background and theme of comfort in the Heidelberg Catechism. This article will look at the structure of the HC and the first two sections. The HC is structured into three sections, something unique at the time. These sections are human misery (Q&A 3-11), deliverance (Q&A 12-85), and gratitude (Q&A 86-129). This threefold division is built around what we could call the basic elements of Christianity: the Apostle's Creed, the Sacraments, and the Ten Commandments and Lord's Prayer.

A popular Roman Catholic catechism of the day taught that three things give us a heavy heart: 1. I will die. 2. I don't know when. 3. I don't know where I will go. By contrast, the HC teaches how great my sin and misery are; how I am delivered from my sin and misery; and how I am to thank God for this deliverance (Q&A 2). Note that the theme of comfort is knit into the very structure of the HC. This is the gospel of grace!

The HC begins with the knowledge of who we are apart from Christ. Although no one enjoys talking about sin, the gospel cannot be understood apart from recognizing humans as sinful. Part one of the HC—misery—deals with the basic human condition since the fall of the first couple. Misery, which we come to know through the law (Q&A 3), is the result of sin. Humans who were created for community are now rewired “to hate God and our neighbor” (Q&A 5), unable to do any good (Q&A 8), and therefore subject to God's punishment (Q&A 10). Although most of this section offers little hope, Q&A 8 points to the solution to our problem: being “born again by the Spirit of God.”

After introducing God's justice and mercy in Q&A 11, the second part moves into God's solution to our problem. This section clearly teaches that only God can pay the debt for our sin (Q&A 12-15), thus the necessity of

Christ's mediation as the God-man (Q&A 16-19). Readers are left with the question, “What must I believe?” This is answered by a section explaining each line of the Apostle's Creed.

This teaching on the Creed focuses on fundamental Christian truths. The sources the writers used were diverse, borrowing from Lutheran and Reformed texts. While there are a few implicit attacks on some Lutheran and Anabaptist teachings, the harshest attacks were leveled at the Roman Catholic church. For example, Q&A 29-30 emphasizes Christ alone as our Savior, not saints or anyone else. This reminds us as well that our ultimate trust must be in Christ.

One of the hottest topics in the 16th century was the sacraments. Specifically, what is happening in these rituals? Interestingly, the HC is ambiguous on this point, perhaps to keep the various parties united. What is clear in baptism and the Lord's Supper is that these practices symbolize our union with Christ. In baptism we are united to Christ's body, the church (Q&A 70, 74). In the Lord's Supper we share in Christ's body and blood such that all his benefits become ours (Q&A 76, 79). All of this is done through the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is at work producing faith through preaching and the sacraments “mak(ing) us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel” (Q&A 66). This is spiritual food for our spiritual journey received from Christ himself (Q&A 75). Through the sacraments we not only hear with our ears the gospel message, but see with our eyes “and taste with our mouths” that our hope and comfort in life and death is built on nothing less than Christ. 



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.

Golden Insights Await *Theo* Readers

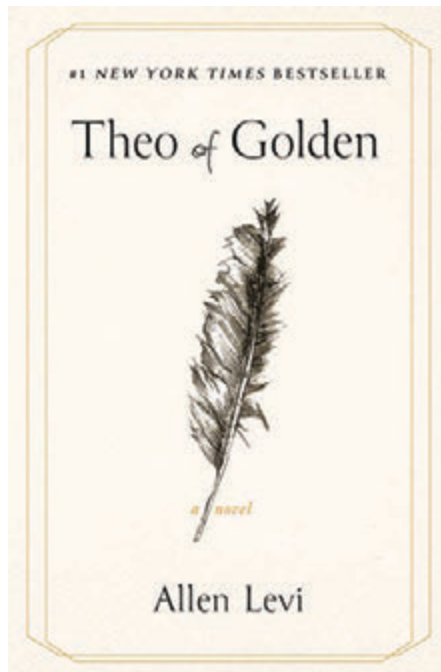
THEO WHO?

Readers of this No. 1 *New York Times*-bestselling novel don't find out his last name until the very end of the book, and for good reason. We just know this 86-year-old character as Theo of Golden, a fictional town in the South where he moves to quite mysteriously from his New York City home.

As an avid reader and observer of what books people are talking about, I kept hearing about Theo over and over again in my bookish social media feeds. At first I thought Theo was a child, but when one of my book clubs picked the book and I finally cracked it open, I met the most endearing elderly man, a character I was more than willing to walk with through the streets of Golden.

Soon after Theo arrives in town, he visits a coffee shop where the baristas brew up a cup of java that nearly matches the coffee perfection of his native Portugal. Theo is kind, unhurried, and notices everything, which is why he takes the time to examine the hundred or so pencil portraits of local residents that hang on the coffee shop's walls.

Though Theo's ultimate purpose is not revealed until the end of the book, he finds meaning by buying the portraits, sketched by a gifted local artist, and giving them to their subjects one by one. In this way he goes from a stranger in town to a friend, meeting with the portraits' subjects and hearing their stories. Whether the recipient of his "bestowals," as he calls them, is an unhoused woman with mental health challenges or a brilliant student cellist, a single father janitor or a street busker, Theo meets each person just where they are in life. After meeting with Theo, people feel seen, like Hagar in the wilderness encountering the God she named "El Roi," "the God who sees."



Theo sees the *imago Dei* in each person, no matter how they treat him or receive his gifts. He exemplifies how the power of compassion, presence, and generosity can change people's lives.

This read lived up to the hype for me. Some readers have found it slow and a bit preachy, but to me the gentle, lingering nature of the book was a healing balm, and the spiritual elements were artfully, if not explicitly, woven in.

If you are looking for a comfort read that will cause you to reflect and ponder its glimmering insights, *Theo* is for you. If your book club wants to have a compelling and possibly rousing discussion, look no further than Golden and its newest resident. You will never forget the quirky, real, and oh-so-human characters that propel these pages. You will never forget Theo of Golden. (Atria) **B**



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



The Me That Remains

By Amy Grant

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

It has been 13 years since Amy Grant released new music—eventful years for the singer songwriter who became a household name when *Age to Age* released 44 years ago.

But heart surgery and then a bicycle accident and head injury required her to relearn a number of things, including how to sing and play guitar.

As she came to terms with these changes, new songs emerged that resulted in *The Me that Remains*, an indie release and her best album in four decades. Grant's relaxed vocal style fits these songs about longing and loss beautifully. The title track, in which she reflects on who she is now, is especially beautifully written and performed, but the album is full of songs that make the listener want to pay attention. (Thirty Tigers)



All Booked Up

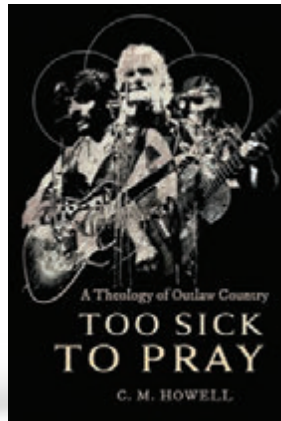
By Melody Carlson

Reviewed by Ann Byle

Veteran fiction writer Melody Carlson offers a delightful story readers will love. Protagonist Rita Owen is an older woman, which is nice to see when it comes to life and romance. Second, there are so many books!

Rita, who doesn't want to give up her home and, more importantly, her library, decides to take in lodgers to make ends meet. The ensuing personality quirks, drama, and potential romance with a tenant's older brother make for a bit of craziness, but using classic books to help those around her begins to calm everyone. People change, forgiveness is given, and life for Rita and her housemates settles down in a lovely ending.

This is fiction with a Christian worldview that will make a great addition to many summer reading lists. (Revell)



Too Sick to Pray: A Theology of Outlaw Country

By C. M. Howell

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

In 1969, struggling country artist Kris Kristofferson released "Me and Bobby McGee," marking the beginnings of "Outlaw Country."

In this book, theologian and musician C.M. Howell notes the religious undertones of many of the songs of Kristofferson, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and others. The faith journeys of these writers is hardly the stuff of inspirational books. They have struggles, doubts, and many questions. Howell, however, pulls apart their lyrics and the music to find how each of them writes about God, faith, and salvation.

Howell's facility with theology and music is evident in the way he analyzes both the texts and the music of these fascinating artists. *Too Sick to Pray* is a valuable resource for any country music fan who wants to explore the music more deeply. (Fortress Press)



Trust the Wings

By Barbara Schultze

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Barbara Schultze's debut novel gently portrays how personal adversity might just be an individual's pathway to spiritual and emotional growth.

As the year 1999 draws to a close, 28-year-old Aviana Lehrer is convinced that in the next century her nursing career will achieve new heights. But a devastating betrayal and a shocking discovery that her aging father has been arrested set Aviana on a hard path. When she finds herself back at her father's house, the extent of his deterioration forces Aviana into a role as his caregiver.

Though Aviana struggles to feel like she belongs anywhere, even in her relationship with God, she eventually realizes that "she did belong—right where she was, from one day to the next. Not in striving for prestige ... but in opening her wings to love." (Edenridge Press)

The Lowdown

Written by Barbara M.

Britton: In *Across the Lake: Traveling with Jesus Around the Sea of Galilee*, readers will discover the life-changing power of Jesus in six short stories from the Gospel of Mark. The miracles of Jesus will leap from the page in a biblical fiction story, author reflection, and relatable study. (Scrivenings)

Starring, Well,

Everybody: In *The Odyssey*, Homer's opus comes to life as Odysseus, king of Ithaca, embarks on a perilous journey to return home after the Trojan War. With Matt Damon, Anne Hathaway, Lupita Nyong'o, Tom Holland, Zendaya, and more. (July 17, Netflix)

Ma, Pa, Laura, and Mary

Return: Showrunner Rebecca Sonnenshine's fresh adaptation of Little House on the Prairie promises an authentic, sweeping take on Laura Ingalls Wilder's iconic books, blending hopeful family drama with gritty frontier survival. The show has even secured an early Season 2 renewal. (July 9, Netflix)

Written by Pastor Melle

Pool: In *Managing Conflict: A Pastor's Account of Shepherding Congregations to Health and Renewal*, CRC pastor Pool asserts that rather than rejecting or avoiding conflict, it must be managed so that it may become a force for good in our personal and church life. (Friesen Press)

A Black woman with her hair in braids, wearing a blue jacket over a red shirt, is crouching in a field. She is smiling and looking towards the camera while her hand rests on a large, green, leafy plant. The background is a blurred field with other similar plants.

Healed Minds Tend Toward Justice

How World Renew Supports Mental Health and Hope After Trauma

By Naomi Bula, World Renew

WHEN I MET JOYCE, she was a 19-year-old single mother of a 4-year-old who had been living in an under-resourced township in Zambia. As she was finishing a two-year agriculture and entrepreneurship certificate, Joyce confidently shared with me about her studies and her dreams. But her journey up to this point was anything but straightforward.

“Before I started studying, I was just sitting at home doing nothing,” Joyce told me. “After I gave birth to my daughter, life was very hard to endure, even to the extent of giving up on life and trying to commit suicide.”

Joyce’s words struck me not only because of their vulnerability, but also because of what she shared next: Her turning point was not education or economic opportunity. She needed a chance to heal.

Before Joyce enrolled in college, she participated in a trauma healing program implemented by volunteers at a local church in partnership with World Renew, the disaster response, community development, and justice ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Those sessions gave Joyce space to speak her pain aloud and to be seen not as a failure or a burden, but as a young woman created and loved by God. They helped her name the shame she carried and begin to let go of it by bringing it to the cross of Jesus. Only then was she ready to imagine something more for her life.

This pattern of “healing first, growth next” runs through World Renew’s work across the globe. In places shaped by conflict, displacement, abuse, and deep poverty, trauma often lives just beneath the surface. Even when violence has ended or immediate needs have been met, fear often remains lodged in the body, grief clouds the mind, and shame might isolate people from their communities. These unseen wounds reverberate through families and generations, undermining hope and making lasting change difficult to sustain.

Healed and ready to provide for her daughter, Joyce hopes to raise chickens of her own someday.



This art was created by young people in Ukraine. Program participants who were affected by the conflict were offered psychosocial supports, including art therapy.

“We have learned that healing the heart is not optional; it is foundational,” explains Ruairidh Waddell, chief program and impact officer at World Renew. “Food security, education, livelihoods, and peacebuilding all matter deeply, but without attention to mental and emotional health, progress can unravel. Through trauma healing work grounded in Scripture, relationship, and community, World Renew walks alongside people whose lives have been shaped by profound loss, helping them rediscover dignity, resilience, and hope.”

Overwhelmed by Grief

In a different context, Daniella’s story echoes Joyce’s.

Daniella grew up in Nicaragua, raised by her grandparents after her father left before she was born. While her mother worked long hours, her grandfather became her constant source of safety and wisdom. “My grandfather was a guiding light in my life,” Daniella said. “He taught me many things about life and being an honest person with strong values.”

When Daniella was 15, her grandfather died. The loss shattered her sense of belonging. “I locked myself in my room for hours, refusing to talk to anyone,” she recalled. “I felt so much pain and loneliness that I began to wonder if life was worth living at all.”

At school, classmates mocked her. Her grief expressed itself as anger and, one day after being teased, Daniella struck a classmate with a wooden chair. She was suspended and required to attend the Living in Peace counseling

program facilitated by World Renew's local partner, the Nehemiah Center.

"At first, I didn't want to talk," Daniella said. "I just sat there, staring at the floor." But her counselor stayed. "Week after week, she listened to me and asked me to pray with her. She told me that even in the middle of my pain, God still loved me."

That steady, compassionate presence began to soften the hard heart that grief had created in Daniella. Slowly, she rebuilt relationships at home and at school. Scripture became a source of comfort. "For the first time," she said, "I started to believe that maybe God hadn't forgotten me."

Like Joyce, Daniella did not just need discipline or opportunity. She needed someone to help tend the wounds beneath the surface. Today Daniella is nearing high school graduation, volunteering in her school's computer lab, and planning for college. "God didn't just heal my heart," she reflected. "He gave me a new purpose. I used to think my story was over at 15. But God was just beginning to write it."

When Trauma is Allowed to Speak

The consequences of trauma not being addressed ripple outward. World Renew's trauma healing work is therefore closely tied to peacebuilding: helping people process pain so it does not harden into despair or violence.

David, a 40-year-old father of three, learned this through devastating loss. After repeated militia attacks, David was forced to relocate within his home country of Nigeria. Within two years, his wife and son were killed in separate attacks. He was never able to recover his wife's body for burial. Grief froze him in denial.

When David joined a trauma healing group facilitated by World Renew's partner, Beacon of Hope Initiative, he spoke little at first. On the third day, during a session on forgiveness, he began to share and collapsed into tears. Facilitators gently reassured him that it was safe to show emotion and that God was present in his sorrow.

"I have now found courage in letting go of my pain and moving on with my life," David later said. "It has made me a better person and father." Since then, David has become a source of encouragement to others in his community. Again, the pattern holds: secure places for processing come first, transformation follows.

Dignity Restored, Thread by Thread

This pattern is visible in the story of Nyandom, mother of four and the women's representative for South Sudan's Ruweng Administrative Area.

After years of poverty, domestic violence, and displacement, Nyandom joined gender-based violence support sessions facilitated by Coalition for Humanity, a World Renew partner. Through counseling and supportive spaces, she began to stand tall again.

After that foundation was built, Nyandom was offered skills training. Learning embroidery built something resilient in her. "I stitched my pain into beauty," she said. Her work now supports her family. Her children are in school. Her husband publicly acknowledges her strength. Community members trust her to lead.

Nyandom's words of encouragement are poignant: "Don't give up. There is always a way forward, even if you have to sew it together one thread at a time."

A Call to the Church

When the church makes space for lament, truth-telling, and compassion, lives begin to change from the inside out. The Trauma Healing Institute describes how this work "incorporates proven mental health practices and a time-tested library of resources. But all of that is built on one foundation: the wisdom of the Bible. Our resources reach hurting people through Scripture, helping them to find healing from their trauma and to reconnect with the God who loves them."

Joyce said, "You can do it, no matter what people say! But you can't work alone. You need people to help, and you need guidance from your elders."

This is an invitation for us to see mental health not as secondary, but as sacred ground where God is already at work. As he fled for his life, King David wrote words that still speak into stories like those of Daniella, David, Nyandom, Joyce, and so many others: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:18).

After completing her trauma healing, Joyce pursued her studies through a scholarship made possible by World Renew. "I was downgraded by the community," she told me. "But now I'm aiming higher so that I can become a farm manager or an extension officer (a trainer of farmers). ... For me, my life has been very hard. But we have to pray to God." With this foundation of healing, the pursuit of justice and human flourishing are possible. **B**

Real Ministry, Real Pain

By Phillip Palacios, director of communications, Calvin Theological Seminary

IT'S A SCENE WE ARE ALL FAMILIAR WITH: The service has ended, the benediction given, the coffee and baked goods accompany the half-hour conversations before folks step out the door, get in their vehicles, and go on to the rest of their Sunday and week. But that's not always the whole scene. Hidden in the margins are quiet conversations out of earshot of others, sharing pain that cannot, and in many cases should not, be shared publicly. Also hidden are the conversations left unsaid. These are the undercurrents of turmoil, pain, trauma, and hurt dwelling on wooden pews or hidden behind stacked chairs in church buildings across our denomination.

This is just one aspect of their calling that ministry leaders face daily. How does one weigh the delicate balance of care, privacy, love, and truth? How does one know their own capabilities and also when to seek additional guidance and recommend professional help? Our denomination takes these questions to heart and has resources and programs that adapt to changing needs and contexts. As a ministry of the CRCNA, Calvin Theological Seminary is one piece of the larger picture.

The holistic theological education at Calvin Seminary focuses on the entire person, forming them as discerning, biblically wise, gospel-shaped leaders prepared to engage in that balance of ministry. Our Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program has played a significant role in answering the changing needs of the church. Additionally, our vocational formation specifically fulfills our "holistic" education promise, preparing students for real ministry by engaging with real pain through mentor groups, contextual learning, assessments, and tools for growth.

Evie Dykhouse (M.Div. 2027) says of her experience, "There's so much pain in this world and so much suffering, I appreciate that our classes don't try to skirt away from it. ... As ministry leaders and pastoral caregivers, these are the things we are going to see."

We describe the educational experience at Calvin Seminary as "Head, Heart & Practice." We purposely use an ampersand instead of "and." When authors work closely together on a book or paper, the ampersand signifies that close collaboration. This is a picture of what we offer students who will answer calls in the CRCNA and beyond. Recent M.Div. (2025) graduate and Ph.D. student Leah Jolly talks about this holistic formation: "I would argue that the best education is academically very rigorous and challenging ... and it integrates with what you are doing outside the classroom. I



would say the hardest classes I've taken are the ones that have challenged my heart and my practice the most."

The church cannot fix every wound, and we do not know all the ways God works for renewal in the lives of our congregations and communities. Sometimes those quiet conversations will not bring healing. But our calling at Calvin Seminary is to prepare students to work toward healing nonetheless.

As Jessica Joustra, Ph.D., incoming professor of systematic theology, stated in a recent article, "In Bavinck's view ... the gospel 'embraces the whole of human existence'; it touches all of life as a 'joyful tiding ... for the entire cosmos.' God, in his glory and goodness, is sovereign over all. Because of this, theology must be doxological; we ought 'not rest satisfied (until we have) traced back everything to the sovereign good pleasure of God as its ultimate and deepest cause.'" 

The View From Here

Leadership in the Wilderness

IN THE FINAL MONTHS of the 1990s, I was a freshly minted student at Calvin Theological Seminary. I had recently become engaged to a Christian Reformed woman and joined the CRCNA. With a head brimming with energy, excitement, and Reformed theology pouring out my ears, I was unleashed on unsuspecting CRC congregations with my “license to exhort.” And exhort I did—grateful for the preaching opportunities that helped pay my bills.

Yet there was something missing in those early years. It wasn’t experience—though certainly I needed more hands-on learning. It wasn’t theory—I had already digested a massive amount of theology and was conjugating Greek and Hebrew verbs in my sleep. What I lacked was formation, specifically the leadership formation that happens in the wilderness.

I used to think that leadership was like an escalator. You get on at the ground floor and, if you do it right, you move steadily up, up, and up. What I didn’t understand was that the formation sustaining fruitful leadership requires the escalator to stop and sometimes even slip backward.

Robert Clinton, one of the most influential leadership authors of the past 50 years, writes extensively about the “wilderness experience” of leaders. Scripture is full of them: Moses’ banishment from Egypt, Elijah’s flight

Wilderness experiences are the formative crucibles God uses to move leaders to their next stage of ministry.

to Mount Horeb, and Paul’s years in Arabia. Even Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted for 40 days.

In his book *The Making of a Leader*, Clinton refers to these wilderness experiences as “isolation processes.” Whether brought on by illness, loss of job, conflict, or emotional upheaval, these experiences should not be understood as failure and tragedy.

Rather, wilderness experiences are the formative crucibles God uses to move leaders to their next stage of ministry. By cooperating with the Spirit during these dry seasons, leaders develop the character, spiritual depth, and moral authority to lead. Clinton provides many examples of how the “wilderness experiences” prepared significant Christian leaders to be used by God in a remarkable way.

It would be convenient if I could say, “I wish someone had told that young, aspiring seminary student about the formative power of the wilderness.” The truth is, they did. In fact, one of my seminary classes assigned me to read *The Making of a Leader*. But as a young leader, I just didn’t get it. Maybe I couldn’t. Maybe some things can only be lived, not taught.

I eventually encountered the formative power of the wilderness the

old-fashioned way. Several years into my ministry in Haiti with Christian Reformed World Missions (now Resonate Global Mission), I hit a metaphorical wall. Immersed in conflict, frustrated by my failure to make an impact, and suffering with an illness, I found myself in the desert. Or rather, God found me in the desert—and he used that experience to transform me. I’ve been in many wildernesses since, and I can tell you God has been present in every one.

What does this mean for developing leaders for our churches? We live in a time when many recognize the deep challenges of Christian leadership. Sometimes friends, parents, siblings, and even pastors try to talk prospective leaders out of ministry service, whether lay or ordained. Ministry is a privilege and joy, but the wilderness will come. Let’s challenge ourselves to see the desert not as tragedy, but as formation—part of the profound gospel pattern of dying and rising that ultimately sustains Christian leadership and life. 



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.

A Remarkable Journey of Faith and Perseverance

TEN MONTHS AGO, Colin Jambekar was sitting through chemotherapy treatments that lasted up to seven hours a day while trying to keep pace with a demanding civil engineering course load.

On May 9, 2026, he walked across the commencement stage at Calvin University as a college graduate, cancer survivor, and conference champion student-athlete.

The native of Grosse Pointe, Mich., came to Calvin for its nationally respected engineering program and continued his athletic career as a javelin thrower on the university's track and field team. After steadily improving during his first three collegiate seasons, Jambekar entered the fall of 2025 poised for a breakthrough senior year.

Then came an unexpected diagnosis.

After discovering abnormalities during a self-exam in late August, Jambekar sought medical attention and was diagnosed with testicular cancer. Doctors later discovered the cancer had spread into his lymph nodes, leading to surgery followed by three rounds of chemotherapy.

"It's shocking at first," said Jambekar. "It forces you on your knees to pray, and I prayed a lot."

Jambekar continued pursuing his degree while traveling regularly to Detroit for chemotherapy infusions. He credits Calvin faculty and staff for helping him navigate one of the most difficult seasons of his life.

"My professors were great," said Jambekar. "I would not be graduating from Calvin without their help. My engineering professors helped me work ahead. They were willing to work around my medical treatments and helped with my time management."



Calvin student, athlete, and cancer survivor Colin Jambekar graduated May 9, 2026, with a deep appreciation for God's faithfulness.

The treatments came with immense physical and emotional challenges. Jambekar lost weight, strength, and stamina while also dealing with anxiety and post-traumatic stress tied to his cancer treatments.

"There is a psychological part of the battle," he said. "I kept telling myself that it wasn't about me. It was about glorifying God through my struggles."

This spring, Jambekar returned to competition with the Calvin track and field team after almost 11 months away from competition. At the 2026 MIAA Championships, he delivered a career-best javelin throw of 49.08 meters while helping Calvin capture the conference title.

The moment became even more meaningful because he competed alongside his younger brother, Lucas, who won the conference championship in the event.

"Getting to watch Colin overcome everything and find joy in the performance was something right out of a movie," said Calvin associate head coach Jacob Graham.

Calvin head coach Adam Haldorson said Jambekar's impact extended far beyond athletics.

"He wanted to use his diagnosis to find a way to make other people's lives better and further God's kingdom by showing God's grace and glory through his hardships," said Haldorson. "He's been a great ambassador for people who one day will go through this cancer journey."

Jambekar completed his engineering senior design project this spring and has accepted a position with Anchor Construction in Grand Rapids following graduation.

Now considered cancer-free, he continues follow-up appointments with doctors but faces the future with confidence grounded in faith.

"I know that God is in control and that his will is perfect," said Jambekar. "That brings me peace and the confidence to live for him moving forward." 

—John Zimmerman,
Calvin University

Directors' Desks:

Carol Bremer-Bennett and Peter Timmerman

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

Carol Bremer-Bennett: World Renew helps Christian Reformed congregations recognize that kingdom work is already happening in their churches, neighborhoods, and communities around the world. Our role is to connect gifts, wisdom, and relationships so we can lean into the global body of Christ together.

We invite churches into real partnership. Some engage through long-term development or disaster response; others through prayer, advocacy, learning, or giving. This is mutual ministry. We don't see churches as helpers or communities as projects.

Peter Timmerman: I often use the word *glocal*: connecting the local to the global. We help churches engage meaningfully through prayer, giving, learning, advocacy, and, for some, travel. While information isn't our primary goal, we also help churches understand global poverty, justice, and disaster response so they can engage faithfully.

What core values guide World Renew's work?

Peter: Our strategic plan identifies four core values: faith, effectiveness, people flourishing, and stewardship.

Faith is foundational—our work is rooted in Scripture and in discerning God's will in a broken world. Effectiveness matters because we want real impact, defined by the communities themselves. People flourishing reminds us that development is always people-based. Everything we do—food security,



Photos from World Renew's 2026 Annual General Meeting at Cascade Fellowship CRC, April 2026

livelihoods, health—is about people living abundant lives, especially those who are marginalized or vulnerable. Stewardship flows from our CRC heritage: faithfully caring for resources, people, and creation. You see this in our climate-smart agriculture and creation care work.

Carol: These values shape not only what we do, but how we do it. We begin with listening, believing communities already have strengths, wisdom, and God-given potential. Dignity matters. We practice asset-based community development, asking: What's already here? What dreams do people have for their own future? We come alongside as partners, offering support when helpful and stepping back when it's not.

What is one thing you wish people better understood about World Renew?

Carol: I wish people knew how deeply hopeful this work is. We often show up in moments of crisis, but we also see incredible beauty, resilience, and care within communities. There is already so much hope present.

I also wish people saw that same hope in their own communities. It's easy

to feel overwhelmed by the news, but we're not called to hopelessness. God's creativity and compassion are alive—both among our partners and within the CRC itself.

Peter: Two things stand out for me. First, we work through local partners: churches and Christian organizations grounded in their contexts. This approach is empowering, sustainable, and essential.

Second, World Renew's impact is bigger than many people realize. Through this ministry, the CRCNA has had global influence far beyond its size, touching hundreds of thousands of lives over more than 60 years.

What has been a highlight for World Renew in the past year?

Peter: For me, a major highlight has been meeting CRC members across North America and hearing their stories of refugee sponsorship, learning trips, and creative generosity. Their commitment and belief in World Renew are incredibly encouraging.

I was also deeply moved by meeting partners in Central America: strong, capable leaders whose personal

Foundation to Future: The Canadian National Gathering

stories and ministries reflect hope and resilience.

Carol: Amid significant transitions in the global development sector, I've seen God's faithfulness in how World Renew continues to be trusted by partners, churches, and funders. Even in times of change, World Renew is sought out for its integrity, relationships, and effectiveness.

Where would you like to see World Renew in five years?

Carol: I hope our work continues to be shaped by community voices and local leadership, marked by trust, joy, and shared power. I want World Renew to remain a bridge for CRC congregations, helping them engage meaningfully, both locally and globally.

I hope World Renew helps cultivate unity, courage, and compassion within the church. I have confidence that God will continue to bless this work as we stay faithful.

Peter: I hope we continue to grow, not dramatically in size, but in depth, partnerships, and sustainability. I want to see power increasingly shared with local partners and communities as development becomes even more community-led and relational.

How can people pray for World Renew?

Peter: Pray for courage to remain compassionate in a world that increasingly views empathy as weakness. Compassion is at the heart of Christ's call and of our work.

Carol: Pray that we lead with humility, wisdom, and trust in God's provision. Pray for protection and strength for staff and partners working in fragile and conflict-affected places. Pray that we stay grounded, attentive, and united—and that we never lose joy in recognizing where God's kingdom is already breaking through. **B**



Members of the steering team prepare for participants to arrive at the Canadian National Gathering: from left, Nicole Van de Kraats, Josh Sweetman, Wendy DeJong, Kevin Lobert, Al Postma.

AT THE END OF JESUS' SERMON on the Mount is a story about two builders. It's a parable not of location but of depth, asking us not where we build, but if we're willing to dig down to the bedrock for a solid foundation. This is the image that shaped our Canadian National Gathering this past May, with its theme of "Foundation to Future."

We came together at a genuinely pivotal moment: disaffiliation, pastoral vacancies, binational tensions, an increasingly diverse membership. Navigating these requires deep wisdom.

From east to west, stories emerged of healthy conflict handled with grace, of mentors investing in the next generation, of churches reaching their neighbors with love, of lifelong discipleship quietly transforming lives, of leaders stewarding their roles, and more.

Wisdom emerged in many ways, with four that stood out to me: First, a reminder that the church is people; structures must serve the community, not replace it. Second, we cannot build

in isolation; we need one another's encouragement, accountability, and diverse wisdom. Third, intentionality matters; we cannot simply hope things fall into place. And fourth, the most foundational truth of all: that Jesus Christ gathers, protects, and preserves his church. He is the rock and the builder.

To be a disciple of Jesus is not to just stare at the foundations, but to build on them. The question is whether we're going to be wise builders or foolish ones. I left the Canadian National Gathering more convinced than ever that the CRC has leaders from across Canada who have deep wisdom, and it makes me hopeful for the future. **B**

*Al Postma, CRCNA
Executive Director, Canada*

Serving the Nations on Campus

RESONATE GLOBAL MISSION is celebrating the newest partnerships in the Christian Reformed Church's growing campus ministry network: international student ministries led by Hilda Vanderklippe in the Niagara region and a team including Jenica Groot-Nibbelink in the London, Ont., area. Though both leaders have been serving students for years, their recent agreements with Resonate mark a new chapter of collaboration, support, and shared vision.

International student ministry reflects the heart of Resonate's mission in powerful ways. Each year, thousands of students arrive in Canada carrying hopes, dreams, and enormous courage. They also carry burdens—academic pressure, financial strain, and immigration uncertainty. As Vanderklippe explains, many are separated from their natural support systems of family and lifelong friends while trying to navigate a new culture and education system in a second language.

"The first year is especially hard," she said. "Students are dealing with loneliness, culture shock, and so many changes all at once."

These ministries often meet students at pivotal points in their mental health journeys. Immigration policy changes, work permit pressures, and the stress of securing employment after graduation add layers of anxiety. Students who arrive knowing no one can quickly feel isolated. In these moments, campus ministries become more than programs—they become lifelines. Leaders pray with students, connect them to counseling resources, foster friendships, and remind them



A view of the Niagara student ministry after a skating event.

they are not alone. Many students have said that once they found this community, their lives changed.

Groot-Nibbelink and the team she works with at Fanshawe College and Western University intentionally support students' practical, social, and spiritual needs. This can include monthly potluck meals in local churches, Bible studies, and programs such as "Friends for Dinner," which matches international students to Canadian Christian homes during Canadian holiday times. Monthly potluck dinners also support students' health and wellbeing, opening conversations about topics such as housing conflicts, taxation, and mental health.

"We strive to support international students' practical, social, and spiritual needs," Groot-Nibbelink said. "Our faith is not just a Sunday activity—it affects every aspect of who we are and what we do."

In Niagara, Vanderklippe and her colleagues offer English and French conversation circles, career mentoring, cultural celebrations, Bible studies, and countless one-on-one

conversations. Their approach is holistic and relational.

"We support international students so they can thrive in this new country," Vanderklippe said.

There is also profound joy. Groot-Nibbelink speaks of witnessing generosity and perseverance among students from around the world. Vanderklippe celebrates those who move from curiosity to faith, discovering a God who loves them.

By welcoming these two ministries as partner campus ministries, Resonate strengthens a network that serves students at some of the most formative—and fragile—moments of their lives. Together, we give thanks for what God has already done and look forward with hope to what he will continue to do among the nations gathered on our campuses. 

—Victoria Veenstra,
Resonate Global Mission

Moon Notes

MOST NIGHTS I FORGET the moon is there, but every once in a while it winks out from behind a cloud, and I marvel at this part of God's good creation.

The Bible and science tell us the moon was created after the earth. Genesis describes the moon as a "lesser light to rule the night" that was created on the fourth day. Scientists have several theories of how this happened, but all suggest something (or many things) very large struck the earth and "flung enough molten and vaporized debris into space," resulting in the Moon. (science.nasa.gov/moon/formation).

However God did it, I am glad it was created! Not only does the moon reflect the sun's light, it causes the tides, protects us from meteors, and is a sign to some animals for movement and breeding.

Light in the Darkness

The moon does not make its own light, but reflects the sun's rays. As it circles the earth, we see it as a sliver of light, a football shape, a semicircle, and finally a circle. These are called the phases of the moon.

Even when you see only part of it, get some binoculars and take a closer look. You can see the whole moon, but part of it is hidden in shadow.

The nights we are not able to see the moon are called the new moon phase. In the Old Testament the New Moon Festival marked the beginning of each month with worship, offerings, and renewal.

Moon Guide

Sandhoppers are tiny crustaceans that live on ocean beaches. With rising and lowering tides (also caused by the moon) they can easily get stranded and dry out. Experiments reported in Nature show sandhoppers move up

Moon Stats:

- » Distance from Earth: around 240,000-380,000 km
- » Size (diameter): 3,476 km, about one-fourth the size of Earth
- » Time to complete one trip around Earth: 27.3 days
- » Temperature: between -248 and 123 degrees Celsius (about -414 to 253 degrees Fahrenheit)
- » Gravity: one-eighth Earth's gravity

and down the beach based on phases of the moon, using their antennae to face the right direction. This helps them keep track of the waterline.

Coral spawn once a year, following a full moon. Scientists are unclear how this happens, but studies suggest that spawning is triggered by the period of darkness from sunset to moonrise, which changes with the moon's phases.

The Dark Side

Since the moon rotates on its axis at a similar rate to how fast it circles the earth (called tidal locking) we only see one side of the moon. In April 2026 the spacecraft Artemis II did a lunar fly-by, and the four astronauts on board saw the side of the moon that no human eyes have ever seen. On that mission, the astronauts spent Easter looking at Earth and the moon from their spaceship.

"When I read the Bible and I look at all the amazing things that were done for us," astronaut Victor Glover said, "...you're on a spaceship called Earth that was created to give us a place to live in the universe and the cosmos." **B**



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

DEADLINES: Ads for the September/October issue are due August 14, 2026; November/December, October 10, 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.

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

Church Positions Available

BETHEL CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH is seeking a Minister of the Word to shepherd our church family with compassion, strong leadership, and a desire to do God's will. We are located in the Four Corners region of the United States. Our community of Shiprock, NM is also within the Navajo Nation. For more information, please contact us: bethelcrtc-nm@gmail.com or 505-686-5451

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.

CALVARY CRC OF THE TWIN CITIES (MN) is seeking a full-time Pastor of Discipleship. We value a gifted communicator who teaches with clarity and invests deeply in the spiritual formation of our congregation, especially our youth. Those eager to join a dynamic team ministry in a major metropolitan area can inquire at search.calvary@gmail.com. More information can also be found at www.calvarytwincities.org.

FAITH PRESBYTERIAN CRC GUAM is seeking a pastor for our multi-ethnic congregation. Desire a candidate with strong Bible-teaching skills and a heart for evangelism. Web:www.faithchurchguam.org. Interested applicants may email kvolsteadt@gmail.com or fprc-guam@gmail.com or call 1- 671-734-7778.

PASTOR Baldwin Street CRC, located in Jenison, MI, is seeking a Christ-led, Scripture centered Senior Pastor. This pastor will provide spiritual oversight and will partner with elders, deacons, and church ministry leaders to guide our congregation. This role also includes inspiring Biblical preaching, empathetic pastoral care, and a passion to shepherd believers in their walk with Jesus. It should be our pastor's goal to perform these duties with godliness, humility, and integrity, all to the glory of our God. Please contact Ray VanDam at baldwinsearch9@gmail.com or call 616-457-9440.

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

SEEKING A FULL-TIME PASTOR The Christian Reformed Church of Collingwood, Ontario, is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor to provide spiritual leadership and encourage growth in faith within our congregation. The successful candidate will preach biblically grounded sermons that faithfully proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, provide pastoral care and encouragement, and help lead our congregation in worship, discipleship, and service. Our mission is Walking the Road of Freedom in Jesus and Inviting Others Along. We seek a pastor who will partner with us in sharing Christ's love, nurturing spiritual growth, and reaching out to our community. Located in the beautiful town of Collingwood, Ontario, we are a welcoming congregation committed to growing in faith and serving God together. We invite those who sense God's calling to prayerfully consider serving with us. Check out our church profile at CRCNA Network or visit our website at CollingwoodCRC.com Email your application to search-com@collingwoodcrtc.com

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR A FT SR. PASTOR at Golden Gate CRC (ggcrtc.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@ggcrtc.org.

Birthdays

80 Years



55TH ANNIVERSARY & 80TH BIRTHDAY Thankful for 55 years of marriage on 6/26 & John's 80 years on 6/28. Calls: (712) 439-2380. Cards: John & Sherry Kooiker, 1613 Morgan Ct, Hull, IA 51239.

Obituaries

DE BRUYNE, PASTER PETER WILLIAM
October 8, 1932 – May 11, 2026

Peter W. De Bruyne lived a life shaped by faith, service, and a deep love for others. Born in Vrouwenpolder, the Netherlands, he immigrated to Canada in 1955. In 1958, he married Anne Heerema, and together they were blessed with four children; Cathy (Pete), Vivian (Alan), Peter (Deb) and Anna; 15 grandchildren and 36 great grandchildren.

After graduating from Calvin Theological

Seminary in 1962, Peter served faithfully as a pastor in Lethbridge, Regina, Edmonton, Victoria, Brampton and Grimsby; concluding as Chaplain at Shalom Manor. Wherever he went, he carried a true pastor's heart—listening with care, walking alongside others in their struggles, and offering compassion, humility, and grace.

Peter enjoyed time with family, reading, camping, curling, painting, beachcombing, travelling, classical music, and laughter.

Peter and Anne's youngest daughter, Anna, who lives with disabilities, held a very special place in his heart. He enjoyed many special visits with Anna—holding her hand and watching her puzzle.

His life was anchored in trust in God's faithfulness: "I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1–2).

In his later reflections in his autobiography, Peter spoke with confidence about the life to come: "The day on which I will be welcomed into God's very presence will be a new and glorious day without end—a fabulous beginning."

With this hope, we give thanks for Peter's life and entrust him to the Lord he loved. He will be deeply missed and gratefully remembered as one who loved well and faithfully pointed others to God.

FEIKEMA, ESTHER WILMA took her last journey May 17, 2026 three weeks shy of her 95th birthday. She is now reunited with her husband Fred with whom she shared 59 years of marriage, almost 10 of them on the Nigerian mission field. She is survived by her 5 children, 4 of their spouses, 12 grandchildren, 8 great grandchildren. She is preceded in death by Fred, her son-in-law Paul and grandchild Jon Paul.

HOUSKAMP, ALYCE, age 88, of Hudsonville, Michigan, passed away on May 16, 2026. She is survived by children Beth (Randy Bartman) Houskamp, John (Beth) Houskamp, Kathy (Joel) Ruiter, and Bill (Amy) Houskamp; sister Grace (Gary) Nyland and brothers Robert (Dianne) Swierenga, Ray Swierenga, Don (Mary) Swierenga, and John (Virginia) Swierenga; siblings-by-marriage Jeanne (Don) Rood and Bob (Joan) Houskamp; and grandchildren Seth Bartman, Alyssa (Tyler) Houskamp, Ethan (Yena Kim) Houskamp, Grace (Daniel Ferrell) Ruiter, Ben (Nicole Verheek) Ruiter, Ellie Ruiter, Will (Stephanie) Houskamp and great-grandchild William, Owen (Allie) Houskamp, Emma Houskamp, and Allie Houskamp. She joins in heaven her husband Richard; her parents, John and Marie Swierenga; son-in-law Randy Bartman;

and sisters-in-law Cindy and Joan Swierenga. Alyce was a member of Woodlawn CRC.

HUIZINGA, JR., FRED age 90. Loving husband of 68 years to Janet (Bosma). Four married children, 12 grandchildren, 29 great-grandchildren. Faithfully served as a teacher/principal for 37 years at Southwest Chicago Christian Schools.

RECKER, MARY, age 97, entered eternity on April 27, 2026. Her legacy includes daughters, LaVerne Jordan and Karen Getz (Jim); stepchildren, Jim Recker (Sue), Janice LaMar, Luann Recker, and Ken DeVries (Glenna); 23 grandchildren, 43 great-grandchildren, and 16 great-great-grandchildren. She lovingly served her church, family, and friends to the end of her life. Mary was preceded in death by her husband, James, stepdaughter, Gayle DeVries, stepson, Jerryld Recker and son-in-law, Gary Jordan.

VANDER LINDE, MELVINA (NEE VENEMA) age 95, of Grand Rapids, went to be with her Savior on May 20, 2026. Vina is survived by her husband of 16 years, Marlowe Pranger, and her children: Donald (Donna) Vander Linde Jr., Douglas (Julie) Vander Linde, and Patricia Waanders; as well as 11 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren. She was preceded in glory by her loving husband of 54 years, Donald Vander Linde Sr.

Church Anniversary

75 Years

"TO GOD BE THE GLORY" – CELEBRATING 75 YEARS Plymouth Heights CRC invites you to celebrate three-quarters of a century of God's faithfulness in our community. Since 1951, Plymouth Heights has been striving to equip disciples to become neighbors and inviting neighbors to become disciples. Celebrate with us Sunday, October 11, 2026. For more information contact our church office at (616) 243-5638 or office@phcrc.org.

DRESDEN ON. 75TH ANNIVERSARY The Dresden, Ontario, Christian Reformed Church is celebrating its 75th anniversary Sept. 26 & 27, 2026. The Council and congregation would like to extend an invitation to all former members, pastors and friends of our church to come join us. There will be a celebratory dinner on Saturday Sept 26th and a Service of Thanksgiving at 10:00 on the 27th. If you would like to attend the dinner, if you need more information, or if you are unable to attend but have memories to share, please



★ WANTED VEHICLES ★

Local West Michigan Christian School is looking for donations.

Autos • Pickups • RV's • Boats

Any condition, tax deductible, free pick up
Call (616) 427-3128 • calvinslot@gccsmi.org

Donations appreciated and help in tuition reduction.

email Joanie at mrsv518@comcast.net We hope to hear from you! Thank you!

70 Years

COBOURG GRACE CRC 70TH ANNIVERSARY, Saturday, September 26. Commemorative Service on Sunday. Former Members welcome. RSVP to grace.church@bellnet.ca

Congregational Announcements

REV. DR. RANDALL AND KATHRYN ENGLE will be honored for their 25-year ministry at North Hills Christian Reformed Church, 3150 N. Adams Rd., Troy, Michigan, at celebrations July 25-26. North Hills gratefully recognizes Randy and Kathy on this milestone anniversary for their faithful service, steadfast leadership and abiding friendship — and thanks them both for enriching our Sundays with decades of glorious music.

Products and Services

CEMETERY PLOT FOR SALE Located at Brampton Memorial Gardens (Brampton ON, Canada). 1 double depth cemetery plot, and 1 vault available. Selling below market value. Call 905-877-7602 and leave a message.

REMODELING? Call Ken DeVries today for a free estimate on windows or kitchen/bath renovation. 616-457-5880. Since 1985. www.homework-construction.com

I CAN LIST YOUR HOME FOR \$1000 OR 1.5%. 1992 Calvin grad will list your property using a Low Fee Business Model - full service, with savings. The system works! 150 closings in 2025, and over 150 lifetime Banner clients. We help clients buy properties as well. Contact Doug Takens of Independence Realty at



EduDeo Ministries

Education + Gospel = Transformation

Without books, students can't learn. Help EduDeo bridge this gap and equip one student in Haiti with a gift of just \$4.

Learn More
edudeo.com/give



616-262-4574 or takens@sbcglobal.net. Broker's address: 6801 Gettysburg Dr, Hudsonville, MI 49426

TRUE BLUE CAREGIVERS It is our passion to help seniors stay in their homes with our reliable and friendly care. We offer assistance with routine hygiene, meal prep, light housekeeping and other tasks related to daily living. Our company is owned and operated by Calvin alums. We have been serving the greater Grand Rapids area for 14 years and are bonded and insured. To learn more about our services, contact us at True Blue Caregivers or call (616)406-6819

Real Estate Sales / Rentals

ANNA MARIA ISLAND CONDOS Large pool, beach access, free WiFi, 1&2 Bedroom, 1 block to beach. \$900-\$1200 a week. Contact Tim at 941-704-7525 redekercondosonami.com

NAPLES AREA, FL Gated 2 br. condo. Great pool. Easy access. Beautiful walking area. Vermuda Pointe Check internet Vanderbilt Lakes. By month 616.560.2895.

ORANGE LAKE RESORT FL 5 mi to Disney, 4 golf courses, 7 pools, many family activities. Sleeps 8-12, Multiple openings, \$ varies. Call/txt Ken 616-291-5052



TOP OF THE DUNE! Lake Michigan getaway in Sawyer, MI. Enjoy stunning views! Available August-June. \$300/night. Call 630-327-7906. Scan QR code for video tour!

VACATION HOMES NEAR DISNEY FL Sunny Dayz Oasis has 2, 3, 4, & 5 BR homes 30 min to Disney. All with a community or private pool. Call/txt Ken 616-291-5052 www.sunnydayzoasis.com



ENGLAND



GROUP TOURS

EXPLORE. CONNECT. EXPERIENCE

BAVARIAN DREAMS & SWISS PEAKS
Sep 7 – 16, 2026 | Nick & Lynn Branderhorst

EXPLORING THE EMERALD ISLE: HIGHLIGHTS OF IRELAND
Sep 7 – 17, 2026 | Philip Vande-Riet & Sophia Witte

BIKE & BARGE: AMSTERDAM TO BRUGES
Sep 8 – 17, 2026 | Mark & Lori Vermaire

C.S. LEWIS & OTHER GIFTS OF THE BRITISH ISLES
Sep 21 – Oct 2, 2026 | Mark & Lori Vermaire

CULTURAL TREASURES OF GERMANY, AUSTRIA & THE CZECH REPUBLIC
Sep 23 – Oct 5, 2026 | Bob Chappel

CRUISING COASTAL CROATIA
Oct 1 – 10, 2026 | Mindy Miller & Eric Kuhn

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS IN GREECE
Apr 2 – 12, 2027 | Dr. Jeffrey A.D. Weima

NETHERLANDS WATERWAYS CRUISE
Apr 8 – 17, 2027 | John & Rachel Witte

THE GOSPEL COMES TO ITALY
Apr 12 – 22, 2027 | Dr. Jeffrey A.D. Weima

MORE INFO COMING SOON

ITALY'S HIDDEN GEMS
Apr 22 – May 3, 2027 | Brenda & Paul Harris

FROM ALPS TO ALES: A GERMAN & AUSTRIAN ESCAPE
Apr 28 – May 11, 2027 | Loren Veigel

SIGN UP TODAY!
wittetours.com/banner

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING ELSE?
Our Vacation Consultants can help!

witte Travel & Tours
Grand Rapids, MI | 616.957.8113

Banner Builders



Wish you were here!

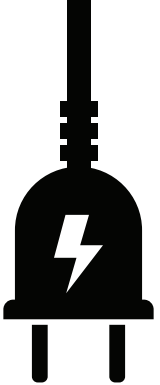
Recurring donations are the foundation of *The Banner's* sustainability. While one-time gifts help us today, annual or monthly support allows us to plan for tomorrow. By spreading your gift throughout the year, you provide a predictable "foundation" that ensures *The Banner* remains a free, high-quality resource for every household in the CRCNA.

Your Exclusive "Banner Builders" Perks:

- » **Deepen Your Knowledge:** Receive exclusive bonus articles and insights.
- » **Explore the Process:** Get first-hand accounts from our editors and writers.
- » **Shape the Conversation:** Have your voice heard through exclusive reader polls.

Sign up at TheBanner.org/Build

BANNER



Yearbook is online!

2025 was the last year your denomination printed the *Yearbook*. Most of the information that you have come to expect and appreciate in this annual publication can now be found online, including:

- Directory of CRCNA office and agency staff
- Classical stated clerks and other personnel
- Information about churches' current and former ministers
- A list of current ministers and commissioned pastors
- Annual and historical statistics on membership, baptisms, evangelism and more.

Find it all at crcna.org/MyCRC



The annual church questionnaire will arrive via email in late August, with responses due by mid-October.



Christian Reformed Church

Good Ol' What's Her Name

I think it's hugely
important to
remember
people's names.



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*.

PETER AND I were having our usual breakfast at the Hungry Fox early on a Monday morning. An elderly couple across the aisle from us also enjoyed their breakfast, as did a single elderly woman sitting in the booth just ahead of them, her back to their table.

Our server, always a kick to be around, kibitzed with us. We had been embarrassed at a previous breakfast because neither of us could remember her name even though she serves us almost every Monday. I was embarrassed to ask.

Waiting until she was nearby, I asked Peter if he had had any nicknames as a kid. I shared some I'd been called: Stretch, Hands, Rodfoot, and Hot Rod. I then turned to her and asked if she had any nicknames. She laughed and said, "Just the obvious one, Janna Banana."

Bingo! We had her name.

She moved to another table, and Peter said, "You planned that whole nickname thing just to get her name, didn't you?"

I nodded. "It worked."

Peter was amazed. "That was pure genius. I'm so impressed."

I agreed. I thought it was pretty smart of me, too.

I was disappointed with myself that I hadn't been able to remember her name. I think it's hugely important to remember people's names. I love it when people remember mine.

On this particular Monday we were enjoying recalling my little ruse while Janna waited on us. The old man across the aisle got up and shuffled off, eyes down, in the direction of the restrooms. He was gone for a while, and when he returned, still moving slowly with his head bowed, he walked right past the table where his wife sat and

slid onto the bench across from the single woman.

Startled, she looked up and managed to stammer, "Well, hello!"

The gentleman's wife spoke sharply, "He belongs here ... with me."

The old man was stunned. He apologized profusely while lurching to his feet and stumbling over to where he belonged. His chagrined wife just shook her head and mumbled to herself. Everyone else sat fidgeting in the awkwardness that followed.

I initially assumed some sort of dementia might affect the man, but it wasn't that. He had just not been paying attention and had messed up big time.

In his defense, the two women looked remarkably alike—same approximate age, same shaggy, bobbed gray-headed hairstyle. Both wore plastic-rimmed glasses. They were similarly dressed. Still, it was an awful gaffe. And absolutely hilarious.

It's one thing, of course, to not remember a name, but it's quite a different matter to forget your spouse. I can only imagine the embarrassment.

On my drive home I heard the song "He Knows My Name," by Tommy Walker. My father died when I was a teenager, and when I first heard that song, the lyrics, particularly of the second verse, touched me deeply: "I have a Father. He calls me his own. He'll never leave me. No matter where I go." It was a beautiful reminder that God knows my name, that he is intimately involved in my circumstances. He doesn't walk past me. He doesn't forsake me.

He knows my name. Yours, too. **B**



Equip Your Congregation to Thrive

Discover fresh energy and renewed purpose for your congregation! Our Thriving Congregations initiative helps church leaders listen together, engage their community, and discern where God is leading next.

Start with Thriving Essentials

This one-day workshop brings your church together to explore four core concepts of a healthy ministry—mission, discipleship, discernment, and leadership—to foster greater unity and momentum for ministry.

Continue the Journey

Next, through peer cohorts, continued learning opportunities, and guided discernment, your congregation can develop practical next steps to reflect your unique calling and missional identity.



Learn more at crcna.org/ThrivingCongregations
or contact thrive@crcna.org.

