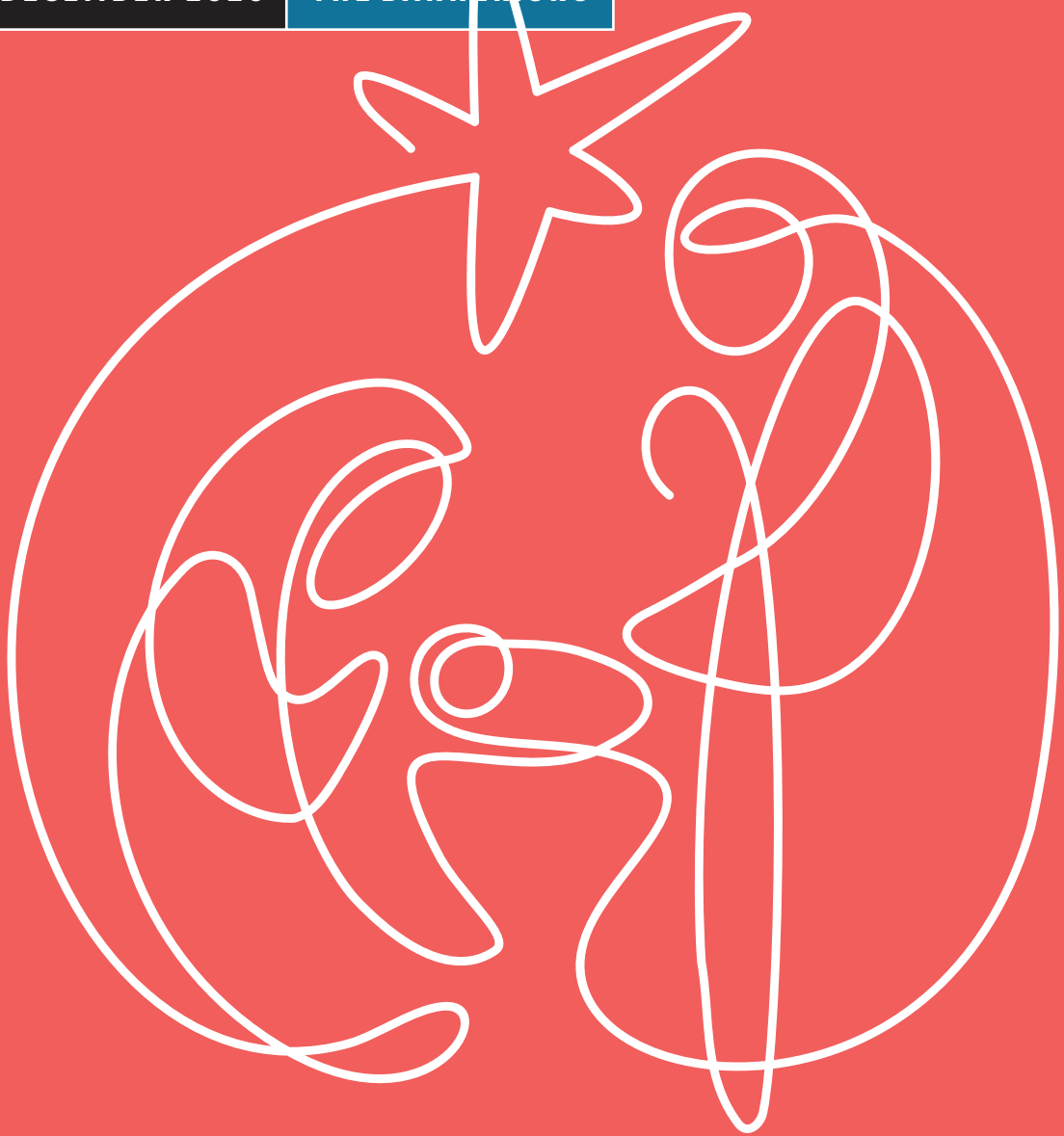
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160 YEARS

BANNER

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2026 THE BANNER.ORG



GIVING GUIDE

Looking for a specific ministry to support with your Christmas giving? Look no further. Throughout this issue, *The Banner* has placed stars to highlight ministries you can donate to with your Christmas gift-giving.

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

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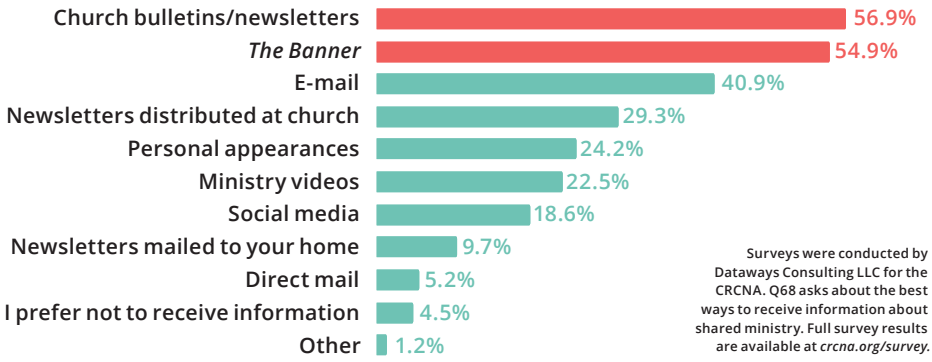
VOLUME 161, NUMBER 6

BANNER

BY THE NUMBERS

The annual denominational survey asks respondents, "What are the best ways for the denomination to keep you informed about the ministries you support through your Ministry Shares, gifts and offerings?" Church bulletins and newsletters and *The Banner* have been the top picks over the last five years. Between 2022 and 2026 an average of 56.9% of respondents selected "Church bulletins and newsletters" and 54.9% of respondents selected *"The Banner."* An average of 40.9% of respondents over the five years chose "email." Other choices were less popular.

In the Know



Surveys were conducted by Dataways Consulting LLC for the CRCNA. Q68 asks about the best ways to receive information about shared ministry. Full survey results are available at *crcna.org/survey.*

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: As Violence Escalates in Nigeria, Christian and Muslim Leaders Unite
- In Honor of Dolly: Revisiting *Steel Magnolias*
- Streaming: *Death of a Pastor's Wife*
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One Big Thank You

That one big thanks for Jesus' gospel gift becomes the bass note—that anchoring sound—of hope under everything.



Lora Copley is editor of *The Banner.* She and her husband Joel have four children and recently welcomed a daughter-in-law to the family. 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/korean* 에서 보실 수 있습니다.

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

EVERY NEW EDITOR brings a time of revisioning. So it is now at T*he Banner.* We've got a lot on the table. New columns? A new look? A regular podcast? Your small *Banner* team is busy weighing options. (Have ideas? We would love your input.)

Dreaming forward has also meant looking back. We identified core values that have shaped our 160 years—things like gospel-centeredness, CRC-connectedness, and a confessional compass, too.

A day in *The Banner*'s archives made those values vivid. Paging through decades of ink, sure, I saw failings and flaws. But I also saw gifts: A people of earnest devotion. A heritage of sacrifice and service. Growing diverse churches. Family worship. Faith-driven schools. Justice and mercy. Mission and discipleship. So many gifts, and much to love.

But what happens if the gifts eclipse the Giver? What happens if, accustomed to gifts, we assume them or yawn over them? What happens if we lose wonder in salvation itself—that because "Jesus Christ came to save sinners" (1 Tim 1:15), we were rescued from sure and eternal death and graced with life?

Our family received a picture of saving grace in 2024. Our 19-year-old son David had a rollover crash. Flipping four times, his little truck looked like "trash blowing in the wind," the eyewitness said. Glass shattered, the cab flattened, our son was pinned under the roof and airlifted to a hospital. Medics voiced fears of internal bleeding, swelling, fractures. It seemed like death's cold hand stretched out, and we were powerless.

But amazing grace met us. Late that night, we learned David, inexplicably, would be OK. Yes, he'd need neck surgery, and yes, his body—crisscrossed in cuts and bruises—would need time to heal, but he would be alright. David was discharged the next day, his Hawaiian shirt and signature grin defying the neck brace and crutches.

For weeks, I felt like the most blessed woman alive. I couldn't stop kneeling to pour out a "thank you, thank you!" to our gracious, saving God. I saw a world crammed with undeserved gifts: eggs on toast, sun on leaves, my kids' backpacks and shoes everywhere. It could have been otherwise.

But it hit me: if the gift of my son being saved from *physical* death elicited such thanks, how much more the gift of salvation from *eternal* death through our Lord's birth, death, and reign?

"What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will sacrifice a thank offering and call on the Lord" (Ps. 116).

Our whole Christian life, says the catechism, is one big "thank you, Lord!" for this salvation gift (QA 86). It's not reserved for Thanksgiving services, Christmas pageants, or distinct magazine columns. That one big thanks for Jesus' gospel gift becomes the bass note—that anchoring sound—of hope under everything.

It's the bass note of hope when we leave the hospital without the miracle we prayed for.

It's the bass note of hope when we face the flaws and failings of our own times.

And it's the bass note of hope for what we do in *The Banner.*

That "thank you, Lord" undergirds the stories we tell, the questions we ask, and the way we listen, celebrate, and critique. Gratitude for the gospel gift helps us face our challenges head-on, striving to keep the main thing the main thing.

Whatever shape *The Banner* (or our lives) might take, may we ever "lift up the cup of salvation" in wonder and in one big thanks at what our Savior has given.



REPLY ALL

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

Belgic Confession

Mary L. Vandenberg mentions the comfort we receive from God's sovereignty by quoting Article 13 of the Belgic Confession that not "even a little bird can fall to the ground without the will of our Father" ("The Belgic Confession," March/April 2026). This reference comes from Matthew 10:29. The NIV mentions that not one sparrow will "fall to the ground apart from the *will* of your Father," but many others omit the word "will" in that spot. There is a big difference between God being present during catastrophes (small and large) and God willing them. Did God will (i.e. cause) Adam and Eve's disobedience? Does God will a child's arm to break during a bicycle fall? Did God will the genocide of Jews in Nazi concentration camps? Elsewhere in Scripture we are warned not to blame God for the evil in the world (James 1:13-18). We must be careful not to define God's sovereignty in a way that everything that happens in the world is directly attributed to God's will. God is not the author of sin and misery.

» Robert Bruinsma // Edmonton, Alta.

A Cup of Coffee

I read the article "The Least of These" by Hank Ottens, a retired orthopedic surgeon (July/August 2026). The article begins with Matthew 25:40: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." The text is in connection with the story of the Good Samaritan. After reading the article, I was puzzled. I guess I am puzzled by the fact that retired men would watch, discuss his situation, and yet not reach out and offer the man a cup of coffee. Doesn't discomfort nudge us into action?

» Elaine Smit // Sarnia, Ont.

160th Anniversary

When reading the article on "Subscriptions and Subsidies: Numbers Spanning 160 Years" (March/April 2026), it was fun to look at all the pictures of *Banner* covers through all the years. I have saved some *Banner* issues over the years so it made me want to look through them again. Having been a Calvinette leader for many years, I actually had saved the *Banner* with the Calvinette on the front cover from Nov. 27, 1963, which was also pictured in your article. I am thankful for having read *The Banner* all these years. Happy 160th Anniversary!

» Helen Cates // Emo, Ont.

Banner Mandate Change

I extend my congratulations to Lora Copley on her appointment as editor, and I wish her the best ("Synod 2026 Approves Lora Copley as Banner Editor-in-Chief," July/August 2026). *The Banner* has a long and distinguished history of fostering theological inquiry, faith development, and respectful dialogue in the CRCNA and beyond, surpassing most denominational magazines in content and design. But my condolences go to *Banner* staff and contributors now required to adhere to new interpretations of a few confessional clauses, interpretations that are, in my judgment, ungrounded in the Reformers' worldview and unsuited to the church's mission today ("*The Banner*'s Mandate Curtailed," July/August 2025). The periodical that has long fostered lively dialogue and debate, firmly grounded in Reformed theology yet open to critical reflection and mutual learning, must now endorse recent synods' novel and narrow orthodoxies. I am deeply grieved as I feel the denomination that nurtured my family, my students, and me has closed its doors to many of us. I mourn the loss, but I have found the doors of other churches (I am now a member of a Presbyterian congregation) open and welcoming.

» David A. Hoekema, philosophy professor and academic dean emeritus, Calvin University // West Olive, Mich.

Church-planting Plan

Synod 2026 decided to engage in a 10-year plan of church planting and growth in light of dire membership loss numbers ("The Start of a Movement, the Next 10 Years in the CRC," July/August 2026). Has anyone noticed the "own goal" of synod's past decision regarding forced congregational disaffiliation (over LGBTQ affirmation) resulted in the loss of thousands of faithful and historically service-filled CRC members and dozens upon dozens of faithful pastors? I suppose these CRC synod's convoluted ideas of church growth will take years to recover from—if they ever do.

» Robert Bosch // Grand Rapids, Mich.

As I Was Saying

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

» The Way Will Provide

» The Confessional Voice isn't Coming Back

» Reflections from a New Church Planter

Stop Exchanging the Glory of God for Images on a Sanctuary Screen

WHEN ONE OF MY COLLEGE students was in elementary school, he enjoyed watching hour-long videos. but now watching something that long is stressful, and he can no longer pay attention in class. The cause, he said, is TikTok, a social media platform that delivers an "infinite stream" of short videos.

My student is not alone in worrying about how screen-mediated technologies shape us. Evidence is mounting that they distract our attention, degrade our abilities, cause mental health problems, and interfere with personal relationships—enough evidence that churches should curtail the use of screens during worship services or eliminate them entirely.

Technologies aren't neutral; they shape the messages they transmit. Physical books suggest permanence. The Bibles and hymnals still found in many pews will be there year after year. Images on screens, though, are ephemeral. Valuable things may appear there, such as Bible passages. But we risk trivializing Scripture when we serve it up as "content" alongside stock photographs for sermon illustrations; hymn lyrics, but often without musical notation that facilitates good congregational singing; AI-generated "art" literalizing biblical passages that previous generations were forced to ponder; church activity advertisements; a count-down clock; unnecessary captioning, such as the word "prayer" projected while someone prays; video of the pastor blown up to Nebuchadnezzar-like proportions; and images of Jesus—cartoon Jesus, clip art Jesus, and photos of actors portraying Jesus—sometimes in sanctuaries where a permanent representation of Jesus would not be allowed.

If the content on church screens resembles anything more than a social media feed, it's a PowerPoint presentation like those found in classrooms and business meetings, a technology widely reviled as boring, ugly, and prone to user error. Slides convey information. They rarely inspire awe, reflection, or transcendence.

> Technologies aren't neutral.

Worship planners might assume that worshipers desire, even need, screens, but a tour of churches in my small city—at least a dozen of which have no sanctuary screen—demonstrates that churches are not powerless when it comes to forming worshipers' desires and capacities.

Members of the growing Orthodox church stand during its two-hour (or longer) service in a sanctuary filled with beautiful (but static) icons. Students at the Catholic church near campus want to sing in Latin. Young children, like those in children's worship services I've led, are able to sit in silent reflection with no screen to entertain them—a capacity many worship planners assume adults don't have.

People need—whether they know it or not—worship that provides respite from short-form videos, AI slop-filled social media feeds, and unappealing slide shows that bombard them elsewhere. And churches need to show people a God who is everything these technologies are not—beautiful, awesome, and eternal.



David Schweingruber is a member of Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Ames, Iowa, where he has served in worship and education ministries. He is an associate professor at Iowa State University.



Noticing With Eyes of Love

What We Can Learn About Gift Giving From the Magi

By Lorilee Craker

The key to good gift giving lies in noticing with eyes of love.

There is a luminous moment in *Anne of Green Gables* when Matthew Cuthbert, shy, bachelor potato farmer and newly minted father figure, gives his Anne Girl the gift of her dreams: A dress with puffed sleeves. What struck me wasn't just the dress itself or how much she loved it. It was the attunement that went into it.

"Matthew … noticed a scarcity in the one he adored. … It finally dawned on him that Anne was dressed differently from other girls in Avonlea. … A girl that shone like Anne should not be gowned so," author L.M. Montgomery writes.

Matthew noticed—he really paid attention. So that first snowy Christmas in Avonlea, Anne received a gift that spoke volumes about the way she was cared for, heeded, and understood for who she was—a cherished child of a loving father.

As we approach gift-giving season, this story made me think about the kind of giver I want to be. Like Matthew, like the Father of lights, the "giver of every good and perfect gift," I want to notice my recipients with eyes of love.

My "love language" is gifts, which means that I "thrive on the love, thoughtfulness, and effort" behind a gift (according to *5lovelanguages.com*), both in the giving and the receiving.

How can I give meaningful gifts that will increase my bond with the recipient? How can you? Gifts can express love and care and deepen relationships with those we adore. In giving gifts at Christmas, we are fashioning ourselves after God, who sent us his great Gift.

But as the mother of three adult children (and one daughter-in-law) who were *all born in December*, the frenzy around Christmas gift giving sometimes sends me right over the edge. This was especially true when my kids were small. I'm not alone: A mom friend told me about the time her in-laws woke up her 3-year-old daughter to open more presents, at which point the child began to howl.

When I feel overwhelmed with gift giving, it's grounding to go back to the first Christmas and gift giving occasion, when the wise men bestowed gifts on baby Jesus.

How did we get from offering gold, frankincense, and myrrh to trampling our neighbors on Black Friday, going into debt to afford the latest electronic gizmo, and making a kid bawl by forcing her to open another pile of presents? How do we get back to the gift-giving basics the stargazers modeled?

One antidote came from a friend, AB. "Why not follow the 'Principle of the Three Wise Men'?" she asked. "Something you want, something you need, and a surprise." AB and her family adopted a similar framework: something you want, something you need, something to wear, and something to read.

I latched onto the wise men and their three gifts. "Why should we get more gifts than Jesus?" I asked my then-7-year-old one Christmas. He gravely nodded. It appealed to his childhood logic. Twenty-one years later, we are still operating under that gift-giving paradigm.

How does the three-point principle fit the actual gifts of the magi, that shiny alliance shrouded in stardust and mystery? Our family's three categories don't correspond perfectly to gold, frankincense, and myrrh—and Matthew's gospel doesn't suggest they should.

But what can we learn from those fathers of gift-giving and their three abiding tributes?

Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar (the names given to them in later Christian tradition, circa the eighth century) inspired the idea of giving gifts at Christmastide. They modeled generosity and restraint, while amplifying meaning and love in their presentation to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Gold fits most under the "something you want" heading. For Mary and Joseph, gold was equivalent to a thick wad of cash, their ticket out of Herod's murderous path and to safe haven in Egypt. It could also fit under the need category, but its high value could be something special desired by the recipient.

Frankincense was a costly incense used in religious ceremonies and could represent something essential that elevates or supports daily life, also known as a need.

Myrrh might be a stretch, but as an oil or perfume with healing medicinal properties, it has been adapted as the "surprise," a thoughtful item chosen by the giver.

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh were widely available in the days when Jesus was born, and all three gifts were generous yet practical, costly but with deep value. Even though I don't have a treasure chest from which to offer Christmas gifts, I can still learn from the magi to give with open hands and an open heart. They teach me how to not feed the frenzy; they teach me to notice my recipients and their wants and needs with a heart of love.

> In giving gifts at Christmas, we are fashioning ourselves after God, who sent us his great Gift.

The wise men's paradigm has been a grace to our family. Keeping it to just three gifts means we don't go overboard, and there's a certain peace and security in that. The "something you need" category has been filled with snow pants, hockey sticks, hunting bibs, sweaters, bookshelves, tools, and other such prudent, though surprisingly well-liked, presents.

"Something you want" means, obviously, we all get something we really fancy.

The last category is my favorite. Who doesn't love surprises? This is where we as parents find some hidden gem, something way off our kids' and each other's radars. Last Christmas, I got my musician son, Jonah, an artisanal mug with Aretha Franklin, the White Stripes, and other Michigan music artists on it. He can sip his coffee in Kansas, knowing that his dear old mother loves him and gets him, at least the part of him that misses Michigan and relishes music.

Here are a few ideas for you as you gear up to give and receive this Christmas:

» It Doesn't Have to Come in a Box: This year, give your loved ones the gift of an experience. How about tickets to a sports event or play? Membership to a zoo or art museum or aquarium? It's an investment in relationships, rather than electronics and toys.

» Go Homemade: Why not give your recipients something made by hand? I'm not the craftiest lady in the bunch, but even I can assemble "snowman kits" using hats and scarves from the thrift store, Oreos for eyes and carrots for the noses, and "snow spray paint," using dollar-store spritzers and a couple of drops of food coloring. Just add snow.

» Foodie Gifts: I used to whip up a batch of cheese and broccoli quiches as teacher gifts. If I made them four at once using refrigerated crusts (I watch for sales), it took me 20 minutes in kitchen time and cost me $3-$4 per quiche. What I have learned is that most Yuletide food gifts are sweet, and recipients are thankful for something savory they can eat as a meal.

Let's learn from the ancient teachers of the Orient, from Matthew Cuthbert, and from God himself to notice those we give gifts to with a heart of love. May we intentionally defy the gluttony of too many presents and expectations, along with the tears-inducing pressure.

May we imbue our gift-giving with balance, thoughtfulness, and worth, offering presents (but not too many) that will mean something special on Christmas morning and beyond,

May we fall down in awe like those wise, wise men did, beholding Immanuel, and basking in his presence. May we infuse the season with wonder and joy as we cry out together, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"



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.*



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohórquez

BIG QUESTIONS

Vocation

Is it better to get a job or focus on having meaningful experiences?

As soon as we are old enough to get a job, how much we should work becomes a question. The answer shifts as we go through life, whether it's when we graduate high school or college, if we have children, or as we approach the last third of life. Each stage of life has different responsibilities and can provide different opportunities to glorify God and serve one's neighbor.

Even when we choose to trust in God and not money, money is a factor in how much we should work. When you need to support yourself and/or a family, it's important to earn money and limit experiences that cost significant time or money. However, when you are young, support from parents can free you up for other possibilities and a job is more of an extra than a necessity. There are also many opportunities for meaningful experiences when you are a teenager, and these can have a significant impact on your faith and your life.

At the same time, as *Our World Belongs to God* highlights, "we work for more than wages." Work is a way of loving our neighbors by "providing useful products and services." What those services look like will depend on our skills and experiences: the kind of job you are likely to get in high school will probably not be your dream job or necessarily allow you to use your gifts and passions like future jobs hopefully will. But that does not mean you cannot honor God in what you do and how you do it. Furthermore, having a job can teach you important things such as faithfulness in showing up and perseverance in spite of boredom and frustration, greater respect for those who do menial labor or service jobs, and how to be gracious to people who are not always kind to you. In this way, a job can also be a meaningful experience.

I encourage you, before you turn 20, to have a part-time or summer job or spend time volunteering in a significant way. As you do that, expect God to teach you things. Perhaps what you learn is that you would like a very different kind of job in the future. But hopefully you will also grow in wisdom and generosity so that you are more able, in response to the Lord's generosity to us, to "give freely and gladly of your money and time" (*Our World Belongs to God*, 48).

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

Church/Bible/Doctrine

Does God have feelings? What does his 'impassibility' mean?

"Impassibility" can, on first blush, be a bit of a strange, scary, or even off-putting word, especially ascribed to God! It might make us imagine God as distant, uncaring, even apathetic.

Thankfully, a description of God as impassible is in no way saying that God is uncaring—quite the opposite!

"Impassibility" literally means "without passion." But it ought not be understood as synonymous with not having any feeling at all; rather, as Todd Billings describes in *Rejoicing in Lament*, passions are "disordered affections that could make (God's) loving being and action ebb and flow." When we think of "passion," we should think not only of emotion, but of something like the Greek gods (or ourselves!) who, in the stories, sometimes act in impulsive, illogical ways.

The Westminster Confession helps us understand this in chapter 2, section 1: without any contradiction, it describes God as without passion, that is,

impassible, and most loving, gracious, merciful—all in the same sentence! The two are not at odds. God's impassibility means that he is and always will be fully loving, fully merciful, fully gracious. Again, as Billings describes, "God loves in fullness and has the appropriate relational, affective responses to creation. … God's affections are never distorted through sinful, disordered passions."

Our Three Forms of Unity do not engage impassibility quite as specifically, but we, too, profess God's unchangeability (immutability). In the Belgic Confession, we profess that "there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God—eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty; completely wise, just, and good, and the overflowing source of all good." God's impassibility flows from his immutability, which we confess here: God does not change, and as such, he could never be more or less loving, gracious, and merciful. Rather, he *is* love, goodness, and holiness.

Theologian Herman Bavinck similarly insists that God "is who he is, eternally transcendent over space and time and far exalted above every creature." As such, he does not and cannot change. But his "immutability" ought "not be confused with monotonous sameness or rigid immobility." Instead, God does what only God can do: without any change in and of himself, high and exalted above all else, God enters into relationship with us, his creatures, as the one who "is and remains the same."

Impassibility, rather than professing an apathetic God, does just the opposite: it professes a God who is love in and of himself, and always acts fully as he is. As God says of himself: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6).

Jessica Joustra (Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary, Vrije Universiteit) is associate professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Digital Life

Is it just me, or am I getting more emails in my inbox? And are they getting longer?

I remember the early days of email: bragging to family and friends that I had more than 100 emails waiting for me when I got back from a week's vacation. (I also remember a colleague who, when coming back from vacation, deleted all his emails and, with a smirk, explained, "If they really need an answer, they'll write back." Not sure that would fly today.)

Research from people who keep track of this sort of thing tell us that today the average office worker gets more than 120 emails *a day*, with more than 11 hours a week spent managing all those messages. Because of texting and social sharing, the amount of personal email we receive is about a third of that, but, still, it's a lot.

You can find a lot of advice online for helping manage this endless stream, but I've got bad news about the length: it's likely going to get worse. It used to take time to write overly long and self-important emails, but nowadays tools like artificial intelligence makes the process quick and easy. Anybody can do it.

Bob Hutchins's "The Human Voice: Silicon and Soul" Substack (an online platform for independent publishing) calls this the *unpaid edit* to describe when "the writer skips the hard part of writing, which is choosing, and hands the choosing to whoever opens the message."

I know I am guilty of scanning emails and missing important parts, but it's not always entirely my fault. Truly. If the writer had thought about who their audience was, couldn't they have included a bulleted list or at least some highlighting of the critical points? Or better, couldn't they have taken a little more time to handpick fewer words that would be clearer?

Think of the council meeting summaries that might get read, the parent-teacher meetings that wouldn't be missed, or the opportunity that passed by you to donate to your favorite denominational paper.

Next time you write an email or letter (or overture to synod), do your reader a favor and do the hard part of editing it down to its most necessary parts. It's the loving-your-neighbor thing to do, and besides, Proverbs 10:19 warns, "When words multiply, sin is not absent" (NLT). I can't guarantee it'll be read, but your chances will be better.

Dean Heetderks is director of CRC Ministry Support Services and art director of *The Banner*. Tell me at dean.heetderks@gmail.com if you are one of those people who really don't mind long emails.

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

NEWS

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Christmas Vespers Service Includes Commissioned Work

North Hills Christian Reformed Church in Troy, Mich., uses its annual Christmas choral service as a worship and community outreach event. Choral scholars—students offered scholarships and recruited from nearby schools such as the University of Michigan, Oakland University, and Wayne State University—augment the church's choir and serve as a bridge between the church and local schools.

In 2025 the North Hills CRC premiered "Narnia Awaits," by Seth Miller, at its Christmas vespers service. Miller, since moved out of state, was a bass choral scholar at North Hills church that year, and is a graduate of The Film Scoring Academy of Europe. He composed music for the text written by Lois Sterk Miller, a member of North Hills (no relation to Seth):

Autumn's brilliant hues have fluttered
to the ground,
Carpeting the earth, but leaving
branches bare.
Blust'ry winds drive winged ones
away. The sound
Of vespers fill the early evening air.

Winter's grip descends, and creatures,
great and small,
Prepare: rabbit burrows, hibernating
Bears; buried acorns and frost-tinged
berries call;
And roots and seeds, asleep but waiting.

As frozen, captive Narnia awaits
The bells and gifts of Father Christmas—
Harbinger of merriment, forgiven
Guilt; so now all nature contemplates
And yearns for the return of *Christus*
King of Life, when death itself be riven.

—Lois Sterk Miller, 2024



North Hills CRC

Composer Seth Miller (left), lyricist Lois Sterk Miller (center), and vocalist Caleb Ramsey at North Hills CRC, Dec. 14, 2025.

Caleb Ramsey, 2025 tenor choral scholar at North Hills CRC who attends Wayne State University in Detroit, sang the piece.

North Hills pastor Randy Engle said, "We have built lots of bridges into our local universities; music faculty members and students are regular attendees, even outside of requested musical services."

Sterk Miller, an alumna of Calvin College (now University) who also served as a trustee for the school, said she writes a Christmas poem, usually a sonnet, every Christmas. "Lambs Who Sleep Beside Him" was published by *The Banner* in December 1984. She believes Miller selected the 2024 poem to set to music "because of the musical possibilities of phrases describing approaching winter."

For the 2026 vespers service Dec. 13, "we plan a more traditional Lessons and Carols service featuring primarily choir and congregational hymns, supplemented by world-renowned violinist Sonia Lee, as well as voice faculty from our local Oakland University," North Hills' associate music director Noah Cherry said.

—Alissa Vernon

Ontario Churches Create Displays for Remembrance Day

Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Flamborough, Ont., created and hosted a display of handmade poppies to mark Remembrance Day 2025. The church is remounting the display for 2026. Bethel CRC in Waterdown, Ont., also created a 2026 display and one for its local Royal Canadian Legion.

Calvary created its cascade of 1,700 crocheted or knitted poppies with help from members of the church and the surrounding community. Bethel had about a dozen people contribute to its display, which is sewn onto two lengths of 10-by-15-foot baseball netting. One 10-by-15-foot hanging was also made for the Waterdown Legion Branch 551.

Calvary CRC was inspired to create its 2025 poppy display by an earlier display at St. John's Anglican Church in nearby Ancaster, Ont. From getting church council approval, gaining permission for the project from the Royal Canadian Legion (the poppy is a protected trademark of the Legion), finding materials, organizing poppy stitchers, getting the word out to the community, and finally assembling the display, the project involved many, many hands and "took about one year from start to finish," said Calvary participant Hilery Burlie.

Burlie in turn helped Christine Schaafsma at Bethel CRC get their project going. Schaafsma said Bethel hadn't pursued a large-scale project like this before. "It was good for the congregation to get involved," she said, noting help came from crafters and those donating money toward materials.



Calvary CRC

Handmade poppies are displayed at Calvary CRC in Flamborough, Ont., for Remembrance Day 2025.

In Canada, Nov.11 is observed as Remembrance Day, first known as Armistice Day, which marked the end of hostilities in World War I. It's an opportunity to recall all those who have served in the nation's defense. Poppies, introduced in Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae's 1915 poem "In Flanders Fields," have been connected to the national act of remembrance since 1921. Bethel CRC will display its handmade poppy hanging Nov. 1-12, 2026, and Calvary from Oct. 31 to Nov. 12.

—Anita Brinkman and Alissa Vernon

Illinois Church Pairs Ministry and Market

When a city-run farmer's market outgrew its municipal parking lot, Elmhurst (Ill.) Christian Reformed Church stepped in to host the weekly community event. For the congregation, the bustling atmosphere is a story of stepping out in faith. In Pastor Gregg DeMey's words, the community has witnessed "the slow-drip irrigation of the Holy Spirit."



Elmhurst CRC

Featuring seasonal produce, fresh-baked items, and handmade goods, Elmhurst (Ill.) CRC hosts its city's farmers' market from June to October.

For 25 years, the city of Elmhurst hosted a farm-to-table market in a municipal parking lot close to the neighborhood hike-and-bike "Prairie Path." But the lot was small and the community grew frustrated by inaccessibility—especially with regard to parking.

Jack Lanenga, who in 2015 served as Elmhurst CRC's executive director, had an idea. What if the church hosted Elmhurst's farmer's market in their extensive parking lots? Elmhurst CRC is a large suburban congregation with a reported membership of 1,000.

For nine years the idea volleyed back and forth even as frustrations grew over the landlocked space. Yet Lanenga persisted, right up until his death in 2025.

Last summer, the market officially moved locations, was incorporated as an LLC, and became an affiliated ministry of Elmhurst CRC.

In the second season of hosting, "We've started experiencing people who come up to us and ask for prayer," DeMey said.

Tracy Williams, Elmhurst CRC's market ambassador, said, "We're trying to be open to the dynamic movement of the Holy Spirit. We want to allow God to do more through us."

Forty-five vendors, ranging from fresh produce to baked goods to an assortment of food trucks, took part in the market this past season. The larger venue also welcomes busloads of daycamp participants and senior housing residents to enjoy the market's fellowship and live music. The market runs 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesdays, June through October.

—Kendra Thompson

222Disciple and a Trend Toward One-on-one Discipleship

As Christian Reformed churches focus on multiplication through discipleship in conjunction with the denomination's 10-year church planting plan adopted by Synod 2026, more are turning to one-on-one mentoring to prepare young people for their profession of faith rather than relying primarily on a classroom-setting approach.

Rick Zomer, a faith formation consultant with Thrive, the CRC's equipping ministry for congregations, said, "The classroom approach can make profession of faith feel formal and impersonal for a younger person. In contrast, mentoring creates a comfortable space for young people to ask questions they might hesitate to bring up in a group."

Thrive has curated a Professing our Faith toolkit that contains examples of courses, retreats, mentoring, and other initiatives that various CRCNA congregations have created or used. One platform gaining attention is 222Disciple from Port St. Lucie, Fla., which has seen an 18% increase in the number of people joining and using its online materials since the 2025 Multiply Conference hosted there in November 2025. Because the network does not track reasons for joining, creator Scott Vander Ploeg hesitates to attribute the growth—from 1,730 members to 2,047—to the conference. However, he shared that the conference "generate(d) new conversations and follow-up with pastors and leaders from several regions."

Vander Ploeg designed 222Disciple as a mentorship-style discipleship program patterned after 2 Timothy 2:2, where the apostle Paul encourages Timothy to take the things he heard from Paul and entrust them "to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." Vander Ploeg describes the pattern as a combination of doctrine and apprenticeship between a young person or developing Christian and a mature believer. Available in several languages including English, Spanish, Portuguese, Korean, and Hausa, 222Disciple features a "structured sequence of short teaching videos and accompanying handouts designed to be used in real discipling relationships."



Sunlight Ministries

Olivia Motisi (left) and Rose Correia study together at Sunlight Ministries in Port St. Lucie, Fla.

Aaron Vriesman, pastor of North Blendon CRC in Hudsonville, Mich., has used the lesson sheets for four years. Previously, he walked candidates directly through the Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed confessions. While that approach provided important theological grounding, he sometimes found himself "lost in the weeds of doctrine."

The 222Disciple lessons remain firmly rooted in Reformed theology and, as Vriesman observes, are "noticeably based on the Heidelberg Catechism" while maintaining a clear focus on the gospel. The format, however, allows something more personal to happen.

"It has a way of bringing the candidate's needs, challenges, insecurities, doubts, or questions to the surface," Vriesman pointed out. "The leader then has the opportunity to encourage the candidate with the gospel and explain how the gospel meets all their spiritual needs."

Dave Bosscher, pastor of Lakeside Community CRC in Alto, Mich., has used the materials for seven years after being trained by Vander Ploeg. At Lakeside, mentors pray over a list of junior and senior high students before choosing someone to invite into discipleship. The six- to eight-month process is considered a "win" if a student "either clearly loves Jesus or knows why they don't," Bosscher said.

"We want each student to graduate with a strong reaction to Jesus that is their own choice—anything but a shrug, we like to say," he said.

The 222Disciple model views making profession of faith not as the completion of discipleship, but a milestone within it. Vander Ploeg said, "We hope to see a mature, self-feeding, reproducing Christian—not merely someone who can give the right answer."

—David Hanson

Noteworthy



Geena DeWeerd, most recently director for client strategy and communications with Durrell Communications in Waterloo, Ont., was ratified by the Council of Delegates in October as the new **director of communications for the Christian Reformed Church in North America**. Working out of the Burlington, Ont., ministry office, DeWeerd starts in the position Nov. 16. She is a lifelong member of the CRC and professing member of Stratford (Ont.) CRC, where she has employed her gifts toward congregational communication, website redevelopment, and digital strategy.

The position has been vacant since March, when then-director Kristen VanderBerg left for a role with an Ontario supportive housing charity. Brian Geers, director of marketing and communications for Resonate Global Mission, has been serving in the interim.

Diaconal Ministries Canada, formed in 2001 to unite several regional diaconal conferences of the Christian Reformed churches in Canada and to inspire, empower, and equip deacons, **marked its 25th anniversary in October**. Past and current board members, staff, deacons, ministry partners, and supporters celebrated 25 Years of Love in Action on Oct. 17, including the launch of an endowment fund for the organization's grant-issuing NewGround fund for community ministry.



Currently serving president of Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ont., David Zietsma, has been appointed by the Board of Governors to a second five-year term, beginning May 1, 2027.

In its Sept. 25 announcement the board said, "Serving as provost and vice president, academic, and interim president before his official appointment as fifth president in March 2022, Zietsma has guided the institution through a remarkable period of growth, strategic alignment, and renewed spiritual focus."

Founded in 1982 as a denominationally affiliated school of the Christian Reformed Church, the university's mission is "Preparing students to reflect the love of Jesus Christ in every career and calling."

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Elzo Tenyenhuis

1955-2026

Elzo Tenyenhuis will be remembered for his hospitality, willingness to help, ability to listen, humor, curiosity, and integrity. He shared his zeal for the gospel whenever he had the opportunity. Diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in April, Elzo faced the prognosis with courage, grace, and steadfast confidence in his heavenly Savior. "In these last months, Elzo showed us what a life fully surrendered to God could look like, and it was beautiful," his family wrote in an online tribute. Elzo, 70, died July 2.

At age 3 Elzo immigrated with his family to Canada from the Netherlands, settling in Nova Scotia. Later, after three years at Calvin College (now University), Elzo studied at two universities in Ontario, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Guelph and a Bachelor of Education from Brock University.

After a career in teaching, Elzo enrolled at Calvin Seminary. After graduation and ordination in 1999 he pastored Kincardine (Ont.) CRC until 2007.

Elzo loved nature and the outdoors. He was passionate about sharing his eclectic taste in music with others. He had an inquiring mind and loved reading and exploring many different topics.

Elzo is survived by Marijke, his wife of 47 years; two daughters and their spouses; and eight grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Fire Resets LaGrave Church's Community Center Plan

A fire late in the evening of Aug. 26 destroyed a historic building on the property of LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., but not the congregation's primary worship space.

The fire destroyed a vacant structure that had once served a Seventh-Day Adventist congregation, which LaGrave acquired shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic. That building dated back to 1894 and was designated in 1977 as a historic landmark by the city's Historic Preservation Commission, said Kristin Batts, director of community engagement at LaGrave.

LaGrave's main worship space was not affected by the fire.

The church was in the process of developing architectural designs and coming up with cost estimates for renovating the former Seventh-Day Adventist building to be used as a community and service center that could be open seven days a week, Batts said.

"The planning committee was nearing the time to go both to (the church) council and congregation in the fall of 2026 for project approval and a capital campaign launch," she said. "The long-term church campus plans also included new and renovated spaces for youth ministry and congregation fellowship, along with the community service and ministry components."



Greg CHandler

Fire crews work to extinguish the blaze in the vacant former church building adjacent to LaGrave Avenue CRC on Aug. 27, 2026.

Pastor of preaching Peter Jonker had earlier told the local news outlet MLive that the church was hopeful for the community project to be operational in the new facility by 2028.

LaGrave has had a longstanding commitment to downtown Grand Rapids since the congregation was founded in 1887. It has a long history of working with nonprofit and faith-based agencies that serve the unhoused and those on limited incomes using supportive and subsidized housing. Over the past two winters, LaGrave has collaborated with downtown churches of other faith traditions and nonprofits to provide a weekday community and service center for the unhoused and other interested neighbors. The collaboration has been named Partners in Ministry.

The fire has forced LaGrave leaders to pivot on their plans.

"The coming months will be redefining how LaGrave's planning committee, council, and congregation, as well as the Partners in Ministry, plan to meet our community ministry growth goals," Batts said.

Jonker said "the will is still very much there" to proceed with a community shelter and services hub, but because of the age and history of the structure, the immediate need is to work with the city and state historic commission to learn "what, if any, part of the building we need to save."

Earlier, "because of the instability of the east wall," the city had advised LaGrave not to use the nursery space in its own building, which was physically proximate to the structure, "in case the highest part of that unstable wall would topple into the building," Batts said. The congregation relocated their nursery space on Aug. 30, and on Sept. 2, after an order from the city, removed the top portion of the east brick wall as well as the damaged building's adjacent chimney tower.

As of early October the church hadn't received a written report from the fire department, but nothing had changed from Batts's earlier statement to *The Banner* that "there's no indication that there was anything nefarious."

—Greg Chandler

New Name for Former Press Association

Reflecting an expanded community of professional Christian writers, publishers, and content creators in its membership, the Evangelical Press Association narrowly approved the new board-recommended name "Christian Communicators Network" in online voting from Sept. 15 to Oct. 7.

With 37% of potential voters casting a ballot, 57% voted in favor of the board's recommendation; 42% voted against and 1% abstained.

The Banner, magazine of the Christian Reformed Church, has participated in the association since its founding in 1949.

The board suggested "Christian Communicators Network best represents the organization's identity, mission, and future. It honors nearly eighty years of faithful service while positioning the organization to serve the next generation of Christian communicators with the same commitment to biblical truth, professional excellence, ethical journalism, and Christian fellowship that have always defined EPA."

They proposed that the new name "simply catches up with our mission," suggesting the word *Christian* "communicates our identity more clearly while remaining fully consistent with our evangelical convictions," the word *Communicators* describes the people the organization serves, rather than the former primary medium in which they work, and "the word Network reflects the organization's greatest strength"—its professional community.

The board formally proposed the resolution in an online membership meeting Sept. 15, where some members voiced, or typed into the chat feature, concerns about the proposed name. Sarah Kroop Brown, vice president of communications and marketing for the National Association of Evangelicals, shared: "My main concern is the proposed shift from 'evangelical' to 'Christian.' ... While the intent may be to broaden appeal, we have significant concerns about what such a change could mean, both for the broader evangelical movement and for the institution of the EPA itself."

Board president Dwight Widaman emphasized in an Oct. 8 announcement of the vote results that "the evangelical convictions, Statement of Faith, membership standards, Code of Ethics, and commitment to our journalistic legacy remain unchanged."

He urged full membership participation as "the adoption of a new name does not guarantee a new future."

"Christian Communicators Network will prosper only if its members invest themselves in securing that future. Our new name may open doors, but members must pass through them. We may reach new and younger individuals in our industry, but it will take your personal invitations, convention participation, mentoring, and active engagement to turn those opportunities into reality," Widaman wrote. "To those who did not vote for the change, please know that your involvement remains essential."

The organization also anticipates a new executive director, expected to begin Jan. 1, 2027. In July, EPA announced a U.S.-wide search for the role after Lamar Keener, executive director since 2015, indicated he would retire at the end of this year.

—Alissa Vernon

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Roger Dale Kramer

1943-2026

A humble man of quiet strength, Roger Kramer enjoyed creating joy around him with his wit and playful pranks. A daughter described his life as an embodiment of Phil. 2:3-4: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit ... not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Roger, 82, died July 15.

Born in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., Roger followed in his father's footsteps to graduate from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Ordained in 1968, he pastored Quincy (Wash.) Christian Reformed Church, where he met and married Tammy Weaver in 1970. He then served Church of the Savior CRC in South Bend, Ind., and in 1981 began a 14-year call to Hope International CRC in Arcadia, Calif. He pastored Calvary CRC in Edina, Minn., until his retirement in 2005. After relocating to Portland Ore., Roger continued to serve as interim pastor at Parklane CRC and preached occasionally at Christ Community Church in Tualatin, Ore. He served more than 10 years as stated clerk of Classis Columbia.

Married 56 years, Roger and Tammy enjoyed traveling in retirement.

Roger is survived by Tammy; four children and their spouses; eight grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Council of Delegates, Governance Boards Meet in Grand Rapids

The Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church and the denomination's U.S. and Canadian ministry boards met Oct. 14-16 at Cascade Fellowship CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Items to note from the meeting include a report from general secretary Zachary King after his recent return from a three-month sabbatical, financial updates, and pending decisions on re-addressing the 2018 abuse of power report and a possible corporate structure change for ReFrame Ministries.

King shared with delegates five commitments for his next season of ministry, including communicating a hopeful and honest vision of God's mission. "The core of what we do is to follow the Holy Spirit and encourage the ministry of our congregations," he said.

Roberta Vriesema, director of partnership administration, reviewed the denomination's financial standing of the past fiscal year, compared to the previous fiscal year. "Spending has gone down because ministry shares have gone down and overall giving is down. … We are conservative managers of the money," she emphasized.

Lloyd Hemstreet, delegate from Classis Zeeland who serves on the finance committee, noted that ministry share giving dropped only 1% between 2024-25 and 2025-26 but is still only 79% of the ministry share revenue from four years ago.

Review of 2019 Instruction on Abuse of Power to Come

Delegates received a report from the Dignity Team, a group appointed to address possible gaps in support to those who've experienced hurt within the church, which Synod 2026 requested to disband. The team has until June to wrap up its work. Council of Delegates chair Andre VanRyk led delegates in a discussion concerning whether a new approach to 2019 instructions to address possible gaps in support structures is still needed.

The team "was formed because of the 2018 report on abuse of power. That report has not been overturned," VanRyk said. "So this body will have to work out a way to ensure, potentially in our existing mechanisms" that adequate support exists. Any recommendations will come to a future meeting of the Council.

Boards Approve Investigation of Corporate Change for ReFrame

The Canadian and U.S. ministry boards also function as U.S. and Canadian boards for ReFrame Ministries, the media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church. That's because, unlike Resonate Global Mission or Thrive, ReFrame is still independently incorporated as a nonprofit, registered in Illinois and also in Canada. During the October meetings, the boards discussed a proposal to begin the process of including ReFrame in the denomination's charitable and corporate structure instead.

That would eliminate the need for additional board meetings, duplication of board insurance fees, and other redundant expenses, the proposal noted. However, considering ReFrame's many collaborations with global partners, "care would need to be taken to ensure that this transition is non-disruptive to those agreements," the proposal said.

ReFrame director Darryl Delaney acknowledged "any anticipated efficiencies need to be weighed against potential risks." For one, the question of whether closer legal identification with the denomination could create security, regulatory, or access risks for ReFrame's ministry in restricted areas. Both boards voted to "approve the proposal as presented in principle, pending a satisfactory investigation into the merits and implications." Executive director (Canada) Al Postma, director of U.S. ministry operations Dan DeKam, legal teams on both sides of the border, ReFrame, and the ministry board executive teams will participate in the investigation, to be completed by January.



Any anticipated efficiencies need to be weighed against potential risks.

—Darryl Delaney, director of Reframe Ministries

Canadian Board Approves Refreshed Justice Ministry Mandates

The directors of the Canadian Ministry Board adopted refreshed mandates for Indigenous Ministry, Intercultural Ministry, and the Centre for Public Dialogue at their October meeting. The refresh was carried out over the past eight months, with the input of ministry staff, after questions about the ministries' mandates, how their connected support committees are appointed, and how they relate to the Ministry Board came up at the February 2026 meeting.

Teams Appointed for Studies, 10-year Plan Implementation

In the refreshed mandates each ministry is identified as "part of the Canadian Ministries Office of the CRCNA" and is accountable to the Canadian Ministry Board through the office of the executive director.

For each ministry, "the executive director, in consultation with senior staff, shall determine if a committee to offer advice and support is needed for this ministry and shall define its role and its composition. The executive director shall communicate such decisions to the Canadian Ministry Board for information."

There are committees currently in place for Indigenous Ministry and Intercultural Ministry. The committee for contact with the government, the first of the Canadian Justice Ministries, originally formed in 1968 and operationalized into the Centre for Public Dialogue, has been idle while the CPD has remained unstaffed after the departure of former director Mike Hogeterp in 2023.

Al Postma, executive director, said now that the mandate has been clarified, he will begin work on fulfilling the expectations for the CPD. He doesn't have a timeline for when staff may be hired.

Adrian Jacobs has served as the senior leader for Indigenous justice and reconciliation since 2022. Sebastian Maldonado and Jeremiah Bašurić share the senior leadership position for Intercultural Ministry.

—Alissa Vernon

The Christian Reformed Church in North America's 10-year strategic plan implementation team is in place, and members have been appointed to study Christian nationalism, classis restructuring, and the denomination's vision and mission statements.

Jon Hoekema, CRCNA prayer shepherd, is the lead on the prayer and fasting initiative, "Project Antioch," associated with the **10-year plan**. The rest of **the implementation team** looks like this:

- Discipleship and multiplication: Elaine May, Thrive renewal consultant
- Leadership development: Susan LaClear, director of Candidacy
- Church planting pathways: Vivy Cassis, church-planting operations manager with Resonate Global Mission
- Legacy pathways: Lee Carter, director of Thrive
- Financial sustainability: David Morgan, Resonate director of operations
- Team leadership: Roberta Vriesema, director of partnership administration, and Tim Sheridan, director of church planting for the CRCNA

Serving on the committee to study Christian nationalism, to report to Synod 2028, are Texas church planter Christian Sebastia; Calvin Theological Seminary professor Gabriela Tijerina-Pike; Rob Joustra, professor of politics at Calvin University; Iowa pastors Lee Khang and John Lee; Jordan Ballor, executive director of the Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy; Dordt University professor of political science Jeff Taylor; Classis Hamilton interim committee member Gina Taylor; and Missouri pastor Michael Bentley. Lee will chair the committee, and Joustra is its reporter.

The task force on classis restructuring, to report to Synod 2027, includes Classis B.C. South-East's stated clerk Kaitlyn Hofsink; retired Eastern Canada pastor Gregg Lawson; Florida commissioned pastor John Granada; Michigan pastors Cory Nederveld and Mike Koetje; Illinois pastor Drew Hoekema; Texas pastor Jose Rayas; Wisconsin pastor Dan DeGraff; and Council of Delegates members David van der Woerd (Canada at-large) and Cindy VanderKodde (Classis Grand Rapids East). Hoekema will chair the task force, and DeGraff is its reporter.



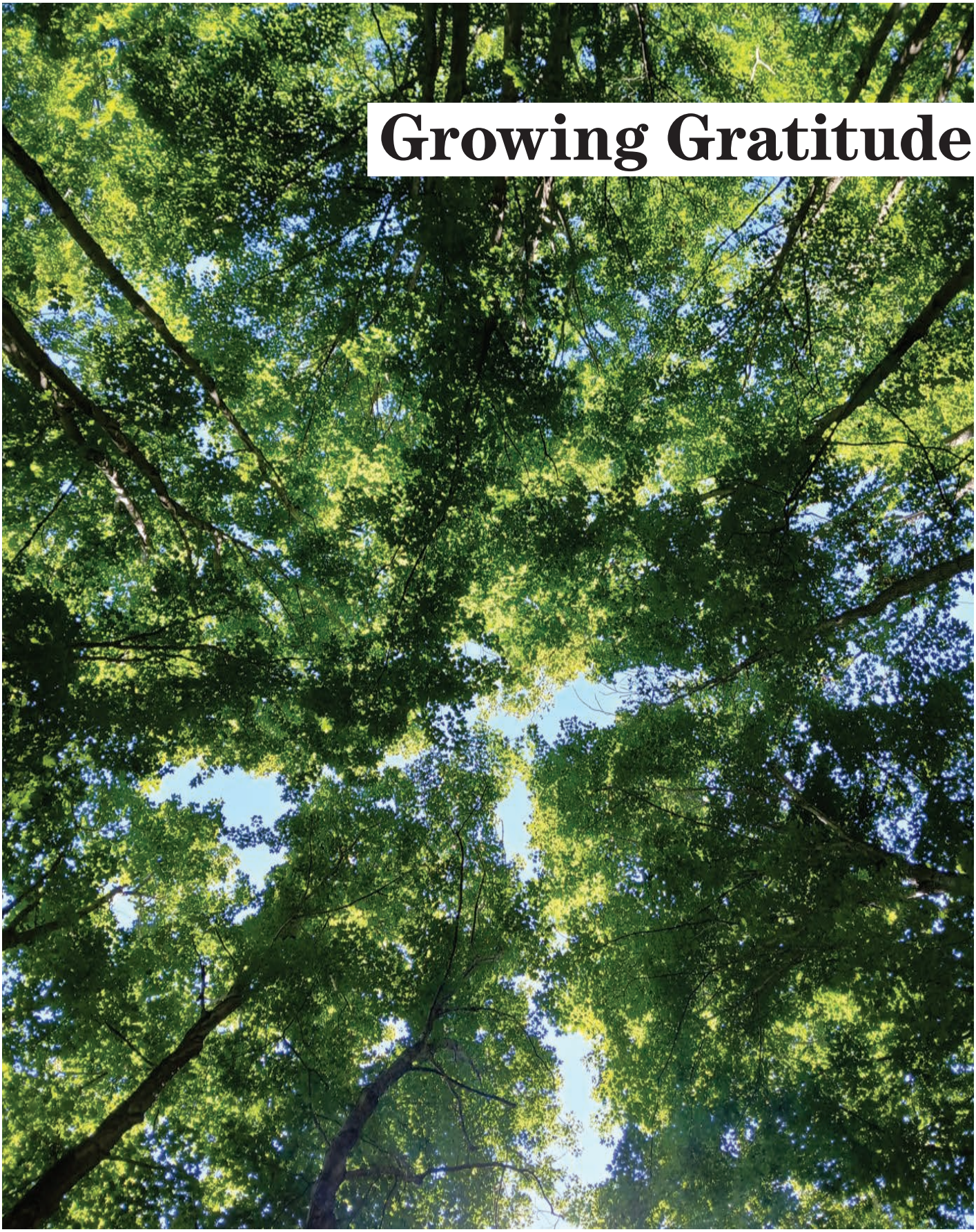
Steven Herppich

John Lee, a delegate to Synod 2026 from Classis Iakota, will chair the nine-member committee to study Christian nationalism, due to report in 2028.

The Council of Delegates, at its October meeting, appointed six of its members to serve on the **vision and mission statement review committee**, being established by the general secretary with an initial report to Synod 2027: Chris Pederson (Chicago South), Gregory Morris (Red Mesa), Wendy Werkman (Alberta North), Felix Fernandez (Southeast US), Ren Tubergen (Thornapple Valley), and Ron VanAuken (Quinte). Matthew Haan (Iakota) and Philip Apoll (Ontario Southwest) were appointed as alternates.

—Alissa Vernon

Growing Gratitude



By CRC Communications

Canadians celebrated Thanksgiving last month. Americans will take a day to give thanks later this November. While news broadcasts are reminding us every day of all the things we have to fear, Thanksgiving Day reminds us to look at all the things we have to be thankful for.

Gratitude can feel like a naive response to the world, a way of ignoring the bad to focus solely on the positive. But giving thanks can be done in any circumstance—in fact, in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, we're commanded to "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

November is also the month when many churches and Christians mark the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, often referred to as IDOP. Christian brothers and sisters around the globe live out their faith in difficult and often dangerous situations, yet hold fast to God and give thanks for the mercies he provides despite the challenges they face.

Later this November we will begin another season of Advent as the church calendar turns to a new liturgical year. This season can remind us of our greatest reason to give thanks: God's great salvation story into which he has invited us.

Here are two stories of the many ways God is working through his people to bring healing and reconciliation, glimpses of his greater work of healing and redeeming the whole of creation, reconciling it to himself through Christ.

Honduras: Making Strides in Child Nutrition

By Laurisa O'Brien, World Renew

Lourdes, 25, has always cared deeply about the health of her young son, Kerin. In her area of rural Honduras, many parents struggle to access the health care needed to give their children the healthiest possible start to life. Poverty, lack of nutritious food, inadequate feeding practices, and other challenges can lead to increased child malnutrition in these communities.

Lourdes and her husband live a very busy life. He drives a moto taxi, which is their main source of income, and she takes care of the many tasks involved in running a home. For a long time, Lourdes would take 4-year-old Kerin to a health center outside their community—and often these trips were challenging.



Lourdes and Kerin have been blessed by local nutrition and learning programs.

"During the rainy season or when I felt sick, I wasn't able to walk all the way there. Sometimes my husband would help me take the child, but when he was busy, I had to walk by myself," she explained. "I made the effort because I care about my child's development, but it was very difficult."

When Lourdes learned about a local program facilitated by World Renew's local partner, Diaconia Nacional, she jumped at the chance to be trained in monitoring and improving her son's health.

Through this program, Lourdes and other mothers have been encouraged to share their concerns, especially regarding childcare and personal care.

"These learnings help us overcome our lack of knowledge about certain topics that sometimes we're embarrassed to talk about, but I have realized it's normal and I can speak openly about what bothers me," she said.

Other key steps for Lourdes were gaining access to vitamins and deworming practices and learning how to monitor Kerin's weight and height. Tracking his growth and development has made her feel more confident in preventing potential health issues and planning for his future needs.

Lourdes is an eager learner who finds that the training sessions help her take her mind off household chores and give her a chance to relax. She has been inviting other mothers to participate in these sessions.

Being deeply rooted in the love of God, our gratitude will naturally grow as we think of all he has done for us and share the good news of Christ with people around us.

"I wish there were more organizations like this coming to our communities, teaching us to work for the common good," she said.

"I am very grateful that this program came to this forgotten community and brought us a ray of hope to keep going. I hope our community also makes good use of these great resources, because we often feel without direction. God bless you always."

Gratitude for Reconnecting: On-the-Land Learning Events

By members of the Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee

Gratitude is often born from the simple joy of reconnecting—with God, with one another, with creation, and with the land itself. In our journey toward Indigenous reconciliation, On-the-Land Learning offers a unique, place-based space to step outside classrooms and sanctuaries and step into forests, fields, and gathering spaces. Guided by Indigenous leaders, these immersive experiences invite Christian Reformed Church congregants and leaders to learn *with* local Indigenous communities rather than just *about* them, replacing distance and stereotypes with real, lasting relationships.

Reflecting on the foundational spirit of these gatherings, Adrian Jacobs, senior leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation, said: "When my Haudenosaunee people first met Europeans in the Dutch encounter of 1613, we understood they wanted to establish a trading relationship with us. We, however, invited the Dutch into the treaty kind of relations we made with other Indigenous nations. This meant we wanted to establish good relations between us as peoples and a good relationship with the land. We knew that this idea was embraced at first but got lost in the developing colonial experience. On-the-Land-Learning brings CRC folk back to the land for the Indigenous people of the land for a reintroduction to this idea. We get a chance to make friends again, which is what reconciliation means. Hearing stories and eating together is how friends are made."

When participants step onto the land with Indigenous hosts, listen to stories, and share meals together, hearts are filled with deep gratitude. One participant reflected, "I was deeply moved by the manner in which the Indigenous leaders engaged with us: postures filled with graciousness and gentleness."

By listening without filters, learning through both Reformed and Indigenous lenses, and experiencing the beauty of God's creation side by side, we give thanks for every moment that brings us back to this foundational vision of peace, friendship, and good relations.

A group gathered in Langley, B.C., for an On-the-Land Learning experience in September.



The Intercultural Table

By Jeremiah Basuric, Intercultural Ministry



During the West Intercultural Cohort's first in-person retreat, one host church invited the cohort to help plan an intercultural worship service. The service opened with familiar and new songs expressed in a variety of languages. An Indigenous member offered a prayer, an Intercultural Ministry leader preached on unity and diversity in biblical Colossae, and another cohort member shared a story about hospitality and creativity.

Tasked with preparing a meal for a large group, she found herself lacking an essential ingredient for an East African dish. An East Asian member stepped in with an alternative from their own culture. When faced with a shortage of large pots, the team fused two cultural cooking styles. What emerged from an initial challenge was something entirely new that honored multiple traditions.

This has been a defining theme of our cohorts: that which people meant for one culture, God meant for many others. As we explore the unique particularities of our own backgrounds, we discover connection and tension with others. In those interactions, the endless possibilities of connection and creativity become the canvas on which the Creator's hand reveals his work of making all things new in Christ.

Recognizing that a growing number of Canadian Christian Reformed churches are becoming intercultural—a shift requiring deep learning and discerning the Spirit's leading in uncharted territory—we gathered these congregations into a learning community. Through these cohorts, local leaders are equipped and encouraged to join in what the Spirit is doing in their midst and across the land.

As this cohort phase wraps up, we praise the Spirit of Christ for what he has been cooking up over the past year.

One church launched an "Intercultural Corner" in its regular newsletter to share community stories, while others are routinely integrating intercultural songs and Scripture passages into Sunday services to highlight diverse cultural traditions. Additionally, summer events have provided safe spaces where people can drop their cultural guard, and another church has launched English classes to serve its local neighborhood.

We also recognize times when the ingredients don't work out as expected. We notice how easily people drift back into their own bubbles, making cross-cultural engagement a slow process. This highlights the need to reimagine what church is: not a space dominated by one ethnic group, but a living sanctuary where we share God's love together.

Other times, we can't quite identify the "secret sauce." In one congregation, members report feeling noticeably more welcomed and accepted during services, even if leaders can't quantify exactly what changed. They simply wonder how to sustain this momentum.

Through all the ups, downs, and turnarounds, our cohorts are growing in trust. Even when the destination feels far away, we trust that what was meant for one culture, God is using to bless many.

The View From Here

Rips in the Giftwrap

THERE'S A GOOD CHANCE your family has some official or unofficial rules about gifts. Maybe once everything is under the tree, you can look but not touch. Or you can pick up a box and shake it, but the tag stays hidden so you don't know whose name is on it. Either way, one rule is the same: keep what's inside a surprise until it's time to unwrap the gift.

I remember, as a kid, finding little rips in the wrapping paper. It was tempting to pull at them a bit more when no one was looking. Sometimes a bit of the box came into view: part of a letter on a label, the color of the packaging, maybe even a glimpse through a clear plastic window—anything for a hint of what was coming. I loved finding those rips because they offered a glimpse of the gift before it arrived, proof that something good was already on its way.

In these Our Shared Ministry pages of *The Banner* we're looking at gratitude during Advent. I like to think of the stories here as rips in the giftwrap.

We tend to think of salvation as involving only the death and resurrection of Jesus, but salvation was accomplished just as much in the gift of his birth. When God became human and stepped fully into creation, the renewal of all things in Christ became an absolute certainty.

But salvation hasn't come in its fullness yet. The renewal of all things in Christ is something we see only in bits and pieces right now: a healed relationship, a congregation that finds new life, a neighbor who hears good news for the first time. We wait in eager anticipation for Jesus to return and make all things new, even as we catch glimpses along the way.

The stories of CRC ministries on these pages are windows into the renewal work Jesus is already doing.

If the full gift we're thankful for, the renewal of all things in Christ, is the present waiting under the tree, then the stories in the Our Shared Ministry section of this issue of *The Banner* are rips in the giftwrap. The gift is already there, fully bought and paid for, and we get to experience glimpses of it now.

The stories of CRC ministries on these pages are windows into the renewal work Jesus is already doing. As we wait through this season of Advent, I hope the stories here remind you, as they remind me, that the fullness of the gift is still coming, and that it is worth giving thanks for even now.



Rev. Al Postma is the executive director (Canada) of the CRCNA. He is a member of Hope CRC in Brantford, Ont.

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Al Postma 목사는 CRCNA 캐나다 지역 총괄 디렉터이며, 온타리오주 브랜트퍼드에 있는 Hope CRC의 교인입니다.

Rasgones en el papel de regalo

ES MUY PROBABLE QUE su familia tenga algunas reglas, oficiales o no oficiales, sobre los regalos. Tal vez, una vez que todo esté debajo del árbol, se puede mirar, pero no tocar. O se puede tomar una caja y sacudirla, pero la etiqueta debe permanecer oculta para que no se sepa para quién es. De cualquier manera, la regla es la misma: mantener en secreto lo que hay adentro hasta que llegue el momento de abrir el regalo.

Recuerdo que, de niño, encontraba pequeños rasgones en el papel de regalo. Era tentador tirar de ellos un poco más cuando nadie miraba. A veces se veía un pedacito de la caja: parte de una letra en una etiqueta o el color del empaque, tal vez incluso se podía entrever algo a través de una ventanilla de plástico transparente—cualquier cosa que me diera una pista de lo que venía. Me encantaba encontrar esos rasgones porque me permitían echar un vistazo al regalo antes de que llegara, una prueba de que algo bueno estaba en camino.

En estas páginas de *The Banner* estamos reflexionando sobre la gratitud durante el Adviento. Me gusta pensar que las historias que aquí se presentan son como los rasgones en el papel de regalo.

Solemos pensar que la salvación tiene que ver únicamente con la muerte y la resurrección de Jesús, pero la salvación se logró en igual medida gracias al regalo de su nacimiento. Cuando Dios se hizo humano y entró de lleno en la creación, la restauración de todas las cosas en Cristo se convirtió en una certeza absoluta.

Pero la salvación aún no ha llegado en toda su plenitud. La restauración de todas las cosas en Cristo es algo que, por ahora, solo vemos de manera parcial: una relación sanada, una congregación que renace, un vecino que escucha las buenas nuevas por primera vez. Esperamos con gran ilusión el regreso de Jesús y que haga nuevas todas las cosas, aunque ya podamos vislumbrarlo en el camino.

Las historias de los ministerios de la ICR que aparecen en estas páginas son una ventana a la obra de renovación que Jesús ya está realizando.

Si el regalo completo por el que estamos agradecidos—la renovación de todas las cosas en Cristo—es el regalo que nos espera debajo del árbol, entonces las historias de este artículo de *The Banner* son los rasgones en el papel de regalo. El regalo ya está ahí, completamente comprado y pagado, y ahora podemos vislumbrarlo.

Las historias de los ministerios de la ICR que aparecen en estas páginas son una ventana a la obra de renovación que Jesús ya está realizando. Mientras aguardamos el fin de esta temporada de Adviento, espero que estas historias les recuerden, tal como me recuerdan a mí, que el regalo en toda su plenitud aún está por llegar y que ya vale la pena dar gracias por ello.

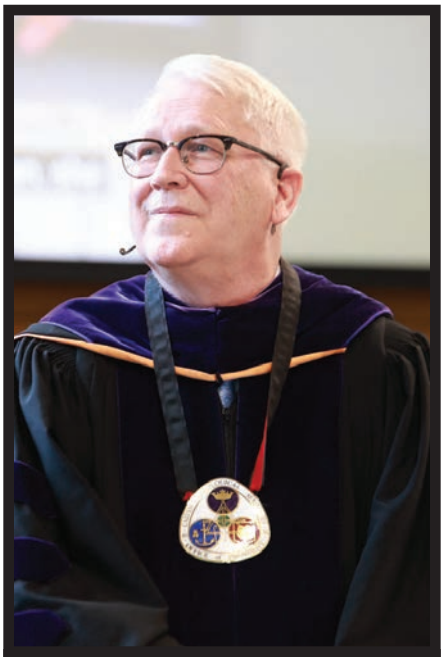
El reverendo Al Postma es el director ejecutivo para Canadá de la ICRNA. Es miembro de la Iglesia Hope CRC en Brantford, Ontario.

Director's Desk: Meet Jul Medenblik

In what ways does Calvin Theological Seminary equip local CRC people and churches to do Kingdom work?

Our mission to serve the church is what Calvin Seminary was founded on 151 years ago, and it has been our focus ever since. At our core from the beginning, we form leaders for the church and provide theological education and formation for those leaders. We have been challenged over the past decade and a half by major cultural and societal shifts. Despite these shifts, we see a continuing need for our academically robust and holistic programs that support that mission. Although we are adapting to the changing needs of the church by expanding learning methods, including distance, hybrid, and competency-based education, our new student housing center demonstrates our commitment to in-person instruction.

This all serves the church by providing well-equipped pastors, preachers, and leaders and by forming teachers, professors, counselors, and nonprofit leaders to pursue all aspects of Kingdom work wherever they are. We continue to support them and the wider community through resources such as *The Forum*, a magazine created by the seminary.



Jul Medenblik stands at the 2026 Convocation.

What are the core values that undergird Calvin Theological Seminary's work? How do you ensure the work aligns with those value?

This is a great question. We can easily point to a mission or vision statement, but that often doesn't tell the whole story. When I think about the values shared among our faculty, staff, and students, I see a deep commitment to Reformed theology. Many of our students come from outside the CRCNA yet are welcomed into our teaching and formation, which is shaped by the Reformed confessions. This value is multifaceted, including our connection to the CRCNA as the only seminary directly connected to it. We are closely aligned with the church and adapt to meet its needs.

A second value is equipping our students with the tools to sow the gospel as missionaries in whatever context they find themselves—including helping them navigate our changing cultural and societal contexts. This starts by understanding those contexts and training and forming our students to provide an academically robust, holistic education in a meaningful and lasting way. For example, our "vocational formation" emphasis, from day one, fosters personal and spiritual growth in our learning community that connects to local churches.

What's one thing about Calvin Theological Seminary that you wish people knew?

I wish people knew just how many students we have at the Seminary, and from over 30 different countries. Yes, we have had a steady and now growing portion coming directly from the CRCNA community, but it is a joy to see just how important our Reformed theology is to the global church. Our enrollment numbers buck the trend in theological education, with steady growth over the past four years, and we now exceed 400 enrolled in our programs. And our M.Div. program has remained steady throughout this time, while the vast majority of seminaries in North America have seen a dramatic decline in M.Div. enrollment.

This is a testament to our faculty and staff's efforts to tell our story and to the significance of Reformed theology in the world today. Also of significance is our affordability. Our strong, supportive community has made this possible.

What has been a highlight of Calvin Theological Seminary in the past year?

A highlight for our community has to be the opening of the Harry and Bernice Vermeer Family Seminary Housing Center, a 46-unit apartment building at 3300 Burton St. SE, immediately across the road from the seminary. This beautiful new building is a space that fosters and encourages community. This facility will set us up for years of safe, efficient, and beautiful housing for our students, allowing us to continue offering highly affordable theological education to those students able to participate in person.

How do you see higher education changing in the next five years, and how are you adapting to meet that need?

I see Calvin Theological Seminary remaining faithful in the Reformed faith and faithful in addressing the needs of our church. From our partnership with Susan LaClear and Gabriela Tijerina-Pike to develop the Spanish-language EPMC program and certificate options for our emphasis on church planting, to our pilot of competency-based learning, to the relaunch of our doctor of ministry program to also directly address the needs of the CRCNA in church planting; I see the common word as "faithful."

How can we pray for you?

Our community is entering a time of transition. As I wrap up my time here as president, I ask for your prayers for the seminary community as we prepare for the transition ahead. For my family and me, for us to transition to a different type of ministry as we move on to a new stage of life, and for the seminary community, that we would all be preparing to welcome in a new leader with encouragement and a posture of service.

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

Christian Reformed Church

ReFrame Ministries

Resonate Global Mission

Thrive

World Renew

Calvin Theological Seminary

Calvin University 1876

Christian Reformed Church Canadian Justice Ministries

Drawn to Jesus

AHMET* HAD SEEN *The Jesus Film* maybe a dozen times—but everything changed the night he watched it with Resonate Global Mission missionary Daniel*.

Born into a predominantly Muslim country in Asia, Ahmet grew up knowing Jesus as a prophet. But he felt restless, uncertain, and unsatisfied with life and his faith. Knowing that Christians believed Jesus was God, he became curious about who Jesus really was. When an opportunity arose to watch *The Jesus Film* the first time, he did—and was fascinated.

"He found that Jesus has real love for all humans," said Daniel. "He was thirsty in his mind for Jesus."

After that first experience, Ahmet watched *The Jesus Film* several more times. When he learned that Daniel's church was hosting an in-person screening, he eagerly attended.

Through Resonate, the Christian Reformed Church in North America sends missionaries such as Daniel to countries around the world to spread the gospel to people who are searching for Jesus. Daniel struck up a conversation with Ahmet and discovered he was eager to learn more about Jesus and Christianity. While Ahmet had watched the movie many times, this was his first time in a church building, and he had never opened a copy of the Bible.

Daniel asked Ahmet if he wanted to learn what the Bible said about Jesus. With Ahmet's religious background, he had a lot of questions to grapple with: Was Jesus really God? What is the Trinity?



Ahmet was raised a Muslim but curious about Christianity. A Resonate Global Mission missionary was there for him.

Through prayer and reading Scripture, Daniel explored those questions with him. For a time, they focused especially on Genesis. Then Daniel encouraged Ahmet to read through the entire New Testament.

As time passed and Ahmet learned more about Jesus and Christianity, he became confident that Jesus was "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior and told Daniel that he wanted to be baptized.

That's when the spiritual attacks hit.

"A variety of challenges began to distract him from reading the Bible, including credit card fraud, a severe flu, and emotional spiritual attacks that he had never experienced before," shared Daniel.

Daniel was able to walk alongside Ahmet as he navigated this rocky path. Daniel supported him through checking in, praying with him, and encouraging him. With Daniel by his side, Ahmet experienced God's protection and guidance. When he was baptized, he shared a powerful testimony of God's faithfulness.

The denomination's support is critical as missionaries not only share the gospel with seekers and guide them as they come to faith in Christ, but continue to disciple them on their faith journey.

Daniel continues to meet with Ahmet. He is encouraging him to continue growing in his relationship with Jesus and to also share the gospel with his family, friends, and neighbors.

"I always emphasize that we are built together as a body of Christ, so we need to help each other grow together. Now I am encouraging him to become a channel for others to meet God," said Daniel. "Will you please pray for the Holy Spirit to continue working in and through Ahmet?"

**Names changed for security.*

Over in the Meadow

"OVER IN THE MEADOW, in the sand, in the sun… ." Have you ever heard that children's song? Maybe you have sung it yourself!

But what exactly is a meadow? A meadow is a wide-open habitat that plays an important role for ecosystems and wildlife, and meadows are found on every continent on Earth. Animals live and play in the grasses of meadows, and some meadows have trees. These open expanses exist without human cultivation or intervention.

What would you see if you visited a meadow?

Grasshoppers love meadows. Their bodies cool off in nighttime temperatures, and meadow mornings offer them the energy of the sun's rays and sips of dew as their exoskeletons warm up to start their days full of jumping 20 times their own length!

You can find spittlebugs in the meadow. Have you ever seen a plant that looks like it has a blob of spit on it? That blob is where a baby spittlebug lives. It hatches from its egg and sucks the sap from the stem of its host plant. The sap exits the spittlebug's body after it mixes with chemicals, and the tiny spittlebug lives inside the foamy blob it creates. In the middle of summer, the spittlebug becomes a froghopper bug and is ready to leave its spitty home.

If you visit a meadow, you might see milkweed plants that are loved by Monarch butterflies. The milk-like sap from milkweed plants is poisonous to almost all animals and insects, but not to Monarchs. Milkweed plants provide a safe home for Monarchs to lay their eggs, and their caterpillars, when they hatch, chow down on the milkweed leaves without having to be afraid of interference from predators. The milkweed's poison sap protects the caterpillars so they can grow up to be beautiful Monarch butterflies.

God created meadows on Earth so that his creation can flourish and be enjoyed within this unique ecosystem. God even uses the imagery of meadows to describe his people in the book of Isaiah: "They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams" (Is. 44:4).

There is something to see in meadows during every season God created. Visit one today to see what you can discover!



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

Illustration for *The Banner* by Anita Barghigiani



Christmas, Contextualized

How CRC Congregations Make the Season Their Own

By Dan Veeneman

Every December, Christian Reformed churches across North America put up trees, light candles, and retell the familiar story of God becoming flesh and moving into the neighborhood. The neighborhoods themselves, however, could hardly be more different.

On the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico, a congregation celebrates quietly in a community where the season carries a different, culturally rooted meaning. In rural Kansas, a church takes its candlelight service down the road to a retirement home so members who can no longer attend church can still share in Christmas. A congregation in Langley, B.C., uses Advent to buy livestock for families on the other side of the world, while a church in Edmonton welcomes the crowds already drawn to its neighborhood's Christmas lights. In Waupun, Wisc., another congregation goes even further, rebuilding the streets of Bethlehem in its own backyard.

These five churches experience five very different Advents, yet a common thread runs through them all. Each congregation has taken something familiar and allowed its particular community to reshape it into a tradition that could not fit anywhere else in quite the same way. In some respects, that instinct captures the heart of Advent itself: Christians wait for God to arrive not in the abstract, but in the middle of real places and particular circumstances. Every December, these congregations do something similar, receiving the same hope and allowing it to take the form their own community needs.

Giving Instead of Getting

Willoughby CRC, Langley, B.C.

At Willoughby CRC, the countdown to Christmas begins with a bare tree and a box of paper ornaments. Deacon Jackie Hofstede explained that the congregation has been decorating what it calls the Giving Tree since 2013, although no current deacon remembers exactly how the tradition began. What people do remember is the simple way it works: members choose a paper ornament printed with an item from World Renew's gift catalogue, fill it out with a pledge, and return it to the tree. Some ornaments represent a goat, others a flock of chickens or a garden starter kit. The completed pledges go to World Renew, while the actual gifts make their way to families who need them far more than anyone gathered around the Willoughby tree.

Verna Dusin, resident of Logan Manor, sits with her granddaughter Kaylee Brown and Luctor CRC member Sherri Woodside in the background.

In 2022, the congregation took the tradition a step further. Working with World Renew, the deacons set a goal of funding several of the organization's "bestseller" bundles, each a $4,000 package that combines livestock, tools, and seeds into one gift with the potential to change a family's circumstances for years. Hofstede said Willoughby has surpassed that goal every year since, a streak now heading into its fifth season.

Individual ornaments remain part of the tree alongside the larger campaign, and Hofstede has noticed that people are beginning to use them differently. Instead of buying another toy for a grandchild who already has plenty, some families now choose a gift that reflects the person they want to honor. They might purchase a flock of chickens through World Renew, then give

their loved one a card explaining the gift made in their name. It is a practice Hofstede has adopted with her own family.

"It's something that we as a church enjoy giving to," Hofstede said. Newer members, she added, have responded warmly to a tradition centered on helping others rather than accumulating more for themselves. She is not sure why this specific annual custom was started, but perhaps the explanation is simple: some traditions take root because they work.

A Quiet Season Amid Ancient Traditions

Zuni CRC, Zuni, N.M.

Fifteen hundred miles to the south, in the heart of the Pueblo of Zuni, Christmas looks almost nothing like it does in Langley, B.C. Pastor James Zwier has served Zuni CRC for four years, ministering to a congregation of about 150 members on land where, as he put it, the church has been a guest for about 127 years.

Zwier explained that Christmas in Zuni arrives during one of the most sacred periods in the traditional Zuni religious calendar. The winter solstice begins a fast that typically lasts from four to 10 days and often falls immediately before Dec. 25. Fewer than 2% of the Pueblo identify as Christian, and during the fast the community observes strict traditional prohibitions, including a rule against turning on outdoor lights. As a result, there are no strings of Christmas lights, glowing Santas, or other bright displays competing for attention.

"It certainly feels different than celebrating Christmas in Canada or Western Michigan or Iowa," Zwier said, "where just about everybody's celebrating it, maybe not so Christian-ly anymore. Here, hardly anybody's celebrating Christmas at all."

Rather than resisting that quiet, Zuni CRC has learned to live and worship within it. Before the fasting period begins, members go caroling through the community, stopping at homes to sing and offer a blessing. Zwier said even neighbors who otherwise have little connection to the church look forward to these visits and often send the singers on their way with food or a small gift. From one year to the next, the congregation alternates between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services, then brings the season to a close with a community potluck.

> These five churches experience five very different Advents, yet a common thread.

Christmas at Zuni CRC is shaped less by decoration than by prayer, offered quietly in a place where the surrounding community is deeply engaged in its own religious observance. "Christmas is a time when believers especially feel the need to be supported in prayer," Zwier said, "because of the traditional religion being so strong at that time of year."

There are no pageants competing for attention on Main Street and no expectation that the wider community will notice or join in. Instead, the small group of carolers moving from house to house has become a quiet witness of its own, reminding the congregation that the church belongs to its neighbors as much as it belongs to itself.

Bringing Christmas to Those Who Can't Come to It

Luctor CRC, Prairie View, Kans.

In Prairie View, Kans., Luctor CRC found its own Christmas tradition by paying attention to someone who was no longer there. Pastor Shawn Richardson recalled a longtime member who had rarely missed an evening service. When the man moved to Logan Manor, the local retirement center, and could no longer attend, the church responded by bringing the evening service to him. Over time, that simple act of care reshaped the way the congregation approached Christmas itself.

Logan Manor is now home to Luctor's Christmas candlelight service, which took place for the second time in 2025. Inside the retirement home, the congregation works to preserve every familiar part of the tradition, from the candle lighting and decorations to the full Advent liturgy. Richardson said the invitation extends beyond church members to all Logan Manor residents and their families, including many who have no other connection to the congregation. One family told him that, amid the upheaval of moving a loved one into long-term care, the service gave them a brief and deeply welcome sense of normalcy.

Attendance doubled from the first year to the second, a change Richardson attributes to the congregation's growing recognition of how much these older members have contributed to the life of the church. "They remember Sunday school taught by these older folks," he said. "They remember seeing them standing up in front of everyone as elders." The Logan Manor gathering does not replace the congregation's traditional Christmas Eve service; it stands beside it. Two church members now also work at Logan Manor, strengthening the relationship through their roles as neighbors and caregivers. Christmas Eve has become more than simply the night before Christmas morning. It is now a night when the whole church gathers around the same light, wherever its members happen to live.

Walking into the Story

First CRC, Waupun, Wisc.

While Luctor CRC brings Christmas to people who cannot easily come to church, First CRC in Waupun, Wisc., invites the wider community to step directly into the story. Every other December for the past six years the congregation has transformed its grounds into "A Night in Bethlehem," an interactive walk-through recreation of the ancient town on the night of Jesus' birth.

Elder Mike Vandenberg said the event began as a way to help people encounter the nativity story with fresh eyes, and it has become one of the congregation's most anticipated outreach efforts. Led in small groups through a recreated marketplace, visitors meet merchants and townspeople, sample foods inspired by the biblical era, and eventually arrive at a live nativity scene. Last December, more than 200 people from Waupun and the surrounding area walked the streets that First CRC had built.

What lifts the event beyond historical reenactment, Vandenberg said, is the guide who accompanies each group and threads the larger gospel story through the journey. The walk concludes at a cross, where visitors hear a short reflection connecting Christ's birth with his death and resurrection. "Our prayer is that every visitor leaves not only with a memorable Christmas experience," Vandenberg said, "but also with a clearer understanding of the hope that is found in Jesus Christ."

The event has also changed the congregation from within. In the weeks before each presentation, dozens of volunteers build sets, sew costumes, and rehearse their parts, and that shared work has drawn the church closer while deepening its sense of calling to its neighbors.

Meeting the Neighborhood on the Corner

West End CRC, Edmonton, Alta.

West End CRC in Edmonton, Alta., sits beside Candy Cane Lane, a residential street known across the city for its elaborate Christmas light displays. For years, the church watched December crowds pass by without finding a meaningful way to connect. Lisa Vander Leek, who helps lead the church's outreach efforts, said that changed two years ago when the congregation chose to welcome the foot traffic already arriving at its doorstep rather than ignore it or try to compete with it. On average, about 300,000 people visit Edmonton's Candy Cane Lane over its month-long opening.

The result is a season-long welcome designed around the people who come to see the lane. On selected evenings, the church closes its parking area to vehicles and opens it to pedestrians, turning what is usually a shortcut into a small community gathering place. In partnership with a nearby Tim Hortons, West End offers Timbits (donut holes) and hot chocolate, while an ice-sculpture nativity gives visitors a place to pause. Firepits along the route create warm gathering points for an event the outreach team calls Cocoa on the Corner.

For Vander Leek, the lights have never been the point; what matters are the conversations that unfold around them. Volunteers tend the firepits and spend time talking with neighbors, many of whom have no other connection to the church. The effort grew from a simple change in outlook. Instead of waiting for the neighborhood to come looking for them, members of West End decided to become more present on their own street and meet people where they already were.

One Story, Many Streets

Together, these five congregations show how differently the same story can be told when it is shaped by the people and places telling it. At Willoughby CRC, an offering has become an act of imagination, inviting members to picture a particular family receiving a garden bundle or a flock of chickens. Zuni CRC members have learned to practice their faith quietly and faithfully during a season that, in that place, coincides with another sacred calendar. Luctor CRC recognized that a full church calendar means little if the people who helped build the church can no longer take part, so it created a service that brings Christmas to them. West End CRC noticed the crowds already gathering next door and chose to meet them outside, while First CRC found that one of the best ways to help neighbors understand an old story was to let them walk through it themselves.

None of these traditions began with a strategic plan. Instead, each grew from something ordinary that someone chose to notice.

Perhaps that is the true Christmas tradition shared by all five congregations: not a common set of customs, but a willingness to let context, neighbors, and history shape the way the story is carried forward. The manger itself looked different depending on who stood around it that first Christmas. Shepherds came to it from nearby fields, while Magi arrived from the East after a long journey. They approached from different worlds and saw the scene through different eyes, yet somehow it was the same good news for both.



Dan Veeneman is a lifelong learner, avid reader, and writer who enjoys exploring the places where faith, life, and culture intersect. He lives in St. Albert, Alta., with his wife and three children, and they worship at Sturgeon Valley Baptist Church.

Blade and the Blessing Bag

I prayed.

I waited.



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

"Blade," the disheveled man said when I asked him his name.

But Blade was anything but knifelike. He was like a gentle breeze, his voice barely audible as he shyly looked at me.

During the summer months as I walked through the area where Blade ventured, I tried to engage him in conversation. One day, I saw where he slept. He was standing by his possessions, packing up.

"Have you got a place to stay in the coming winter?"

"I've got a good sleeping bag," he said.

"That won't be enough."

He smiled, undisturbed.

Troubled by his nonchalance, I envisioned daggerlike freezing rain, stabbing cold, and cutting snow.

In the next months, I saw Blade in the public place where he spent his days: headphones on, playing a video game, his possessions a circled wagon surrounding his daytime territory.

As winter set in, I looked for Blade each time I stopped by the public place. "Is Blade still alive after the cold nights?" I wondered. Yes, there he sat. Same activity. Same circled wagon.

I talked to an employee at the public place about my concerns for Blade. The employee had tried to help Blade. Also, two police officers had talked with Blade about services and shelters where he could receive assistance. Blade's answer? He was fine.

Many nights the Holy Spirit brought Blade to my mind, prompting me to pray for his survival. On numerous occasions when I saw Blade, I wanted to talk with him again, but it was obvious he'd rather be left alone.

I prayed. I waited.

Then a surprise opportunity came. Our church's youth group had initiated a drive to collect items for unhoused members of our community. Through the Holy Spirit, the youth assembled 100 "Blessing Bags" filled with snacks, socks, toques (hats), mittens, water bottles, encouraging notes, and $5 gift cards.

I grabbed a package with a warm scarf wrapped around it. "That's for Blade," the Holy Spirit whispered.

As my husband Rinke and I drove home after church, again I heard the Holy Spirit's prompting: "Bring a bag to Blade right now."

I knew I would likely find Blade in his normal spot. Yes, there he was! I walked up to him.

"Hi, Blade. I have a gift for you."

Blade looked up from his video game.

"It's a bag filled with items."

Blade's eyes lit up.

"Have you found a warm place to sleep?"

Softly he answered, "No, but I have a sheltered spot."

I knew I couldn't convince Blade to come in from the cold.

"God loves you, and I pray for you."

Blade smiled and accepted the bag.

As I walked away, I was pierced with joy. I recognized the author of that joy and the hero in these converging events—the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit guided me to meet Blade this summer and prompted me to pray for him. The Holy Spirit worked in our youth and their leaders to assemble Blessing Bags. The Holy Spirit moved Rinke and me to find Blade after church. The Holy Spirit gave me the words to bless Blade.

The sword of the Spirit—the Word of God—at work in all of us, is "sharper than any double-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12), a blade that brings life to all who believe.

Life After Cancer

Obeying Jesus' command to take up my cross daily is really hard.



Curtis Korver is the pastor at the Alberni Valley CRC and police chaplain in Port Alberni, B.C. He and his wife Jessica have three adult children and one grandchild.

JUST OVER TWO YEARS AGO I emerged from surgery to remove a tumor from my cerebellum. Scans had suggested that the tumor was contained, relatively easy to remove, and probably not malignant. I'd likely be back to regular life in a month, maybe two at the outside.

But the tumor was closer to the brainstem than the vagaries of an MRI could show. A surgery scheduled for four hours went nearly seven. The tumor was growing into the vagus nerve, the one that, among other things, runs the show in the throat. I couldn't swallow at all and could barely speak. I had terrible double vision, no sense of temperature or touch on the entire right side of my body, and my left hand was numb and clumsy, like I had slept on it overnight. My balance was so bad that I couldn't sit up, never mind walk. I had hiccups for 12 days, including a stretch when they kept me from sleeping for three days. After 43 days in the hospital, I finally went home and learned that the pathology of the tumor showed markers of both benign and malignant. I would need 30 radiation treatments.

I am grateful that two years later, the nerve damage, while not healed, is less pronounced. My voice is still unchanged, but I'm scheduled for a surgery that can possibly restore it; I'm a pastor, so having a working voice is an important tool. Even better, the most recent monitoring brain scan showed no evidence of the tumor. I'm grateful for my wife and family—relatives and church family—who have steadfastly walked with me. I'm grateful, too, for a long list of medical people who have helped save my life.

I am not among those who say that they are grateful for cancer because other parts of life, including their walk with God, have improved. My life was turned upside down. I wonder how this is supposed to bring glory to God. I wrestle with the question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism that says sickness and health come to us not by chance but from God's fatherly hand (Q&A 27). Am I so obtuse that God had to send cancer to teach me a lesson? Or, and I hardly dare to ask the question out loud, does God have no better strategy?

After two years, I have learned this much: obeying Jesus' command to take up my cross daily is really hard. Jesus didn't get into specifics when he gave that command. Surely he didn't want us to be crucified; he did that once and for all and in our place (1 Pet. 3:18).

Speaking for myself, I believe he was telling me I have to die to my supposed right to understand why this happened and die to my expectation that I get to know the recovery schedule. I have good reason to think the tumor is long gone, but this is cancer. I might have to face death a few decades earlier than I've always envisioned.

And other parts of my life must die. Since my ordination day 30 years ago, I've struggled to feel equal to my calling. I've felt like a child put in an adult's role. I've tried to make up for it by working hard—make one more visit, read one more book, take on one more task, never ask for a Sunday off. I trusted in my idol of hard work, reasoning that what I lack in quality I can make up in quantity. While second-guessing my work, I've always been kind of proud of being physically fit and looking 10 years younger than

I am. I hope no one noticed, because I'm also kind of proud of being humble about it. I put a lot of trust in my ability to get along well with others and, frankly, remain likeable. Now I am quite happy to be alone because talking is exhausting and leaves me sore and dizzy.

One by one, my idols are proving their worthlessness. I'm left with nothing but the promise of God's grace. I've always trusted God's grace. I've also been glad for my own contributions to the work of God, some stored-up merit just in case God was disappointed with me and held back some of his grace. But now all the things of my own making—all my idols—are dead, or at least have one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel.

Even so, I want to perform CPR on my idols; I have always known their worthlessness, but I managed to find comfort in them and part of me wants to return to them. I wish I could let them die. I wish I had deeper trust in God's grace. But, by the Holy Spirit, I believe more than ever that even when I can't offer God anything or hold onto him, he remains a loving Father who holds me for Jesus' sake.

I told you all of that so that I can tell you this: the Father in heaven is trustworthy even when our faith and obedience wobble.



A Christmas Classic Helps Us See Our Own 'Wonderful' Lives

"IS HE SICK?"

"No, worse, he's discouraged." *It's a Wonderful Life*, the timeless film of the 1940s, touched the hearts of millions. Narrated by Clarence the angel, it follows the life of "small-town hero" George Bailey. The film speaks about life, love, despair, and purpose. It reminds us that in our darkest moments, there are people praying for us so that we might "live again."

George Bailey always dreamed of leaving his small town to travel the world. However, his dreams come to a halt when his father dies and someone must take over the family building and loan company. George spends his life working to build his community, being generous, and helping people afford homes.

But when a mistake is made with the funds for the company, George realizes he might face prison time, ruin, and disgrace. Hopelessly, he stands on a bridge, contemplating jumping.

In George's darkest moment, he encounters an angel who helps him see what he cannot: what life in the town would have looked like without him there. Through this new lens, he sees what he had was more valuable than what he did not, and that his life held inestimable value.

"Strange isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives. And when he isn't around he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?" said the angel Clarence to a despondent George.

"I want to live again," was George's prayer when he realized that living this life was far better than not existing at all.

God brings people into our lives to help and encourage us when it is hard to encourage ourselves—to pull us out of deep waters because we are not called to walk through life alone.

If George wasn't around his brother would not have lived. He saved his brother's life. One might argue that each person has saved someone simply by loving them.

When you sit and talk with a friend on a dark winter day; when you make someone laugh; when you phone someone just because you are thinking about them; when you stay with the friend who just lost their loved one, even though you don't know what to say—you might not always see it, but when you love, you can help someone out of a dark place.

"You see, George, you really had a wonderful life."

It's a Wonderful Life speaks to a truth sometimes hard to see in everyday life: that we are loved and have a very special place in this world and in our communities. My prayer is that this Christmas season, you never forget that you are the person someone needs right now. You truly do have a wonderful life.



Isabelle Brown is a writer from Brampton, Ont., and a student at Redeemer University, where she is a reporter for *The Crown*. She was a Synod 2026 reporter for *The Banner*. Her non-writing interests include painting and sketching.



Garden of the Lord EP

By Justin Gambino

Reviewed by Paul Delger

Singer-songwriter Justin Gambino provides his first collection of worship songs with the EP titled *Garden of the Lord*. Gambino turns to a mellow sound with a country feel.

"The inspiration came from my testimony," Gambino says. "Looking back on my life became an invitation from the Lord to walk with me through the garden of my heart and tend to the places that had gone dormant."

The six-song EP includes the title track that concentrates on thankfulness for peaceful rest and renewal. "Depend on You (All I Need)" was written during a time of infertility for Gambino and his wife. Other selections include "Let Me Not Forget," remembering Jesus' death, and "Focus," centering on God's goodness. This is a peaceful recording with solid lyrics. (The Residence Music)



The Christmas That Almost Wasn't

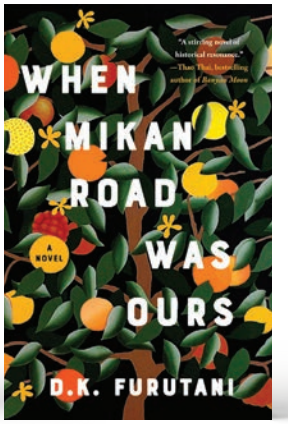
By Laura Alary
Illustrated by Ana Eguaras

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

The story follows young Aidan as a severe ice storm disrupts his Christmas plans, preventing his grandparents from visiting and canceling his church pageant. Disappointed and freezing in a house without power, Aidan's perspective shifts when his dad takes him to deliver coffee and treats to elderly neighbors. This act of service helps him find meaning in the darkness.

On Christmas Eve, listening to the Nativity story by candlelight, Aidan realizes that Mary and Joseph also faced unexpected hardships, fear, and displacement. He connects his own struggles to theirs, discovering that the true spirit of Christmas lies in hope, kindness, and God's presence, even when things go wrong.

Author Laura Alary's masterfully crafted story and Ana Eguaras's wistful artwork make this book an insightful addition to a family's Christmas storybook collection. (Beaming Books)



When Mikan Road Was Ours

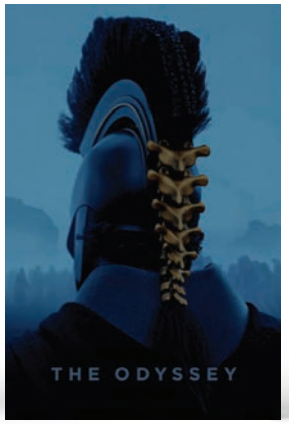
By D.K. Furutani

Reviewed by Ethan Meyers

When Mikan Road Was Ours masterfully captures the awkwardness of family secrets. When Murano, an English professor, attends a great-uncle's funeral, a cousin asks him to compile the deceased's notes into a family history.

Murano initially struggles with the assignment. The stories of an upstanding boy in the notebook pages don't align with his memories of a sour old man. Furutani transports readers from a gravel driveway lined with mandarin trees straight to the devastating reality of Heart Mountain and Tule Lake, where the U.S. government incarcerated Japanese Americans during World War II.

This journey transforms Murano from a lonely, defeated man into someone striving for values greater than himself. While sprawling family genealogies can often feel dry, Furutani breathes dimension into every relative. (Atria Books)



The Odyssey

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Penelope (Anne Hathaway), queen of Ithaca, lives in a dark palace and pines for her lost love, Odysseus, the king who left 20 years ago and never returned. Odysseus and his crew, meanwhile, face one obstacle after another on their way home.

There is a surprisingly strong moral center to the movie. Evil is not glorified but examined and regretted.

I'm glad I saw it. *The Odyssey* has stood the test of time for 3,000 years, with its themes of homecoming, hospitality, and loyalty. It gave me insight into Scripture, helping me better understand the ancient world where biblical characters lived—a world swirling with competing gods, myths, and pagan rituals.

This film earns its R rating with violence alone, although there is a bit of strong language and mild sensuality. Viewers must decide if they can handle it. For me, it was a reminder that faithful love conquers all. (Released in theaters in July.)

The Lowdown

Kids on the Heidelberg Catechism: Zack Flipse, a Wisconsin CRC pastor, hosts a YouTube show with his grade-school-age daughter, Avy, in which they tackle the Heidelberg Catechism in kid-engaging ways. Watch the 68 videos (so far) on YouTube. (Firstcrcoostburg.org)

Written by John Rozeboom: Against the grain of his self-denying Dutch Calvinist origins, John Rozeboom writes and sings his own story as a lifelong echo of love, of learning's light, of grace and opportunity, of solace, and mission ministry joy—gifts of many, notably from a loving God—in the memoir *Down the Long Stairway Into the Street*. (Independently Published)

***A Way Through the Wilderness*:** When Becca arrives in Brighton, England, she's carrying far more than a suitcase. Unemployed, disillusioned, and haunted by disappointment, she's lost confidence in herself and has no idea what comes next. Drawn into the life of a local church, she finds unexpected friendship, a mischievous cat called Tansy, and the chance to help transform an abandoned house into a refuge for the homeless in this novel by Denise Penrose. (Amazon)

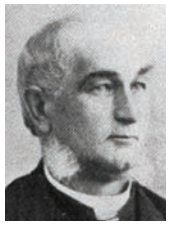
Editors Who Have Shaped the Church

Each of these editors have left their mark on *The Banner* and on the CRC.



Gayla Postma retired as news editor for *The Banner* in 2020. She is a member of Grace Community CRC in Ancaster, Ontario.

Any retrospective of *The Banner* would be incomplete without writing about its editors. Over its 160 years, 14 people have occupied that chair, but the most influential among them were the first four, who helmed the magazine for its first 110 years: John DeBaun, Henry Beets, Henry J. Kuiper, and John Vander Ploeg. The half century since has seen Lester De Koster, Andrew Kuyvenhoven, John Suk, Robert De Moor, and Shiao Chong sit in the chair. And along the way there have been shorter-term and interim editors. Galen Meyer, John Kromminga, Harvey Smit, Leonard Vander Zee, and current editor Lora Copley. *The Banner* is the official magazine of the Christian Reformed Church.



Rev. John Yeury DeBaun
1866-1895

Rev. John Yeury De Baun, a pastor of the True Reformed Dutch Church in America in New Jersey, published the first issue of *The Banner of Truth* in June 1866, and for 11 years published the magazine alone, bearing both editorial and financial responsibilities. He felt it was important to have an English-language magazine for instructing the church's young people who were speaking English more and more at the time.

In 1877 LaGrave CRC in Grand Rapids (Mich.) secured De Baun's services to lead the CRC's first English-language church services. When De Baun moved to Michigan, *The Banner of Truth* moved with him.

After his death in 1895, the De Baun family maintained control of the magazine. In 1903, the magazine was sold to a group of businessmen in Grand Rapids who increased the publication frequency to bi-weekly and shortened the name to *The Banner*.



Rev. Henry Beets
1903-1928

Rev. Henry Beets headed the group that purchased *The Banner* and in 1903 took the editor's seat, where he served for 25 years. As pastor of LaGrave Avenue CRC, he became a leading advocate of English use in the CRC.

By 1914 *The Banner* became the official English-language publication of the CRC alongside the Dutch-language *De Wachter*.

The 1920s were a watershed decade for Beets and the CRC, wrote Herbert Brinks in *The Banner*. Several major debates—Dutch versus English language, establishing a liberal arts college, adopting individual cups for the Lord's Supper, singing hymns in worship, worldly amusements, Darwinian evolution—beset the church.

Beets sought to turn the denomination's attention outward toward foreign missions to direct the community away from its internal conflicts. He became director of missions for the CRC.

Brinks, in *Origins*, wrote that Beets was a man for all seasons during 52 years of service to the CRC. "Henry Beets controlled, created, or influenced virtually every denominational institution," he wrote. "No one was better known within the church, and no one represented it more authoritatively beyond its institutional borders."



Rev. Henry J. Kuiper
1928-1956

Rev. Henry J. Kuiper was the longest-serving editor of *The Banner*, appointed in 1928. If his predecessor was known as the man for all seasons, Kuiper was "Mr. CRC."

Kuiper served as editor for 15 years part time while also serving as full-time pastor of Neland Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. In 1944, the position was made full time.

Unlike his predecessors, Kuiper was not an immigrant. Brinks wrote, "He knew the Christian Reformed Church most intimately. All of this first-hand experience in the life of the church contributed much to his becoming known as the 'voice' of the CRC."

Not all readers appreciated that "voice," wrote Edward Heerema for the magazine *Reformed Fellowship*. "He made enemies in his fearless devotion to the cause of the Christian Reformed Church as he saw that cause."

Kuiper promoted Christian schools and strongly advocated for a CRC radio ministry.

More than anything else, Kuiper was passionate about worship and liturgy. Perhaps Kuiper's greatest achievement was the publication of a Christian hymnal, according to De Jong, even though that hymnal was never adopted by the CRC. He served on the committee that produced the CRC's first *Psalter Hymnal* in 1934. "It is doubtful that anyone before or since has had as great an impact on Christian Reformed worship," De Jong wrote.

James Bratt, the author of *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, wrote, "Indeed, as his tenure lengthened it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between the man, the periodical, and the group they served." He wrote that Kuiper was "the authority on all matters of truth and morals, a voice whose every word was to be eagerly awaited, treasured, and—most of all—heeded."



Rev. J. Vander Ploeg
1956-1970

When Rev. John Vander Ploeg became editor in 1956, his leadership rounded out the first century of the CRC's official magazine.

His predecessor Kuiper lauded Vander Ploeg's writing ability, noting that Vander Ploeg was in charge of the "We Believe" column in *The Banner* because "(we realized) that articles on doctrine must be interesting to attract a worthwhile number of readers."

One of the first controversies that faced the church when Vander Ploeg became editor was the infallibility issue. If there was anything close to Vander Ploeg's heart it was his unswerving desire to see Scripture upheld as the infallible and inerrant Word of God, wrote his son-in-law Henry Vanden Heuvel.

In a tribute to Vander Ploeg, Rev. Clarence Boomsma described him as a congenial, warm, and friendly person, by temperament not given to be contentious nor taking pleasure in controversy. That congeniality was not on display when, at the end of his editorship, two Calvin College seniors published a spoof of *The Banner*, called *The Bananer*. Vander Ploeg's reaction was a lengthy, scathing editorial. The college president, William Spoelhof, suggested that Vander Ploeg overreacted.

As he grew older, he grew disenchanted with what he believed were errors in Calvin Seminary, according to Vanden Heuvel. He campaigned to establish the Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Ind.

Upon Vander Ploeg's death, *Banner* editor Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven wrote, "When I became editor he said to me, 'The editorial page is now your pulpit.'" This was always his understanding of the office of editor.



Lester De Koster
1970-1980

Lester De Koster became editor in 1970, the first non-ordained person to sit in the chair.

De Koster turned *The Banner*'s focus to wider cultural issues. De Koster spoke out on current social issues. He came under fierce criticism for running movie reviews in *The Banner* even though at the time the CRC's official stance on "worldly amusements" condemned going to the movies. De Koster maintained that the church's youth "needed expert guidance in their television viewing and movie attendance."

De Koster showed remarkable restraint in the face of criticism that was, at times, cruel. Gertrude Haan, writing in *The Banner*, noted that he would dash into the thorniest controversies, stir up the church, and thereafter handle a flood of voices, pro and con, with the greatest equanimity. "I think he enjoyed it," she wrote.

Under De Koster, the magazine became open to more contributors and a wide variety of cultural, devotional, and reflective material. "It made *The Banner* a far more lively and exciting magazine than it was when (we) had largely the same departments and same writers year after year," wrote Haan.

In one of his last editorials De Koster wrote that he saw the purposes of the magazine as to inspire, to stimulate, to alert the denomination to trends in the church and the world, and to build up the spiritual life of believers and their families.

That bears a remarkable resemblance to *The Banner* mandate of today.



Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven
1980-1989

Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven was appointed as editor of *The Banner* in 1980, the first Dutch Canadian to hold that position. But his Dutch roots did not stop him from making a big splash early on when he published *The Banner* cover showing a pair of wooden shoes up in flames. David Zwart wrote in the *Reformed Journal* that the cover "made it clear it was time for the CRC to move beyond its Dutch heritage."

Kuyvenhoven's arrival brought many changes to the magazine internally. Staff became more involved in evaluating copy and discussion of *Banner*

theme issues. A network of 12 news writers from across the U.S. and Canada was born and continues today after more than 40 years. A report to Synod 1981 reported that most *Banner* readers liked the changes. Subscription rates steadily climbed.

Each month one issue was devoted to a specific theme. Theme issues on women in ecclesiastical office and another on homosexuality elicited ferocious discussion.

When he received the alumni award from Calvin Seminary, the citation noted that as *Banner* editor "his 'church' became the hearts and minds of thousands of additional congregants."



Rev. John Suk
1993-2003

Rev. John Suk was appointed as *Banner* editor by Synod 1993. Suk left his mark on *The Banner* by fighting for its editorial freedom in 1998. Christian Reformed Home Missions and several CRC members had invested in a company called IRM, and when *The Banner* wanted to report on it, denominational leaders tried to block the reporting, citing legal issues. Synod 1998 decided in favor of *The Banner*'s editorial freedom to do such reporting, despite the wishes of denominational leaders.

Suk spent his final year on the road in an RV to pursue "the spirit of the CRC." He wrote his editorials from waypoints along the road.

By the end of Suk's tenure, *The Banner* frequency was cut in half to bi-weekly, due to declining subscriptions and revenue.

When Suk retired in 2003, he told synod about some of his most memorable moments as editor. Most memorable, he said, was his visit to Rwanda, where he saw a mountain made of bones from 50,000 people who died during the genocide in that country. In 2012, Suk resigned from the Christian Reformed Church and subsequently pastored a United Church of Canada congregation in Toronto. He now describes himself as an agnostic.



Rev. Robert De Moor
2003-2015

Rev. Bob De Moor was the last person to edit *The Banner* for longer than a decade. He was appointed interim editor in 2003 and took on the role permanently in 2004. The role had also once again become part time. De Moor oversaw the move from a subscription-based magazine to one delivered to every household, funded by the denomination, advertisements, and donations. In that process, De Moor negotiated terms that protected the magazine from denominational interference in editorial content, avoiding the fate of many other denominational magazines that simply became house organs.

He tested that editorial freedom when he co-wrote (with this writer) a five-page editorial challenging decisions made by denominational executives that the CRC's board of trustees had allowed. De Moor noted that one of *The Banner's* roles is holding agencies to account, telling the truth to members in the pew who are supporting their work.

De Moor also guided *The Banner* into the digital world. Gradually the digital content began to precede publication in the print magazine, and now the website contains additional content not seen in the print magazine. Visits to the website continue to rise.

Perhaps most notorious in De Moor's tenure was his decision to run two controversial articles. The articles raised the ire of readers, many of whom called for De Moor's resignation. De Moor apologized to Synod 2014 for how he presented the articles.

De Moor continued on at *The Banner* for another year and then in 2015 returned to what he called his first love, full-time ministry, until his retirement.



Shiao Chong
2016-2025

Shiao Chong was appointed editor in 2016, pledging to be an agent of shalom during a decade that discussion about human sexuality ethics, not to mention COVID, roiled the church.

Chong was the first editor not from a Dutch background. He came to *The Banner* from his role as a campus pastor in Toronto.

In his interview with Synod 2016, Chong said he felt called to build bridges. "I have to follow what I believe God is calling me to do," he said, which is "call people to remember our unity in Christ."

Commemorating the 500th anniversary of the protestant Reformation, in 2017, Chong directed the publication of a study series featuring the Five Solas.

After three years of painful synods dividing the denomination over human sexuality, Chong resigned after Synod 2025 curtailed *The Banner*'s mandate. Of his vision of shalom-seeking he said, "I am thankful that I could, at least, attempt to model and promote that in my writing and editorial posture."

Chong has since resigned as a Commissioned Pastor in the CRC.

Each of these editors have left their mark on *The Banner* and on the CRC. From its first edition to the present, there are remarkable similarities. We no longer see printed sermons on its pages, but doctrinal articles, denominational news, records of deaths, and devotional pieces continue to be published to this day.

The Banner history shows the high quality of its editors leading the magazine for 160 years. Its readers expect no less.

READ MORE ONLINE

Get full articles on each editor's tenure at *TheBanner.org*.

Canons of Dort

This teaching is intended to give God's people comfort.



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

THE THEME OF COMFORT has followed us from the Belgic Confession through the Heidelberg Catechism. Although the Canons of Dort (CD) are less doctrinally comprehensive, we will once again recognize the theme of comfort underlying the teachings.

By the end of the 16th century, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed churches were drawing tighter theological boundaries to better distinguish what they did and did not believe. This led to controversy not just between groups but within them.

The CD arose out of controversy with the followers of Jacob Arminius. Arminius had challenged his colleagues' views of predestination on several points. After his death, Arminius's followers, the Remonstrants, argued that election and reprobation were based on human choice foreseen by God, rather than on God's sovereign choice grounded in grace. They also taught that believers could lose God's grace and fall from salvation. The government organized the Synod of Dort to deal with the matter. The synod met in 154 sessions from November 1618 to May 1619 in Dordrecht. The outcome was the CD.

The intention of the CD was to clarify Reformed teaching in the face of the Remonstrant challenges. The focus is on God's sovereignty and human responsibility in election. The CD is divided into five doctrinal points of dispute. Point one teaches God's election of some and passing over of others. All have sinned and deserve eternal death. By grace, God grants some faith in Christ solely by his good pleasure, not because of any foresight of faith or because of anything humans have done. This teaching is intended to give God's people comfort. The fruits of salvation offer assurance of election.

The second point of doctrine is particular atonement. While we might have learned it as "limited" atonement, "particular" better reflects the teaching that Christ's atonement is sufficient for all, thus the gospel must be preached to all. Atonement is, however, efficient only for the elect. In other words, Christ's work is applied effectively only to the elect, and thus only the elect will accept God's call to faith and enjoy the benefits of union with Christ.

The third and fourth main points of doctrine, total depravity and irresistible grace, are placed together. Total depravity does not teach that humans are as bad as they could be. Rather, sin has corrupted every part of us making us slaves to sin, unable to do anything to redeem ourselves. Apart from Christ, we cannot do saving good. Nonetheless, God grants his people grace not for the *potential* to believe, but so that they will indeed believe. In other words, grace is not so much irresistible, but transformational.

The fifth head of doctrine teaches that as believers cooperate with the Holy Spirit, they will persevere in their faith, and the Spirit will work through God's Word to preserve them. This should not be an excuse for spiritual laziness, but an incentive to holy living with the assurance that the God who called us is faithful (1 Thess. 5:4).

Like the other two confessions, the CD points believers to comfort. This does not mean we have no questions. Part of faith seeking understanding is wondering about God and his ways in the world. Many times our wondering leaves us facing deep mystery. That is what we would expect from an infinite God. But the Reformed tradition, framed by these confessions, does not leave us without hope. Just the opposite. God's sovereignty and grace assure that we are firmly held in his hands and that the judge of all the earth will do right (Gen. 18:24).

Deadlines: Ads for the January/February issue are due December 11, 2026; March/April, February 12, 2027. 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 $0.45US per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of $0.38US per character and $65 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

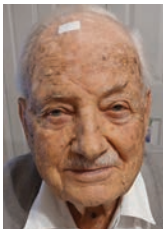
To Advertise: Place your classified ad online at thebanner.org/classifieds or email it to classifieds@thebanner.org or fax it to 616-224-0834. Questions? Call 616-224-0725.

Birthdays

100 Years

BOSSCHER, ANGIE On October 7, we will celebrate a century of our mom's faithful life and service to her family and to those around her by sharing our love for her and singing the hymns she loves.

100 Years



ROOY, SIDNEY H Sept 16, his family and former CRWM missionary colleagues to Argentina and Costa Rica wish to share this special occasion. From an Iowa farm to Calvin Seminary, a NJ pastorate, and Vrije Universiteit doctorate in missions, Sid and Mae (VanDyk) served a Patagonian Argentine Reformed church and then taught twenty two years in seminary education in Buenos Aires. Co-founder of the Latin American Theological Fraternity, as historian and missiologist he published articles and papers and collaborated in international congresses with Kingdom emphases (CLADE). During another 10 "retirement" years in Costa Rica Sid taught in seminaries and co-promoted the International Network for Christian Higher Education benefiting six continents. His mentoring and correspondence, coupled with gardening, preaching, and volunteering (PET) are filling out his years; PO Box 87 Penny Farms FL 32079.

Church Anniversary

100 Years



BY GOD'S GRACE, HONOURING OUR PAST, EMBRACING OUR FUTURE First CRC of Vancouver celebrated 100 years (1926 - 2026) as a congregation with a celebration service and reception on Sunday, October 18th at 10:30am. You are invited to join us in person or online (YouTube link on our website: firstvan.ca or search FIRST CRC Vancouver). Forward notes of congratulations to office@firstvan.ca or by mail to 2670 Victoria Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5N 4L2.

LEE STREET CRC CELEBRATES 100TH ANNIVERSARY Lee Street CRC, Wyoming, MI, is celebrating its 100th anniversary. A service of worship and celebration was held on Sunday, September 27, 2026. Former pastor Kent Rottman brought the message. We invite former members, friends, and family to join us as we celebrate God's faithfulness.

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.

75TH ANNIVERSARY, BETHEL CRC, LISTOWEL, ONTARIO November 7, 2026 @ 7PM Slide show, singing, desert social November 8, 2026 @ 10AM worship service, potluck lunch 345 Elizabeth St.E, Listowel, Ontario.

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF STRATFORD – 75TH ANNIVERSARY Join us in celebrating 75 years of God's Faithfulness. We will be holding an Open House on Saturday, November 21, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and a Catered Dinner and Program for current and former members at 5:30 pm. On Sunday, November 22, we will celebrate with a Special Church Service at 10:00 am, followed by cake, coffee, and a soup luncheon. 190 Athlone Crescent. Stratford, Ontario. For information, please contact Betty DeWeerd at office@stratfordcrc.org.

50 Years

PROVIDENCE CRC - CUTLERVILLE, MI is celebrating 50 years of God's faithfulness. Celebrate with us at our 9:30 AM worship service on October 11.

Church Positions Available

CO-PASTOR: FAITH FORMATION & DISCIPLESHIP Immanuel CRC in Hamilton, Ontario, CA is seeking a full-time Co-Pastor shaped by two primary pillars: Youth & Family Discipleship and Nurturing & Enabling Ministry Teams and Volunteers. Shared duties include biblical preaching rooted in Scripture and the Reformed confessions, as well as relational pastoral care. View our Church Profile and job details at immanuelministries.ca or at network.crcna.org/jobs. Direct inquiries and applications to search@immanuelministries.ca.

FULL TIME PASTOR POSITION Grant Christian Reformed Church, located in rural Grant, MI, is searching for their next full-time pastor. We are seeking a male leader that will preach the gospel, implement biblical teaching, pastoral care, and continue to drive congregational growth. To apply, please email your resume to Jeff Pols at polsjeff@gmail.com.

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RESONATE GLOBAL MISSION: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPER FOR WEST AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST Prayerfully seeking North America based mission coworker who can fully fundraise for full time work with our TWO international TEAMS serving in the Muslim world. The job includes advocacy, building bridges of recruitment and awareness in the CRC, and education. Contact regional leader, Rev. Naji Umran (numran@crcna.org) w/questions/referrals.

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

Employment

CAMPGROUND HOST Smaller Northern Michigan lakefront campground Camp host position beginning 2027. Just over 40 sites. Online rental bookings. Reply to jim@lakeshorecom mercial.com.

TREASURER The Treasurer of Classis Toronto serves as chief financial officer for the regional assembly of Christian Reformed churches.

This role is responsible for managing all financial operations, ensuring compliance with Canadian accounting standards and charitable regulations, and supporting the mission and ministries of Classis Toronto. More details including compensation and approximation of hours required are available. Please contact the clerk of Classis Toronto, Tilly Berg for more information. clerk@classistoronto.org.

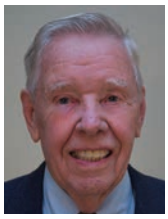
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Obituaries



DEBLAEY, MARCELLA ANN (KONING) died peacefully on July 27, 2026. Marcie was preceded in death by her husband Gord; her parents; her three sisters, Alice Owen, Betty Koning and Mary Bosker and their spouses, John Owen and Bob Bosker; two nephews; and her son, Michael. Marcie is survived by her daughter, Mary (Bob) Jackson; four grandchildren and six great-grandchildren: Philip (Anna Dowell) Jackson with children Geneva and Gregory; Ellen Jackson; Griffin (Colleen) Jackson with children Finn, Honor and Eden; and Drew Jackson with daughter Simona; as well as nieces, nephews and many dear friends. Marcie was a member of Shawnee Park CRC.

KUIPER, LUCILLE RUTH age 81 went to be with Jesus after a lifetime of great joys and struggles on 7/23/26. She is survived by her loving husband and soul mate of 61 years, Don; sons Joel, Mark, and Matthew. Twin sister Margaret Vredeveld, brothers Marvin and William Huizinga, and 8 adoring grandchildren. She was an RN and a lifelong member of River Terrace CRC where she touched the lives of generations of children and adults with her singing and served as an elder. She demonstrated the model of Jesus throughout her life in many acts of love and service. Praise be to God!



LUBBEN, VERNON E. , age 95, of Grand Rapids, went to his eternal home on Monday, August 17, 2026. He was blessed with four children: Verna Lubben, Beverly (Ken) Rinzema, Donald Lubben (who preceded him in death in 2007), and John (Helene) Lubben. Vern is also survived by his grandchildren, Nathan Rinzema, Craig Rinzema, Keith (Ashley) Rinzema, Donna Lubben, Toni Lubben, Andi (Mark) Bautista, Jake Lubben, and Luke Lubben; great-grandchildren, Alleah Rinzema, Paige Rinzema, Graham Rinzema, and Rhea Bautista; and sisters, Arlene Zwart, Elaine Visscher, and Jean Hanenburg. He was preceded in death by six of his brothers and sisters: Harris, Martina, Alvin, Rolland, John, and Elaine. Vern was a member of Cascade Fellowship CRC.

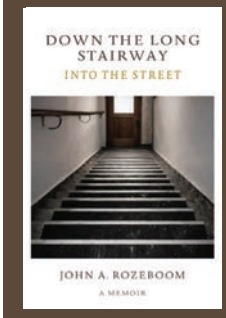
NUVILL, CHARLENE (NEE VANDOORNE) Charlene Ruth Nuvill, beloved wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, passed away peacefully at home surrounded by family.Born June 21, 1942, in Grand Haven, Michigan, Charlene shared 66 years of marriage with her husband, David. She was a cosmetologist, caregiver, devoted Christian, and longtime member of Ocean View Christian Reformed Church in Norfolk, Virginia. She is survived by her husband, David; five children; grandchildren; four great-grandsons; and three siblings. Charlene will be remembered for her kindness, faith, gentle spirit, and love of family.

PRUIKSMA, GEORGE Age 87, went to be with his Lord on Aug 4, 2026. Surrounded by his wife Sally (Folkersma) of 65 years. His daughter Linda and two granddaughters, Rozlynn and Tanasha.



SMEELINK, JUDSON LLOYD, 99, went home to be with his Savior, Jesus Christ, on June 20, 2026. Jud was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Elaine; his sisters, Carol and Lorraine; and his son, Joel (with Jesus in 1971). He is survived by his children: Judy (Harvis Beene), Jack (Diane Banas), Joy (Paul Boerman), and Joni (Rob Mitchell). He had 13 grandchildren and 19 great-grand children. While we miss him deeply, we rejoice knowing he is home with his Savior.

VANDER WOUDE (HENDRIKSE), CAROLYN CARRIE, age 97 of Palos Park, IL, went to glory on July 15, 2026. Her beloved husband, Stewart, died in 2017. She is survived by daughters Cheryl(Charles) Marcus, Marcia(Charles) Kooger, sons James(Jayne) Vander Woude, John (Janna) Vander Woude, 14 grandchildren and 26 great-grandchildren.



Down the Long Stairway Into the Steet

A grateful, adventurous memoir by John A. Rozeboom, pastor emeritus. Beginning in small-town Edgerton, Minnesota, about schools and jobs (including a stint as an Alaska game warden) influences for good for a lifetime, and CRC ministry career of Southern California missionary pastor, Western U.S. regional missionary, CRC Home Missions director (22 years), post-retirement ministry at Oakdale Park Church and Victory CRC, an African church, both in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

(Amazon, $16, 450 pages)



VANGROUW-BANDSTRA, RUTH (KONING) In loving memory, at the age of 98, of Grand Rapids, MI was welcomed into the loving arms of Jesus on July 5, 2026. Born in Bozeman, MT her childhood was shaped by living in the West and Midwest. Ruth was known for her letter writing to family and friends. Throughout her life, Ruth's greatest desire was to know and serve Jesus Christ. Ruth was preceded in death by her first husband of 54 years, Clarence Lee VanGrouw; her second husband of 10 years, Andrew Bandstra; daughter, Cheryl DeYoung; parents, John and Nellie Koning; stepmom, Wolly Koning; grandson, Steve VanBeek. She is lovingly remembered by her children: (Bernie) DeYoung; Karen (Bob) Veldman; Ruth (Ron) Verwys; Crystal (Paul) VanBeek; Lee (Donna) VanGrouw; Barbara (Norm) Hawkins; and Lynette (Greg) Andriese. Ruth leaves behind a rich legacy of faith through her 7 children, 23 grandchildren, 70 great grandchildren, 3 great-great grandchildren, step family, and many friends whose lives were touched by her kindness, encouragement, and steadfast love.





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

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Apr 27 - May 7, 2027 | *Pastor Glenn & Delrae Gerdes*

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

THE SACRED SPLENDORS OF ITALY
May 3 - 14, 2027 | *Fr. Ed Udovic, C.M.*

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Sep 9 - 19, 2027 | *Dan & Amy Hermen*

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SAVOR SOUTH AFRICA: WILDLIFE, WINE, & WONDERS
Oct 14 - 25, 2027 | *Eric Kuhn & Mindy Miller*

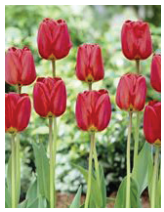
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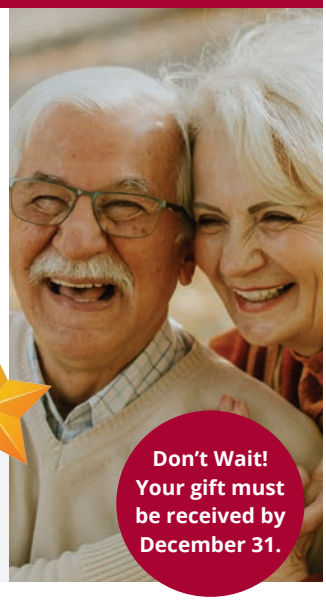
Wedding Anniversary

70TH ANNIVERSARY Gerben and Lila Voetberg of Zeeland, MI celebrated their 70th Anniversary in August. They were joined by their 4 children, Lynn (Bruce) Walters, Lisa Goetsch, Rick (Betsy) Voetberg and Jaci (Greg) Gartland. They are also the proud Grandparents of 12 Grandchildren and 17 Great Grandchildren.

Benefits of an IRA Charitable Gift

In the United States, an IRA charitable gift is a simple, tax-smart way to support a ministry or charity—counting toward your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD), and reducing taxable income even without itemizing. If you are over age 70½, the 2026 limit for individual Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) is $111,000.

If you have questions about IRA gifts or other non-cash ways of giving, call 800-272-5125 or email advancement@crcna.org.



Don't Wait! Your gift must be received by December 31.

Christian Reformed Church | ReFrame Ministries | Thrive | Resonate Global Mission

The Giver is the Gift

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."
—1 Thess. 5:16-18



Dawn Berkelaar teaches part-time at Redeemer University and studies in the Renovaré Institute of Christian Spiritual Formation. She and her husband and children worship at First Hamilton CRC in Ontario, where Dawn is an elder. Read more from her at treasure-severywhere.com.

I cannot thank You, Lord, for all I see.
The world is broken, brimmed with loss and pain.
How can I thank and praise continually?
How does one trace the rainbow through the rain?

The world is broken, yes—but beauty, too,
Is here. The good, the true are also near.
These things run deeper, sourced and shared by you.
You scatter them like pearls, luminous and clear.

More: You are close through every stormy swell.
You, giver of all good, are greatest gift!
Your presence changes hearts and makes us well;
In turn, we share your love. The balance shifts.

As we learn how to live with open hands,
We feel your joy. With gentle wings, it lands.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1. Publication Title: The Banner; 2. Publication No. 0041-300; 3. Filing Date: Nov. 24, 2026; 4. Issue Frequency: Bi-monthly 5. No. of Issues Published Annually: 6; 6. Annual Subscription Price: $28.00; 7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 300 East Beltline NE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49506-1208; 8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: 300 East Beltline NE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49506-1208; 9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Christian Reformed Church in NA, 300 East Beltline NE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49506-1208; Editor: Lora A Copley, 300 East Beltline NE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49506-1208; Managing Editor: Sarah Heth Sundt, 300 East Beltline NE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49506-1208. 10. Owner: Christian Reformed Church in NA, 300 East Beltline NE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49506-1208; 11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: None; 12. For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at special rates. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes has not changed during preceding 12 months.

13. Publication Name: The Banner; 14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: November, 2026.

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)	59,901	59,879
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation		
(1) Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	44,609	44,581
(2) Paid In-County Subscriptions	0	0
(3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution	9,068	8,739
(4) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS	0	0
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation	53,677	53,320
d. Free Distribution by Mail		
(1) Outside-County as Stated on Form 3541	0	0
(2) In-County as Stated onForm 3541	0	0
(3) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS	7	2
(4) Free Distribution Outside the Mail	0	0
e. Total Free Distribution	7	2
f. Total Distribution	53,684	53,322
g. Copies Not Distributed	1,946	1,742
h. Total	55,630	55,064
i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation	99.99%	100%

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete.

Dean R. Heetderks, Director, Ministry Support Services

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