

BANNER

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BANNER

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Cover: Lime tree stem, light micrograph. This magnified photographic image, taken through a microscope, shows the splendor of a single cell, invisible to the naked eye.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SUPERSTOCK

Let the Lord Build Your House

IN A RECENT BANNER ARTICLE, a respected Christian Reformed psychologist and therapist proposed that we revise our traditional ecclesiastical posture towards committed couples living together before marriage, given the older ages at which couples wed these days. Professional counselors work with hurting people who are often crippled by guilt and shame over such things. A softer ecclesiastical stance might seem to present a more helpful approach.

I agree that we need to be a grace-filled community that does not judge and condemn. We must bring and be good news to all whenever they, and we, stray from God's paths. That includes couples living common-law. I also agree that the Bible does not define specifically what is included in the sin of "fornication."

Still, my reading of Scripture does lead me to reaffirm the Christian church's position that a mutual, public vow of unity, faithfulness, and love should precede living together. As a pastor who has learned from couples in the context of marriage preparation, counseling, and milestone anniversaries for some 40 years, I believe that waiting honors God's will, and God blesses such obedience in key ways.

Building a healthy marriage depends on many different ways of finding each other and growing together. When couples get ahead of themselves sexually or live together to see if they're compatible, they make it almost impossible to assess clearly whether they are growing the kind of relationship that will allow them to face the challenges of marriage for the long run. Such actions create a dependency that clouds their judgment and makes it much harder to part

company should they find they are not right for each other. Sex alone cannot keep a marriage together, so it should never be what keeps couples limping forward when the rest of their relationship is faltering. I've seen that all too often.

Common-law couples often tell me that marriage is "just a piece of paper." That's precisely the point. If you too quickly start living as husband and wife only to find you are not compatible, your parting will hurt you (and those around you) just as if you had that paper. It's a divorce all the same because,

biblically speaking, when you gave yourselves to each other sexually, you *already* became husband and wife (Gen. 2:24, 1 Cor. 6:16)—even though you and your community weren't even ready for that commitment.

Scripture offers sufficient warning not to get ahead of ourselves. But my favorite text puts all this in the positive: "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1). Verses 3-5 clearly show that the psalmist isn't just thinking of bricks and mortar. God knows how to knit lovers together into a solid household. He's good at it (Gen. 2:22-25). Couples who build their relationship God's way can count on it. Allow God to build the foundation *first*. Let him finish building your spiritual house. Then, by all means, move into the bedroom.

If you really love each other, let your relationship be built to last. Then every new step will bring a fresh blessing to you, your loved ones, and God's kingdom. ■

God knows how
to knit lovers
together into a
solid household.



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Relics of a Bygone Era

FEAR AND APPREHENSION propel me, like a priest approaching the Ark of the Covenant, toward the cardboard box perched on a wobbly card table. Instead of winged cherubim, faded red letters on the lid hail Budweiser as King of Beers. My sister, having diligently triaged our late father's earthly debris, had placed the holiest objects in the Budweiser ark and brought it to my kitchen for final disposition. From bottles of Bud to books by Bavinck.

Dad had been a staunch defender of a somewhat cramped version of Calvinism formed by his upbringing in the Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands. Early on, his parents had put the kibosh on his aspirations to ministry; unless he had a distinct call from the Lord, he had a duty to help his father run the farm. But disappointment did not snuff out his enthusiasm for the cause of John Calvin. He read commentaries and wrote essays that he read at men's society meetings. Dad eloquently argued points of doctrine, articulating and defending each letter of TULIP. He collected cassette tapes of sermons by Dutch *dominees* and those Christian Reformed ministers who shared his passion. In retirement he pored over

black-bound tomes and cobbled together sermons, reading them to the captive audience in a nearby retirement home. He had become a preacher after all.

Now, 10 years after a preacher committed him to the earth from which he came, my sister opens the lid of the cardboard ark. Inside are books, bulky manila envelopes, and, on top, a cigar box veneered with wood and dust in nearly equal proportions. Inside the box are two rows of cassette tapes labeled in Dad's inimitable handwriting. The labels reflect predictable themes: "The means of grace." "The broad and narrow ways." "Predestination: delight or despair."

My sister calls for a timeout. "We need coffee!" she exclaims. I suggest a Bud might be more appropriate. We agree that peering into the holy box is a paralyzing pastime. As long as we contemplate the remains of past orthodoxy, see Dad's righteousness in the slanted handwriting on stored sermons on election and reprobation, Sunday observance, worldly amusements, adultery and divorce, we cannot come to a decision.

The brief coffee klatch gets us talking about the new "normal" in church life: praise teams, women clergy, seeker-friendly services, interfaith dialogue,

acceptance of divorced and gay members. We put down our coffee cups and get down to business. The ark has become a beer box with relics of a bygone era. Emboldened, we transfer its contents into a black plastic garbage bag. The cigar box with cassette tapes goes in last.

Tomorrow a smelly truck will rumble to our curb. A man in a yellow coverall will jump out, grab the bag, and toss it among the garbage. The truck will roar away to the city landfill and consign outdated orthodoxy a place among the broken bedsprings, naked dolls, and used paperbacks of our throw-away society.

Are these venerable reflections on the means of grace, the Heidelberg Catechism and pious living, no more important than a broken-down hobby horse or a six-pack of empties? Do those old sermon tapes at least deserve a respectful place in a preacher's bookcase? I don't know if it really matters. I keep to myself the gnawing ambivalence, twist the bag shut, and drag it to the curb. ■



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



Learn from yesterday,
live for today,
hope for tomorrow.
The important thing is
not to stop questioning.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

A Deadly Silence

THE BANNER



We cannot be silent, because silence is approval.

MANY OF US are probably familiar with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and, more recently, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. The cruelty portrayed in these and other stories hits us hard, but even more disturbing is the portrait of humans' penchant for self-deception. People dying while perpetrators and viewers turn a blind eye.

Yet we too turn a blind eye.

I believe that one of our blind spots today is abortion. Our nation is disturbingly comfortable with the death of the weakest and most defenseless among us.

This is a deeply tender subject. Some women are manipulated or raped, living with the consequences of another's sin. Imagine the immense courage it takes to go full-term with a baby. Hear their stories. But if God gives life, how is this life not present at conception?

We may be against abortion. But to take a *vocal* stand for the baby and family is easy to relegate to others. Like the crowds watching "The Hunger Games" in Collins's story, like the mute bystanders during American slavery, we too simply approve of the status quo when we contribute only silence. For some time I felt exonerated by my personal conviction

against abortion. But I cannot simply wash my hands and point fingers, denying my own need for grace and obligation to speak out. We stand called by God to oppose the destruction of these fragile lives. These voiceless ones have no other to defend them; we are their voice.

And lest our words be hollow, we, as members of Christ's church, are also called to walk alongside expectant mothers, those suffering after abortions, and whole families. Preserving life for nine months means nothing if we don't support the family after birth.

Edmund Burke once said, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." Silence speaks volumes, making us implicit accomplices in allowing the cycle of evil to be perpetuated.

But thank God, who has provided for restoration at the cross. Where there has been abortion, abandonment, marginalization, or silence, there is also pardon and the invitation to a new life. Jesus' forgiveness frees us to add our voices to those crying out on behalf of unborn babies and their families.

This may look different for each of us as God nudges us to action: it may begin as a conversation, a vote, a dinner delivered to an expectant mother. But we cannot be silent, because silence is approval. So we speak God's Word on behalf of the voiceless. On behalf of Rachel, Aaron, Nina, and Justin. And we go with the confidence that the God of the living is with us. ■



Jonathan Fischer graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary with an M.Div. in 2013; he is a member of Immanuel Christian

Reformed Church in Wappingers Falls, N.Y.



Tomorrow's Theology

Rev. Walhout claims that the "new" fact of evolution may require revision of our understanding of creation, Adam and Eve, the fall into sin, and even salvation and God's purpose in history ("Tomorrow's Theology," June 2013). Apparently he believes that the teachings of our confessions on these subjects are merely theories that will have to be revised. This is not new, and it is heretical! To claim we must preserve "everything essential to the biblical story" seems to imply there is much that is not essential. This is nothing but old liberalism in a new dress.

—LeRoy Christoffels
Worthington, Minn.

Let's not reduce God's handiwork to man-made theory but rather embrace the biblical view of creation and acknowledge that God's acts are bigger than any theory could ever explain. We acknowledge that science is valuable in explaining and appreciating God's handiwork and attention to detail. However, we also acknowledge that science gives us but a glimpse of God's character and attributes. Through the eyes of faith, God has given us the ability to believe Scripture and its place in our lives, now and 500 years from now. We believe that God's Word transcends any theory. "Tomorrow's Theology" appears to suggest the contrary.

LETTERS

Please do not squander further opportunities to promote the rich biblical teachings of the CRC by publishing articles that could just as well be found on the shelves of a local library.

—Consistory of Bethany Christian Reformed Church
Fenwick, Ontario

As a scientist with a long career doing research, I have studied the claimed evidences for evolution for over 50 years (“Tomorrow’s Theology”). I have found no creditable evidence that any natural process can convert inorganic matter into living cells. As scientists learn more about nature, particularly about living cells, it is becoming increasingly obvious that it is impossible for a living cell to have formed from non-living matter. And there is no fossil evidence that any kind of life ever evolved into a different kind of more complex life. My conclusion is that evolution is not a validated scientific theory but is a belief developed by those who want to believe nature is the creator rather than God.

—William Vanderkooi
Midland, Mich.

Amongst my Christian Reformed friends, most are already asking the questions that Walhout articulated so well (“Tomorrow’s Theology”). If Christian teaching does not mesh with known facts, the church will inevitably become less and less relevant. Young people especially will not be drawn to a church whose theology is not reconcilable with established science.

—Steve TenElshof
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Thank you for publishing Edwin Walhout’s timely article “Tomorrow’s Theology.” For me evolutionary science explains the material unfolding of the universe and biological life as we know it. Genesis 1 sings a hymn of praise to our Lord who makes the universe his temple and creates us to walk and talk with him in the cool

of the day. So let cool heads prevail as we take up the extraordinary calling to think tomorrow’s theology today in relation to an evolutionary understanding of life.

—Henry Venema
Brandon, Manitoba

The essay that describes what theology will look like 500 years from now is useful and should not be ignored (“Tomorrow’s Theology”). It is also pernicious because its extrapolations do not take into account that sacred Scripture is *sui generis*: It alone has been written by the Holy Spirit of God. The true church will never subordinate this holy book to any other authority, however persuasive. The fact that naturalistic evolution rejects divine revelation is the greatest of many reasons to reject the erroneous presumption that its authority trumps the Bible’s. Actually, it’s the other way around.

—Joel Nederhood
Lansing, Ill.

I do hope and pray that Christ returns before we face the suggested change in theology (“Tomorrow’s Theology”). It is the simple gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit that ignites the many souls won for Christ all these hundreds of years, not a change in theology.

—Helen Baker
North Haledon, N.J.

The Reformation was a return to the truth of Scripture. If Christ hasn’t returned 500 years from now, may people see that we too have rejected falsehood (“Tomorrow’s Theology”). Whether one believes the earth is old or young, there are truths expressed in Scripture that I believe are not debatable. We don’t need to revise our understanding of Jesus in light of “established facts” that are in dispute.

—Judith Eizenga
Lansing, Ill.

Edwin Walhout (“Tomorrow’s Theology”) is so concerned that we need to be in agreement with science concerning origins. Hasn’t he heard the rest of our story? Does today’s science support a maiden girl giving birth without a man? Does a decomposing body walk again? Does a brutally murdered man come back from the dead and then ascend into the clouds and from there govern the world?

—Tom Bracewell
Yakima, Wash.

Evolution is a theory not a scientific fact (“Tomorrow’s Theology”). Both evolution and creation scientists share the same evidence, each interpreting the facts within their belief systems. It requires just as much faith to believe that one evolved from nothing as it does to believe that one was created by God.

If you discredit the first five words of the Bible, “In the beginning God created,” how are you to believe any of the near 775,000 that follow?

—Mark Zylstra
Sarnia, Ontario

[MORE ONLINE](#)

Corrections

The quote in the last sentence of the article “**Philadelphia Pastor Receives Dante Vanegas Award**” (July 2013, p. 33) should have been attributed to Dr. Michelle Loyd-Paige, director of multicultural affairs at Calvin College.

Also, in the article “**Learning from Timothy**” (July 2013, p. 52), the legal chronology was stated incorrectly. The Chicago federal court did strongly criticize the Timothy school board, but it was for selling the school in Cicero and moving to Elmhurst. The court made no ruling on a lawsuit charging the school with violating the civil rights of black students who were barred from the school, since the lawsuit died after the school was sold.

NEWS

(L-r) Lauren Balder, Autumn Lochridge, Brooke Wolters, and Robyn Ellens set sail in Grand Traverse Bay.



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Michigan Church Takes Teens on Faith Quest

What do a minor league baseball game, an Episcopal monastery, and a wooden schooner have in common? They're all places where teens entering high school are learning more about their relationship with Jesus Christ and his church, and having a blast along the way.

The program has been offered by Providence Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich., for the past five years.

Brad Laninga, director of student ministries, leads students through several experiences that illustrate important aspects of discipleship. "As much as there has got to be teaching, we need to find ways to provide hands-on experience," said Laninga.

Students learned the importance of working together as the body of Christ on a high ropes course. An overnight trip to St. Gregory's Abbey taught the group about spiritual disciplines. "Fasting" from phones, iPods, and other devices, students spent time in

solitude and learned the importance of finding a sanctuary in their everyday lives. "Since I left the abbey," said Autumn Lochridge, "I've given up more electronic time and am spending more time talking to God by myself."

The final experience is a two-night excursion to Northern Michigan. Students visit a vineyard while reflecting on John 15. "All of a sudden the light goes on," Laninga said, "because they've seen how they need to be pruned to create a world-class grape." Stu-

dents later set sail on an historic schooner in Grand Traverse Bay. "The wind is invisible but is working all around us and doing important things, just like the Holy Spirit," said Robyn Ellens.

The aim for all these exciting experiences is "stirring up interest in [students'] faith and the local church," Laninga said, "helping them to see the importance of staying connected to the church throughout their entire life." For these young people, it's also just plain fun.

—Susan Vanden Berg



(L-r) Samantha Roon, pastor Keith Doornbos, Brooke Statema, and Brooke Wolters reflect on their own legacy in a local graveyard.



Rev. Wayne Coleman
Holland Pastor
Victim of Hate
Crime

Members of a Holland, Mich., Christian Reformed congregation are rallying around their pastor after an incident some are calling a hate crime.

Wayne Coleman, pastor of Imagine Fellowship CRC, woke up early one morning in mid-July to the sound of someone smashing out the windows of his car. He also says one of the vandals uttered a racial slur during the attack.

Holland police arrested two suspects who are facing multiple charges. At press time, no hate crime charges have been filed, although Coleman says “without a shadow of a doubt” that he was targeted because he is African American. Two other recent incidents targeted another local African American leader.

“It’s time for us to come together as a community, to make sure Holland is a safe community for everyone, regardless of race, regardless of faith, regardless of color,” said Coleman.

Coleman’s congregation is primarily African American, with an emphasis on ministries toward mentoring boys and young men. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Greg Chandler

Canadian Director Position Refined

The position of Canadian Ministries Director of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada should be primarily about working with congregations and classes, translating the denominational ministries plan into the Canadian context. It should be about resourcing congregations for faith formation, church renewal, ecumenical relationships, and social justice engagement.

That was the gist of the recommendations to the Board of Trustees from Ben Vandezande, interim director of Canadian ministries, after he traveled across Canada listening to what church members want from the Canadian ministries leadership.

“This is recommended as a senior executive leadership position. It helps to provide vision, planning. It’s not a manager of programs,” said Kathy Vandergrift, president of the Board of Trustees—Canada Corp. “This is a shift [to] dealing with *all* the ministries operating in Canada.”

Another change recommended is to drop the requirement that the person in the position be ordained as a minister. Vandezande said it would likely be preferred but not required.

The Board of Trustees endorsed the report and sent it on to the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture. That task force is a committee of synod that is studying the entire denominational administrative structure, including descriptions of the senior leadership positions and the binationality of the CRC.

—Gayla R. Postma

New Accessibility Sign Comes to
Denominational Buildings

A new accessibility sign picturing an active, forward-leaning person using a wheelchair was recently installed at CRC denominational buildings.

“I saw the power of changing the way that this extremely common sign pictures people with disabilities: from passive recipients to active agents. That’s what excited me about it,” said Mark Stephenson, director of Christian Reformed Disability Concerns.

Since its creation in 2009, the new symbol has gained momentum, catching on at many businesses, faith-based organizations, and even New York City.

The new image places more emphasis on the person, using a pointed arm and rounded limbs to humanize the figure. The torso leans forward and the wheels indicate active mobility.

“This is one simple way of reminding people with a powerful visual that people with disabilities are also active agents,” said Stephenson.

Stephenson said that buying a sticker online to replace the old icon is a small investment that can make a big difference at the local church level.

—Ryan Struyk



The new icon portrays people with disabilities as active and capable.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. William J. Dykstra
 1935 – 2013

Rev. William J. Dykstra, 78, was a compassionate counselor who was forthright in his demeanor. He passed away on May 29 after a bout with esophageal cancer.

Dykstra served congregations in Wisconsin and Michigan. He left parish ministry to serve as a chaplain at State Prison of Southern Michigan for 22 years, retiring in 1990 after an auto accident.

Dykstra was a man of deep understanding and perceptive sympathy. He met the pastoral needs of his congregations with the practice of devout personal prayer. This practice intensified during the years of prison ministry, when so much of his ministry was devoted to people who knew the pain of intense loneliness, anger, and regret.

Dykstra loved gardening, enjoyed classical music, and played a good game of chess. He was a devout husband and father.

Dykstra is survived by his wife, Marcy, three children and their spouses, and nine grandchildren.

—Louis M. Tamminga

Further information on recently deceased ministers is available each year in the front pages of the *Christian Reformed Church's annual Yearbook*.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Harold De Groot
1928 – 2013

Rev. Harold De Groot, 84, a seasoned missionary, an accomplished linguist, and a congenial people-person, passed away as a result of heart failure.

Following graduation from Calvin Theological Seminary, De Groot entered ministry in the Christian Reformed Church in North Dakota. A few years later, his ministry took him to Nigeria as a missionary, where he planted churches in Nigeria's bush land and trained leaders. De Groot's linguistic gifts enabled him to be part of distributing the first Tiv Bibles, Tiv hymn books, and gospel literature.

In 1970, De Groot returned to the U.S., where he served churches in Iowa, Washington, and Indiana. He retired in 1992.

De Groot was a joyful, winsome man of great integrity. His keen, retentive mind enabled him to have a firm grip of scriptural and theological truth and to share it effectively in preaching, teaching, and mentoring.

De Groot is survived by his wife, Marjean, five children and their spouses, 21 grandchildren, and 21 great-grandchildren.

[MORE ONLINE](#)

—*Louis M. Tamminga*

Board President Sheila Holmes: Answering God's Call

In 1994, Rev. Sheila Holmes believed God was calling her home. "My husband died after a brief illness and I was having a hard time dealing with life without him. I could not understand why God would allow me to just exist," she said.

However, she said, God spoke again, telling her, "You're not going to die but change ministry. I am calling you to be a pastor."

Holmes grappled with this new call but eventually submitted. She had no intention of staying in the Christian Reformed Church (in 1994, women were not permitted to serve as pastors). "But God has a sense of humor," Holmes said, "and soon he confirmed that the CRC was where he was going to place me."

Mentored by the late Rev. Stan Vander Klay, Holmes attended the Center of Urban Theological Studies in Philadelphia. In 1996 Holmes was examined by Classis Hackensack and subsequently served as interim pastor at Northside Community Chapel in Paterson, N.J., until 1998, when she accepted the call to be its pastor.

Even after becoming a pastor, Holmes felt that God wanted to



KAREN HUTTENGA

Rev. Sheila Holmes, president of the Board of Trustees.

use her in more ways. She served as an ethnic advisor to synod (the CRC's annual leadership meeting) and was a board member for

Christian Reformed Home Missions.

Her latest assignment is as a member of the denomination's Board of Trustees, where she continues to blaze a trail. She is the first woman and first person of color to be the Board's president, a position she will hold for the coming year.

And though most people think she is quiet, she said, "When God tells me to speak, he makes room for people to listen."

—*Callie Feyen*

Write for *The Banner!*

The Banner is seeking news writers for California and the Toronto/Hamilton region of Ontario. If you like to write and have a passion for telling stories of how God is at work in the Christian Reformed churches in your area, we'd like to hear from you. We'd especially welcome writers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Email expressions of interest to news editor Gayla Postma at gpostma@crcna.org. Please include a letter outlining your news writing experience and some recent samples of your work.

Los Angeles Gospel Concert Draws Diverse Crowd

For the first time in years, Community Christian Reformed Church in Los Angeles, Calif., opened up its balcony.

The reason? A packed-out concert for surrounding churches and the community featuring Dorian Holley, lead singer of Jay Leno's "The Tonight Show" band, and Glenn Bulthuis, an experienced church music director and concert performer.

"We felt honored to host this concert featuring an outstanding group of talented musicians and gifted vocalists," said Richard Jones, the church's pastor. "It was a blessing to see the church filled with a multiethnic group of people."

More than 250 people attended the concert, forcing the church to add rows of chairs in the back and fill the balcony.

Attendees included members of the Michael Jackson band, members of Smokey Robinson's band, and American Idol vocalists as well as Christian producers and actors.

"I believe the concert provided an opportunity for the surrounding community to see what can occur when God's people come together," said Jones. "Several people from the community commented on how much the concert was a blessing."



CAROL BAWMEL/SEBERG

Gospel music concert draws more than 250 people from across the Los Angeles area.

—Ryan Struyk

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Robert Geelhoed

1954 – 2012

Rev. Robert Geelhoed, 58, was profound in his spirituality, a compassionate friend, a conscientious student, and a sensitive worship leader. He passed away after a painful struggle with cancer.

Geelhoed, who earned several degrees, including a Ph.D. in psychology of religion/pastoral care and counseling, served one Christian Reformed church in Iowa, after which he was appointed director of the counseling center of Christ Church in Oak Brook, Ill. He served there with great distinction until his death in 2012.

Geelhoed loved his Savior and he loved the people around him. He was a compassionate helper and a dedicated mentor to many. Prayer was prominent in his life.

A dedicated scholar, he was a sought-after trainer for Stephen Ministry. Geelhoed and his wife loved to travel and deeply cherished their children. He was serious about physical training and practiced the Korean martial art Hapkido for many years, earning a black belt.

Geelhoed is survived by his wife, Ruth Anne, and three children and their spouses. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Louis M. Tamminga

Widow of Slain Ontario Man Pays It Forward



Sharlene Bosma set up Tim's Tribute in memory of her slain husband, Tim Bosma.

Three months after the death of her husband, Tim, Sharlene Bosma has set up a trust fund as a tribute to him.

"I had such an appreciation for what other people had done for me," she said, "that I wanted to find a way to pay it forward."

In early May, Tim Bosma left with two men to test drive a truck he was trying to sell. He never returned. A week later, police

found his body. Two men have been arrested and charged with first-degree murder.

The day those men appeared in a Hamilton, Ontario, courtroom, Bosma announced that she had set up Tim's Tribute, a fund she hopes will help others who find themselves in a similar situation but without the help she received.

As news of Bosma's disappearance and death spread through the media, donations poured in for Bosma and her 2-year-old daughter.

"Without that, I wouldn't be keeping a roof over my head," she said. "A lot of people in my situation wouldn't have that [support]."

Bosma said the fund will be administered through Christian Stewardship Services and that her own congregation, Ancaster (Ontario) Christian Reformed Church, will be involved.

Bosma said she is grateful to the CRC. "The CRC [showed] such

a great testament of what a church community is, and the whole world got to see it."

Bosma said the fund will initially help people in the Hamilton-Wentworth region. "I received a lot of support here," she said. "This is a way to say thank you."

Bosma hopes Tim's Tribute can address two stages of need. The first is the immediate crisis, she said. "Suddenly, you're left for weeks on end with no income. We can address that immediate crisis by helping people with groceries or gas, basic day-to-day needs."

Longer term, there are costs during the trial stage: lost wages, parking costs, meals.

She hopes the funds can also help with other needs such as burial costs.

"We didn't have a burial plot or a headstone picked out. We had all the time in the world," she said. "And then we didn't." [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Gayla R. Postma

NEWS

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Paul Han
1916 – 2013

Rev. Paul Han (Han Ying Chan), 97, overcame years of poverty and political turmoil in China to devote his long life to service in God's kingdom.

Han arrived in the United States in 1947 where he completed his education, including a Ph.D. at New York University.

In 1954 he was appointed to teach Mandarin at the U.S. Army Language School in Monterey, Calif. His wife was finally able to receive a permit to come to the U.S. with their two children, ending a 10-year separation.

Han gave up his position in Monterey to pastor the Chinese congregation of Hyde Park in Chicago in partnership with Christian Reformed Home Missions. His ministry was singularly blessed and became the center of a widely known Chinese ministry in the metropolitan area.

Han passed away on July 21, predeceased six months earlier by Margaret, his wife of 76 years.

They are survived by four children and their spouses, 10 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren. A granddaughter preceded them in death in 2011. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Louis M. Tamminga

Drawing Parables

Some Bible stories capture our interest and imagination. We can actually picture David's stone hitting Goliath, Ezekiel's valley of dry bones, or Jesus feeding of the 5,000. We can take pen and paper and draw these stories.

That is what is happening at an adult Sunday school class led by Naomi Friend and David Schweingruber at Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Ames, Iowa.

It all started when Friend, an artist, brought drawing supplies for the class. Schweingruber suggested that she bring her art supplies and easel to the next class.

Most Sundays, Schweingruber leads the discussion of a particular Bible story while Naomi depicts



Naomi Friend with two of her paintings, "Unmerciful Servant" and "Vineyard Workers."

what is being discussed. Sometimes the class stops to look at Naomi's work and offer comments and ideas about what could be added.

When asked how Friend's artwork helps him better understand the parable or Bible passage they are studying, John Verkade said, "Naomi's artwork gives me a different perspective of the parables,

which broadens my understanding of them."

Matt Sandbulte said, "The vivid images in Naomi's artwork stimulate my imagination. . . . Seeing the drawings take shape gives a sense of freshness to each parable because the artistic ideas are partly planned and partly spontaneous."

— Kyle Hoogendoorn

Roseland Christian School Ends 130 Years of Christian Education

After standing as a beacon of light to the Roseland community for more than a century, Roseland (Ill.) Christian School closed its doors in June.

"There are many factors that have brought the board to this difficult decision," wrote Rick VanDyken, board president, in a letter distributed to churches, "but the underlying cause is the lack of financial resources needed to provide the high caliber academic program that our students deserve."

Founded in 1884 by members of the Christian Reformed Church, the school experienced a 75 percent decline in enrollment over a five-year period. Meanwhile, costs to maintain the aging building have increased.

For 36 years, Bill Dykstra taught at Roseland—some of those years



Roseland Christian School served its community from 1884-2013.

also spent coaching and driving a bus. His wife served in various capacities, and their four children all graduated from Roseland. He remembers a time when there were 50 graduates; this year there were just 10.

"I just love teaching here," said Dykstra, a member of Pullman

Christian Reformed Church (Chicago, Ill.). "I have met some incredible students, teachers, and parents—people who have opened my eyes and reminded me what being a Christian is all about. My faith has grown so much."

—Melissa Holtrop

NOTEWORTHY

- **Johanna (Jo) Kuyvenhoven** is heading a literacy project in Sierra Leone sponsored by the World Bank. She will be directing the second part of a three-part \$17.9 million project.
- **Larry Visser's** popular organ arrangement of "By the Sea of Crystal" has been published by Wayne Leupold Editions. Visser is minister of music and organist at LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. The hymn was originally written in 1933, when *The Banner* sponsored a hymn-writing contest to help prepare CRC congregations for the change from singing only psalms.
- **Tom Greidanus** won the Henrik Zetterberg hockey scholarship, named after a captain of the Detroit Red Wings. The \$1,500 award is given to students who show leadership and community service off the ice.
- **The King's University College** in Edmonton, Alberta, launched its Youth Ministry Certificate Program, created in collaboration with Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, where a similar program began a couple of years ago.

—Banner correspondents

Please visit our website at thebanner.org for all these stories.

Michigan Wedding Was On The House

For Jeff Boersma, presiding over weddings for people in his church is normal. But this wedding was held in his living room.

Boersma is pastor of On The House Church in Muskegon, Mich., a Christian Reformed church plant that meets in local coffee shops, McDonald's restaurants, parks, conference rooms and, of course, living rooms. With the absence of a central church building, the logical place for an intimate wedding would be a house.

"Getting married at Jeff's home was the perfect location, because it is where I learned to worship God. The environment of a home just made everybody, including myself, feel comfortable and loved," said Arrun. [MORE ONLINE](#)



Arrun and Khira held their wedding in the home of their pastor, Jeff Boersma.

—Daina Kraai

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Jon De Bruyn

1949 – 2013

Rev. Jon De Bruyn, 64, an educator before he entered the ministry, church planter, and the founder of Prayer Missions International, passed away on June 22 from metastatic melanoma.

After graduating from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1978, De Bruyn served one church in Michigan and helped plant two others.

Following retirement, he became an active leader in Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International's Dunamis Project. He also founded Prayer Ministry International in 2008 and led conferences in many centers abroad.

De Bruyn and his wife traveled around the globe to study praying churches and establish believers in the practice of prayer. He was instrumental in beginning and participating in Deeper Journey retreats for church workers. He also served Classis Northern Michigan as its prayer coordinator.

A kind man, De Bruyn had a winsome way of relating to those not in the faith. Their salvation was the object of his fervent prayers.

De Bruyn is survived by his wife, Maellen, three children and their spouses, and 12 grandchildren. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Louis M. Tamminga

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Andrew Zylstra

1926 – 2013

Rev. Andrew Zylstra, 86, was a pastor with a servant heart, a ready volunteer, and a lover of flowers. He died from unknown causes.

Zylstra graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary and went on to serve Christian Reformed congregations in Michigan, Washington, and Iowa. He retired in 1988.

Zylstra was gifted musically and vocally. For 15 of his retirement years he led a weekly hymn-sing in a rehabilitation facility. His thorough knowledge of the Word enabled him to write sermons with depth, which he presented well, not relying much on sermon notes from the pulpit.

Zylstra belonged to that generation of pastors who were expected to preach twice a Sunday, teach all the catechism classes, lead council meetings, and visit widely in the congregation. His servant heart enabled him to carry this load with a quiet joy.

After retirement, Zylstra and his wife traveled to China, where they taught English. Growing and arranging flowers was a cherished activity in his retirement years.

Zylstra is survived by his wife, Thelma, eight children and their spouses, 29 grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Louis M. Tamminga

NEWS

CHURCH WORLDWIDE

Baseball's Darryl Strawberry Buries His Past in New Career as Pastor



USA TODAY SPORTS IMAGES

Former MLB player Darryl Strawberry, right, and his wife, Tracy.

There are no pictures, no trophies, no plaques, none of his four World Series rings. "I got rid of it all. I was never attached to none of that stuff," says Darryl Strawberry, 51. "It's not part of my life anymore."

Darryl Strawberry, the former outfield great, is now an ordained minister in a town 30 miles west of St. Louis, Missouri.

Strawberry will talk about his drug and alcohol addiction, tell chilling details about prison life and crack houses, tear up telling of the pain and shame he caused his family.

He plans to spend the rest of his life talking about his passion that he says is more rewarding than anything he felt on the baseball field.

"I love the game, don't get me wrong, but I love the Bible more. I want to help people save their lives and have the responsibility of leading people into following Christ. I've never been happier in my life. It's so much fun being a pastor."

Strawberry and his wife, each twice divorced, met 13 years ago at a narcotics center convention in Tampa. Tracy had been clean for a year and had turned her life to Jesus a week earlier. But Strawberry's addiction continued to rage.

Finally Tracy told him she was going home to Missouri. If he really loved her, if he was really committed to giving up his addiction and turning to Christ, he could follow, living in her parents' basement.

"I didn't have anything," Strawberry said. "She didn't have anything. I was in debt for \$3 million, but I felt free inside. We never wavered about how this is going to work out, but how we were going to let God lead us."

They slowly eased out of debt, were married in 2006 at the Little White Wedding Chapel in Las Vegas, and moved into their own apartment in St. Peters.

Today, they have their ministry *strawberryministries.org*, the Darryl and Tracy Strawberry Christian Recovery Program in Texas, and a Coffee House prayer meeting every Friday night at the Darryl Strawberry Adult Day Program for Autism building.

It's their horrifying life experiences, the Strawberrys say, that enable them to relate. "Here I am, a baseball superstar, falling into the pits, having everybody write you off, and then having God say, 'I'm going to use your mess for a message.' How beautiful is that?" —*USA Today*

Christians in Sudan Face Increased Hostility

Church leaders in Sudan say they are beset by increased restrictions and hostility in the wake of the mostly-Christian South Sudan's independence.

In the predominantly Muslim and Arab north, several churches in Khartoum have been destroyed and others closed down, along with affiliated schools and orphanages.

Christians in Sudan are facing increased arrests, detention, and deportation.

After the secession, President Omar al-Bashir promised the participation of religious leaders in writing the laws. But church leaders say that is unlikely. Recently, some government officials, politicians, and Muslim leaders have issued statements indicating the growing intolerance.

More than 300,000 Christians live in Khartoum. "Church freedom is so constrained, (and) holding meetings in the open is a crime," said Rev. Barnaba Mathias of the Sudanese Church of Christ. "We have to seek permission from the authorities for such meetings, which is often denied."

Mathias urges the international Christian community to act as the voice of the persecuted Sudanese church so that it can be granted its freedom. For now, its members can only pray in the churches—with Khartoum closely watching.

—*Religion News Service*

For more on these stories, please visit thebanner.org.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. William D. Buursma

1925 – 2013

Rev. William Buursma, 87, by nature shy and introverted, was highly gifted as a pastor, preacher, churchman, and linguist. He passed away on July 6 following a prolonged struggle with dementia.

After serving in the U.S. Army during World War II, Buursma entered ministry in the Christian Reformed Church. He served congregations in Ontario, Indiana, and Michigan, retiring in 1991.

Buursma was a serious student of the Word, and was widely read. Prayer meant much to him. One parishioner spoke for many when he said, "When he led us to the throne of grace, I felt I was in the presence of God."

Buursma was warmly ecumenical in spirit. The denominational periodical, *The Banner*, benefited greatly from his gifts. Among his personal interests were music and gardening.

Buursma was preceded in death by his wife, Althea, in 2010, and by a daughter in 2006. He is survived by three children and their spouses, 12 grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

MORE ONLINE

—*Louis M. Tamminga*

FAQs

Ethics

Q What's the difference between bribery and extortion? Is one more sinful than the other?

A Bribery is initiated by a person offering a payment or favor of some sort. The process of extortion is initiated by a person seeking to be the recipient of a payment or favor of some sort. When someone offers a bribe to another person, that person is free to refuse the bribe. Extortion, on the other hand, is a form of blackmail. The person being extorted is threatened by the likelihood of harm (to the person or a loved one) if the payment in question is not made. Generally speaking, offering a bribe is a less serious moral offense because it does not involve coercion.

We sometimes speak loosely of bribery, as when we talk about bribing a child to do something she is not inclined to do. This way of speaking might tempt us to regard bribery as acceptable in certain contexts. Strictly speaking, bribery only takes place when a person is asked to do something in violation of a legitimate role such as being an employee, a fiduciary, a relative, a trusted confidant, or a law-abiding citizen.

There can be a fine line between our perceptions of bribery and extortion. Suppose your father promised to give you a valuable family heirloom and instead, while suffering from dementia, he gives it to a neighbor. If that neighbor offers it to you as a bribe in exchange for doing something illegal, it becomes a case of extortion.

—Gregory Mellema is a professor of philosophy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Church

Q What is the origin of the triangle/cross Christian Reformed Church symbol?

A The synodical committee appointed to celebrate our centennial developed a "commemorative seal" of a triangle with the

There is always a cost to discipleship.

words "The Christian Reformed Church Centennial 1857-1957," under which were the words "I will build my church."

In response to requests from many churches and members, that committee recommended that the "Seal be retained as much as possible in its present form, with the revised wording "The Christian Reformed Church. Soli Deo Gloria. 1857" (*Acts of Synod 1958*, p. 378). Synod rejected this recommendation and appointed a study committee "to prepare a denominational seal for our church."

The committee presented a seal to Synod 1960, which voted to "tentatively adopt the proposed seal as the Denominational Seal, final decision to be made next year." Synod instructed the committee to "publicize the Denominational Seal in order to . . . ascertain the reaction of the church" (*Acts 1960*, p. 32). At Synod 1961, the committee reported that "due to certain delays . . . it was impossible to carry out its mandate fully."

The committee submitted another design to Synod 1967, one that was opposed by two overtures (*Acts 1967*, pp. 706, 708). Synod rejected the proposed seal and appointed a new committee that proposed to Synod 1968 the current emblem of our denomination. The committee described it as follows: "The triangle, a beautiful geometric form, is the time-honored sign of the Trinity. Superimposed in a dominant central position, in the design as in our lives, is the Cross of Christ" (*Acts 1968*, p. 306).

—George Vander Weit is a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church.

Relationships

Q I'm a 24-year-old member of the CRC. There seems to be a huge disconnect between my church's stance on issues such as homosexuality, evolution, or premarital

sex and the reality I experience "out there." I consider myself a Christian, but I'm not sure I can stay in the CRC. Should I just find a more "contemporary" church?

A Yes and no. It is better to have a positive connection to a church community than to pretend you feel a connection to a church you have already left emotionally and spiritually. Better to find a Christian church body where your relationship to God and the community can grow and flourish than to feel alienated and possibly experience a continuous temptation to disdain, mock, or judge brothers and sisters in Christ.

The harder choice, which is not for everyone, is to stay and accept the challenge of loving not only God (our first call as Christ followers), but also your neighbors, including your fellow church members. The more difficult neighbors to love are usually the ones whose shortcomings we are familiar with. The challenge is to pray for and accept leadership opportunities within the fellowship of believers you are part of, to explore what it means to be "in the world but not of the world."

There is always a cost to discipleship, although Jesus promises that the burden we will carry being yoked to him will be light. Knowing your motives for leaving or staying can help you discern whether you are hungering for a place to be more comfortable in the world, or whether your discomfort relates to Christ calling you to serve him in a different community of faith.

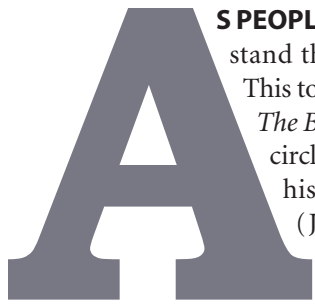
Either way, God calls all of us to accept his love, friendship, forgiveness, and the lordship of Christ, no matter what body of believers we belong to.

—Judy Cook is a family therapist and a member of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster, Ontario. ■

BY HARRY COOK

*Biological
Evolution
Revisited*

GOD'S PLAN FOR CREATION



AS PEOPLE OF FAITH, how are we to understand the topic of biological evolution? This topic has been raised in the pages of *The Banner* and elsewhere in Reformed circles. As Edwin Walhout suggests in his article “Tomorrow’s Theology” (June 2013), there is convincing evidence to support the thesis that biological evolution has occurred.

At the same time, we need to acknowledge that opinions on the topic vary widely, as indicated by the responses to that article. I believe more needs to be said. So in the spirit of engaging the church in an open and continuing conversation, here are some suggestions for broadening the discussion.

Many Christian biologists—and I include myself in this group—accept the findings of biological science as a feature of creation that we have to account for. The combined evidence from fossils and from scientific comparisons of the anatomy, physiology, and DNA of various organisms is so strong that it can no longer be ignored. As a result, most Christian biologists I know accept some form of evolutionary development. In its refereed journal *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, the American Scientific Affiliation has published many helpful articles that support this viewpoint (see sidebar on p. 20).

However, I do have some reservations about the standard evolution accounts. So as we consider the theory of evolution, I suggest that we keep several key points in mind.

Evolution: Biological Theory or Worldview?

Charles Darwin’s religious doubts and his views of God’s way with the world continue to be topics of much debate. Darwin had doubts about a God who interacts with this world and who allows the cruelty that we observe in ecosystems and in natural selection. Some authors suggest that his faith was particularly challenged by the pain of losing his beloved daughter, Annie, who died at the age of 10. Can we separate Darwin’s religious views from the biological theories that are the result of his work?

In our attempt to understand the discussions on evolution, it is important for us to keep in mind the distinction between *evolution* as a legitimate biological theory and *evolutionism* as a godless worldview that we as Christians cannot accept. I need only mention the title of the book *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins to indicate what I mean about the latter. Dawkins has expressed his criticism of the Christian faith in language the genteel Darwin would never have used (we will ignore the amateurish theologizing of Dawkins for now). Nevertheless, we need to acknowledge that a large body of literature presents the theory of biological evolution dispassionately and, in some cases, with respect for the Christian tradition.

Acknowledging Complexity

A second feature of creation that our faith would have us recognize is complexity in the world of nature. Whether we are walk-

ing in a rainforest or examining a muscle cell through an electron microscope, we can’t help but be struck by the beauty and complexity of creation. People experience this beauty and complexity in their everyday experience and, as scientists, in the biology lab. In both cases we feel a sense of wonder, even exhilaration.

Not all scientists are of a mind to acknowledge this complexity. James Watson, co-discoverer of the helical structure of DNA, states: “There is only one science, physics: all else is social work.” It’s true that physics is important. Even within our bodies, structures and processes obey physical laws. Nevertheless, many scientists—both Christian and agnostic—disagree with Watson’s statement. They hold that biological organisms and processes cannot be described in purely physical terms, for they obey biological laws as well.

One way of getting at what “creation” means is to recognize that biological structures and processes have integrity and descriptive frameworks all their own. There is a level of biological complexity within the creation. Such an understanding of biological organisms and processes enhances our ability to appreciate God’s design for creation.

Of course, when it comes to human beings and their culture, there are multiple levels of complexity that need to be recognized: language, logic, and religion, among others. All of these levels reflect the wisdom of the Creator, and they are the embodiment of God’s plan for human life. »

Digging Deeper

The authors of these resources enthusiastically profess that God is the creator. They treasure the message of Scripture, particularly as it is found in Genesis 1 and 2-3, Psalm 104, and Colossians 1:15-20. Nothing they write, or, indeed, in this article, contradicts that God created everything from nothing. Yes, there are implications in all of this for theology, and we will need to consider them thoughtfully and faithfully. The challenge to consider is that the interpretation of the Genesis accounts does not come solely from the evolution debate; there are other good reasons to continue the work on this fascinating topic. Clarence Vos has written about how we read biblical accounts (“How Should We Read the Bible?” November 2011); theologians are challenged to continue the discussion.

- Deborah Haarsma and Loren Haarsma, professors in the physics and astronomy department at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., have co-authored a helpful introduction to the origins debate. Their book *Origins: Christian Perspectives on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design* is written from the viewpoint that God used processes of evolution to bring biological organisms into being.
- Denis Lamoureux, who has a Ph.D. in theology and another in biology, has written two books on the topic of origins: *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution and I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution*.
- Reformed philosopher Jacob Klapwijk’s book makes the case for purpose in biological evolution in *Purpose in the Living World: Creation and Emergent Evolution*.

A Process with Purpose

In the third place, let us notice that there is purpose in the evolutionary process—it accomplishes God’s intent for creation. We know from Scripture that human beings, and in fact all biological organisms, are meant to be here. This is stressed by biologist and theologian Denis Lamoureux and by philosopher Jacob Klapwijk (see sidebar on p. 19). There is purpose in the living world, even if we acknowledge that evolutionary processes imply moments of chance and randomness.

Recognizing that some of the processes that drive biological evolution depend on chance does indeed raise difficult questions. However, what is true for evolution also holds for human reproduction: Even though we know that the determination of gender in a baby is an apparently random process, expectant parents who are Christians might sometimes pray for a girl or a boy. Similarly, we trust that the course of history, chaotic though it is, is ultimately in God’s hands. Even the outcome of a toss of the dice, according to Scripture, is determined by God: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD” (Prov. 16:33). God’s rule enters everywhere, even if we do not always understand God’s way with the world.

We can’t help but be struck by the beauty and complexity of creation.

Selfish Genes

In his big book *Sociobiology*, E.O. Wilson proposes that animals behave in such a way that their own genes are passed on to successive generations. And because animal behaviour is thought to be determined or influenced by genes, a particular behavior can be selected for and thus made part of the evolutionary grand scheme. Richard Dawkins supported this view in his book *The Selfish Gene*. Genes are “selfish” in that they favor their own survival and the behavior patterns of the parent. Unselfish or “altruistic” behavior, a puzzle even for Darwin, can be explained in some cases by suggesting that it favors the passing on of the individual’s own genes through relatives (who will have some of the same genes). In other cases scientists suggest that animals practice reciprocal altruism in turns: “I scratch your back, you scratch mine.” In either case, we will defer to specialists in animal behavior to sort out this problem.

The theory becomes objectionable, certainly to Christians, when it is extended to human behavior, as Wilson does. Certainly human beings can rise above their biological past to lead unselfish lives and to do unselfish acts, regardless of the role of genes in animals. In fact, I see this as part of our being created in the image of God. Christians hold that unselfish behavior is not some puzzling anomaly to be somehow explained. Rather such behavior is part of the new life we have in Christ, who calls us to love others as we love ourselves. For Christians, such behav-

Two Websites for Further Exploration

- The BioLogos website biologos.org was started by Francis Collins; it gives access to many informative authors and articles. Look for thoughtful essays, particularly the incisive article “Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople” by theologian Tim Keller. Articles on this website in “The Forum” by Dennis Venema on “Evolution Basics” and the essays by Andy Crouch and Ted Davis can help us understand current debates about religion and evolution.
- American Scientific Affiliation: Science and Faith website, asa3.org, is a starting point for many helpful articles on science and the Christian faith. Click on “Resources,” then “For Churches and Groups,” and then “God and Nature Magazine.”

iors as donating blood or adopting a child, helping a stranded motorist or serving a cup of water to a stranger, are not a puzzle but a rewarding task. Here too our faith shapes our understanding of an aspect of evolution theory.

Needed: A Positive Debate

Contributions to the discussion on origins range from the simplistic to the profound. Unfortunately, too often the former predominate. Yet it is vital that we engage in a positive, worthwhile, and worthy debate. I say that for two reasons. First, when people, particularly students, are exposed to simplistic reasons for rejecting evolution, and then encounter sophisticated arguments for the process in the literature or in the classroom, they often reject the church or begin to question their faith. Instead, I suggest that members of the church read and talk about Scripture, about biological origins, about evolution, and about natural selection, its supporting process. A good place to begin is with the literature written by Christians in the “Digging Deeper” sidebar (see p. 19). Old Testament professors at Reformed seminaries could and should help advance the conversation by offering to participate in public forums and debates on religion and science.

Second, as Reformed Christians, we have always trusted that the “books” of creation and Scripture both testify to their Author. As those who, through Christ, have come to know the Creator as our Father, we must continue to read both books together and allow them to lead us into the truth about God and creation.

God’s creation praises its maker. That God’s creating work is an essential Christian doctrine, and that God’s creation praises him and deserves our loving care, is beyond doubt for the Christian believer. Along with the psalmist we proclaim, “LORD my God, you are very great” (Ps. 104:1). ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



Harry Cook is a biologist who has taught biology at Christian colleges for many years, most recently at The King’s University College in Edmonton, Alberta. He’s a member of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta.

The Trouble with Economic Equality

In your 20s or 30s? We want to hear what's on your mind as it relates to living out your faith in today's world. Please send manuscripts (600 words) to editorial@thebanner.org. (And, no, you don't have to be ordained!)

Editor's note: Joel Penner offers an alternate perspective to the column "Abundance in a Covenant Economy" (September 2012) by Chandra Pasma.

THE PROBLEM WITH WORSHIPING at the altar of equality is that materialism makes a poor idol.

Let's take a closer look at the Old Testament concept of Israel's years of restoration and Jubilee. That slaves and debts were freed and forgiven every seventh year signified an amortization limit of seven years for any loan. Knowing that restoration would occur every seventh year, those who offered themselves as collateral against a loan were actually being sold into a form of indentured labor. They knew the date they would be freed.

In the year of Jubilee, land—and it was the land with its attendant improvements only, not the sheep, goats, or anything portable—was to be restored to its previous owner. This meant that all transactions involving land were only long-term leases. The fact that a long-term lease was considered a "sale" indicates a single monetary transaction. Any amount of money owing that was greater than someone's ability to pay would have to be paid back before restoration—meaning that the land could be leased for 50 years for a loan having a seven-year amortization, leaving 43 years of production for profit.

Such arrangements would have prevented credit-fueled speculative bubbles, but they also placed a much greater emphasis on portable wealth. Although credit was limited, down payments with accumulated portable wealth on speculative profits could be fantastic, so speculative bubbles could still occur. Back then, banking would not have been a protected industry. The lowly would not

have been expected to bail out anyone stupid enough to loan out past the seventh year.

But some categories of people born into the covenant community were actively excluded from inheriting land: women and the fatherless. Any child born out of wedlock, even to Jewish parents, would not have been considered legitimate, and therefore would never receive a portion of land. This created a huge underclass of poor and needy people without recourse. As well, the laws of primogeniture ensured that eldest sons got a double portion, leaving later-born sons with little in comparison.

So I cannot believe the Old Testament could be a model of outcome equality. Outcome equality only occurs when we actively punish inequality through wealth redistribution. This is not mandated by God, nor does it lead to a just society.

We all know of people who, through no fault of their own, are experiencing the ravages of original sin. Clearly people who suffer grievous injury or disease should not be treated the same as someone never having to face those challenges. Sometimes a person just needs a second chance. People have different needs: so, for example, expecting a pregnant woman to lift heavy objects repeatedly just because that's what her coworkers are expected to do is simply not acceptable. That kind of "procedural equality" simply does not grasp the essence of a godly and just society.

Far from being a template of Marxist-style wealth redistribution with its attendant class warfare, the Old Testament portrays God instituting the concepts of forgiveness, restoration, and understanding. Forgiveness of sins that lead to enslavement. Restoration back into the covenant community. Understanding our own fallibility and need of grace within the law. ■

Joel Penner is a member of Living Hope Christian Reformed Church in Abbotsford, British Columbia. He is studying supply chain management at British Columbia Institute of Technology.

Sometimes
a person
just needs a
second chance.



Nick Hopkins and Katherine Hirschberg are serving at Shawnee Park Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

One Step at a Time

Seminary Graduates Reflect on Their Path to Ministry

by Kristy Manion

When Nick Hopkins and Katherine Hirschberg walked across the stage to receive their Master of Divinity degrees at Calvin Theological Seminary's commencement in May 2012, only God knew where their first steps of ministry would lead.

Fast forward six months to find the two serving at Shawnee Park Christian Reformed Church, a rooted and growing congregation just two miles from the seminary where Katherine and Nick

studied. Today Nick serves as Shawnee's pastor and Katherine as its ministry coordinator.

The paths that led Katherine and Nick to Shawnee are punctuated with promptings, pauses, and redirections from the Lord. Yet perhaps precisely *because* their journeys have been surprising, both say they are clearly called to serve the Lord and the people of Shawnee Park in this first season of ministry.

Forking Roads and an Identity Shift

Nick Hopkins, a transplanted Canadian from New Brunswick, grew up in Florida.

His father was a pastor in the Wesleyan church, and Nick's involvement in worship leadership started early.

"I grew up singing in the church," he remembers. "It's where my musical side was birthed."

While Nick's childhood allowed him to explore the church world, only later did he suspect a call to ministry. As a young teen, he sensed the Lord leading him to help people through speech pathology.

On the college hunt, Nick looked for a school with three characteristics: a

👉👉 The Lord uses you when he will use you, not necessarily when you think you are at your best! 🗨️🗨️

Christian framework, a speech pathology program, and a gospel choir.

“I had never heard of Calvin College or the Christian Reformed Church,” he says. “But Calvin fit.”

Nick found a home at Calvin. He exercised his worship-leadership gifts in the gospel choir. And he pursued his program of study, speech pathology, with a passion.

Then, in Nick’s sophomore year, his professor called him in for a meeting. “I got the ‘You’re a fine student, but grad school isn’t for you’ conversation,” Nick says. “I thought, ‘What do you *mean*, professor? God has been leading me toward speech pathology for a decade.’”

With his academic path unclear, the next year Nick served as a student leader on Calvin’s Barnabas Team. His job was to help other students in his residence hall continue to grow in their Christian faith.

He found that he loved the ministry role. “During that time, I began to say, ‘I want to do Barnabas for the rest of my life.’ My burning question became, ‘How do I give ministry away?’”

He also began leading worship at his local church, Madison Square CRC, and in his senior year became the choir director. What to do after graduation was still an open question.

“I thought, ‘I don’t really know what’s next. But I love Grand Rapids, I love my church, I love my mentor. I’m not leaving.’ And one Saturday morning as I was praying I felt like the Lord said, ‘Go apply to seminary.’”

Nick applied to Calvin Seminary, but not to be a pastor. “I wasn’t willing to admit that I was going for an M.Div. So

I applied for the master’s degree in worship.”

But God wouldn’t let Nick forget about the M.Div. and when he returned for his second year at seminary, he enrolled in the M.Div. program.

There was still some question of denominational fit. How does a person who grew up Wesleyan find his way to becoming a Christian Reformed pastor?

For Nick, the answer had less to do with theology and more with his experience of hospitality. Belonging to a Christian Reformed church throughout college and seminary helped Nick find a home in Reformed Christian faith. So did interactions with his seminary professors, who respected Nick’s denominational roots and taught him about Reformed theology in a compelling way.

A Heart for Missions Meets Closed Doors

Like Nick, Katherine Hirschberg traces early inclinations to ministry back to childhood. The granddaughter of a Christian Reformed pastor and the niece of one of the first women ordained in the CRC, Katherine has been on a path toward ministry almost since birth.

Despite being very shy, 4-year-old Katherine had an evangelist’s heart for a neighbor, Grandma Nell. She remembers initiating an impassioned dialogue with Grandma Nell about the importance of loving Jesus.

“I said to her, ‘Grandma Nell, do you love Jesus?’ And she said, ‘Sure honey, everyone loves Jesus.’ I said, ‘No, not everyone *does* love Jesus, and it’s *very important* that you love Jesus.’”

“Through Grandma Nell I realized that there were all these people out there

who needed Christ. It opened my eyes to the need to spread the gospel.”

Fifteen years later Katherine found herself at Calvin College, studying English and math. She intended to teach high school and do evangelism in Africa.

Then she took a religion class to fulfill a core requirement. “I was writing a paper on spiritual gifts, and I found myself reading commentaries and wishing I knew Greek!”

She took spiritual gifts assessment for the same class. “All my gifts lined up with being a pastor. I felt that God was clearly telling me, ‘You’re going to seminary.’”

The next day, Katherine shifted to a pre-seminary program. She was convinced that God wanted to use her overseas and spent a summer with Christian Reformed World Missions in India.

“My time in India was amazing,” Katherine says, “but I got dengue fever and typhoid at the same time and nearly died.” Her doctor’s advice—that she should never again live in a developing country—devastated her.

Back at home, Katherine’s grandfather wisely waited awhile; then remarked, “Well, Katherine, now you know a large portion of the world where God does *not* want you to do ministry. So maybe that can show you where you *should* be.”

As Katherine started seminary, God still had a few things to work out, including her reluctance to be up front. But she found the barriers coming down.

“If you’ve got this passion from God, God can shift your abilities and natural personality. That’s when I think you really know you’re doing what you’re called to do. When someone who is naturally incredibly shy and never wants to be in the spotlight is excited about preaching, that’s *God* at work.”

The Way Opens at Shawnee Park

During Nick’s third year at seminary, a church he had never visited sent him a letter inviting him to apply for a newly created full-time ministry coordinator »

Calvin Theological Seminary Factoids

- One of every six students studying at Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) is from Canada; one of every five is female.
- Three of every 10 students come from outside North America.
- 322 is the total number of students for all course enrollments.
- CTS professors taught more than 2,170 individual classes last academic year to their residential students.
- 20 seminary students served as pastoral ministry interns this summer in 20 Christian Reformed congregations across North America.
- In 2012, CTS students fulfilled 253 requests for Sunday pulpit supply—that's almost five churches per Sunday that welcomed pastors-in-training to their pulpits and encouraged them in their preaching.
- 38 students are enrolled in the Distance M.Div. program at CTS.
- CTS has awarded 51 Ph.D. degrees to scholars from around the world in the last 20 years.
- Students, faculty, and staff consumed 3,456 donuts last year during the fellowship break after Wednesday chapels—a different kind of "heart" health.
- President Jul Medenblik has lost count of the road and air miles he's logged since he became president two years ago. But he hasn't lost count of the warm reception he's experienced from hundreds of faithful friends and supporters of the seminary as he crisscrossed North America and beyond. During his travels, he's given away more than 475 towels to symbolize the CTS theme Called to Serve.

position. The search committee at Shawnee Park Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., had heard about Nick through a seminary staff member.

Nick hadn't planned to leave his job as Madison Square's choir director. But he found himself accepting Shawnee's offer. He agreed to facilitate the church's various ministries, with a special focus on worship, for two years until he completed his M. Div. degree at Calvin Seminary.

As graduation approached, Nick communicated his desire to resign as ministry coordinator effective upon receiving a call to another church. He started looking for his replacement among seminary peers while he and his wife, Megan, explored going home to New England to plant churches.

Then Shawnee's pastor took another call, leaving a vacancy at the church.

"At that point I was thinking, 'It doesn't matter that Pastor Everett [Vander Horst] is leaving; we're going to be church planting in New England,'" Nick says.

"But it became clear that Shawnee was where I felt called. New England was what I *wanted* to want, but it was not where I was called." Nick was ordained as pastor at Shawnee Park in September 2012.

Shawnee welcomed the new pastor but still needed a ministry coordinator.

Rewind six months to spring, when Nick had approached his classmate Kath-

erine Hirschberg about applying for the ministry coordinator position.

"At the time, I asked Nick if he thought [the position] could be ordained," Katherine says. "And he said, 'Probably not.'"

"So I thought, 'Well, it's nice that he thought of me, but I'm called to be a pastor.' So I said no."

Over the next four months, Katherine continued search processes with other churches and again declined interviewing with Shawnee.

"But then I started thinking, 'I *could* use my gifts well at Shawnee.'"

Three days later, Katherine's phone rang. A member of Shawnee's search committee said, "We're asking you to reconsider. We're partway through the interview process and your name keeps coming up."

Katherine interviewed the next day. She and her husband, Tim, found themselves in a discernment process.

"One of the things Tim said was, 'All along I've been praying that you would find a ministry position where you could use your gifts. I haven't been praying that you'd be ordained.'"

"So we decided that this could be where God was calling me. I accepted the job."

"I very much feel called to be here at Shawnee now," Katherine says. "My overarching calling is to be a pastor. I don't know if I will be ordained in one or two



Katherine Hirschberg and Nick Hopkins reflect on their first year of ministry at Shawnee Park.

Katharine Hirschberg
reads Scripture for a
worship service.

You add.
God multiplies.

MINISTRY SHARES
TOGETHER
DOING MORE



years, or 15 or 20 years. But I'm doing ministry now, and it's so deeply good," she says.

Supported on the Journey

As Nick and Katherine's first year together at Shawnee unfolded, they recognized a need for more training in leading a growing ministry. So they contacted Calvin Seminary president Jul Medenblik, who came to the seminary after 16 years of pastoring a growing church in Illinois.

"We said to Jul, 'You grew a church; we're in a growing church. What do we do?'" Nick remembers.

The three met for lunch to begin this conversation.

"Meeting with Nick and Katherine helps me as president stay connected to alumni and students," Medenblik says.

"I wanted them to know, 'You're not isolated; you're not alone. We want to come alongside you.' That's our vision at Calvin Seminary: to help church growers and planters."

Now on the cusp of their second year at Shawnee, Katherine and Nick depend on each other's ministry strengths and reach out for support available to them.

And they rely on God's Spirit. With delight, they watch God on the move at Shawnee and witness his surprising ways.

"I've found that I'm sometimes used when I least expect it," Nick says. "The Lord uses you when he will use you, not necessarily when you think you are at your best." ■



Kristy Manion is a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary. She and her husband, Josh, are the parents of two young sons and live in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Pray for Seminary Students from Around the World

Emmanuel Saba Bileya, Th.M., Nigeria 🇳🇮

Nigeria's official language is English; about 50 percent of the population is Christian. Sharia law has been introduced in Nigeria's northern states, challenging the country's government and threatening Christians in the affected states.

Please pray that God will equip me to serve him faithfully as I study. Pray also that God will protect my wife and six children from the religious and ethnic crisis back in Nigeria, and that he will restore peace and justice to Nigeria. Pray that God uses the Nigerian government to serve his purposes.

Yakuv Gurung, Th.M., Nepal 🇳🇵

Nepal is home to eight of the 10 highest mountain peaks in the world. Poverty is a challenge: 47 percent of the population is underemployed and working less than half time. Nepal is predominantly Hindu, but a Christian church has been planted in each of its 75 districts.

Please pray for my studies, for my financial needs to be met, and for the health of my family. Please pray that my home church will take the gospel around Nepal and establish many new churches so that the gospel is planted in every corner of the country. Pray also for political stability and for the November constitutional election in Nepal.

Eduardo Gonzalez-Rodriguez, M.A. in Worship & Educational Ministries, Honduras 🇧🇮

Ninety-six percent of Hondurans identify themselves as Christian, and children make up more than half of the country's population. Widespread poverty is a root cause for the difficult socioeconomic challenges Honduras faces.

Please pray that God will grant me wisdom to discern what I am learning at seminary and make applications in my context. Pray for courage, as the move back to Honduras with my family represents a major challenge. Pray also that violence would cease in Honduras: that drug trafficking, gang activity, and organized crime would lose hold of our towns and citizens.

Jiyong Kim, M.Div., South Korea 🇰🇷

Six of the 10 largest Christian churches in the world are in South Korea, and about one-third of South Koreans identify as Christian. North Korea's Christians are a very small minority, about 1 percent of the population.

Please pray that I will continue to grow in the Word and in the Spirit as I study, and for more fruitful relationships to be a part of my life. Pray also for North Korea, because the oppression and persecution of Christians and peaceful citizens is horrific. Pray that God will open up and heal North Korea in his time, in his way, and through our prayers.

Ali Salim, M.T.S., Indonesia 🇮🇩

The Christian church in Indonesia has grown over the past 50 years. Even so, today only about 5 percent of Indonesians are evangelical Christians in this predominantly Muslim country.

Please pray for health for family, that I can finish my program next year, and for leading about future studies after I graduate.

In Indonesia, children are educated according to their own religious convictions. But it is often the case that a Christian student may learn about Christianity from a Muslim teacher and be misinformed. Pray for God to provide Christian teachers, specifically Christian teachers who can teach Christianity, so that the gospel of Christ will spread throughout Indonesia.

Information about these countries was adapted from operationworld.org.

Letting the Light Shine

Everything about the account of Samuel seems calculated to emphasize the darkness. It was night. And before electricity, the night was frighteningly dark.

The message came to a young boy, a bright and seemingly enlightened boy, but one who does not yet see clearly. The high priest was an elderly man in the twilight of his life; his eyesight was almost gone. A nightlight was burning, but it was almost out.

Add to that the most telling darkness of all: “The word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions” (1 Sam. 3:1). When “the boy Samuel ministered before the Lord,” folks couldn’t see the Lord very clearly—nor did they really want to. They did not hear God; they did not see God. And so they did not follow God.

Now consider our own culture. Most people know God gave 10 commandments but few seem to know what those are. Fewer still try to obey them. Many have Bibles in their homes on shelves; far fewer store them in their hearts.

A recent denominational survey (which, by the way, had far better participation than ever before) indicates that less than 35 percent of respondents spend time daily with God! The Word of the Lord is rare in that environment too. God can hardly be seen clearly when God is only rarely consulted.

Samuel lived in the time of the judges—a time when everyone did what was right in their own eyes. We live in a time like that too. Laws are formulated and decisions made without much consideration for God’s will.

We often decide matters by judging by what seems best to us. We sometimes make personal and moral and financial

decisions based on our needs and desires, not on God’s will. We make up our minds on matters like immigration and stewardly living and a host of political issues on the basis of what we prefer, not what God requires. We decide where to live and how to live and even with whom to live on the basis of what is comfortable and satisfying to us, not what the Lord of the universe might expect of us.

It was a sad time when old Eli could hardly see and young Samuel did not yet see clearly. When it came to seeing God’s will and following God’s way, for most people it was like the night. And today is not much different.

Let’s look toward the Light that still burns brightly and is a lamp for our feet. There is an institution training persons to shed that Light on us and others; let’s offer regular prayers for Calvin Theological Seminary and all who teach and learn there. Pray that they will see the Light in such a way that it enables them to shed that Light on our lives. Support the efforts of Calvin Seminary with your prayers and gifts. Together let’s pledge to do

all we can to make the Word of God not “rare” but plentiful in our own lives by reading it, listening to it, reflecting on it, and following it.

In the opening chapter of 1 Samuel, the Word of the Lord was rare. But Samuel, who listened to that Word and followed it, became someone of whom it was said that God “let none of his words fall to the ground” (1 Sam. 3:19). May God let the same be said of all who are learning to speak the Word of the Lord to us. May their words fall not to the ground but into receptive hearts. ■



GOODSALT

“Old Eli could hardly see and young Samuel did not yet see clearly.”



Rev. Joel Boot is executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

You add.
God multiplies.

OUT AND ABOUT



Last October, Katelyn Beaty became the youngest managing editor of *Christianity Today*.

Communicating the Christian Perspective

After Katelyn Beaty graduated from Calvin College in 2006, she spent a semester abroad at Oxford University studying theology and contemplating her future.

When she returned, she took a job as an editorial assistant at the evangelical periodical *Christianity Today*.

Five years later, Beaty, 28, was appointed *Christianity Today*'s managing editor, becoming the first female to oversee the publication's daily editorial operations.

She credits Calvin College for preparing her for the job, which she began last October.

"Calvin was a revelation to me," she said. "It was all about the academics and the integration of faith and learning."

Beaty hopes to attract a greater number of next-generation and female readers and writers to the magazine, envisioning an editorial approach that sets a "thoughtful and charitable tone" and encourages the publication to "continue being a big tent with wide boundaries."

She majored in communications arts and sciences at Calvin and began exploring the engagement of faith and culture in her studies, on the *Chimes* staff, and in the student activities office, where she worked for two years.

"Calvin helped me gain my footing and my perspective," Beaty said. ■

—Bruce Buursma, Calvin College

From Bitterness to Faithfulness

A stutter and a lack of education had left KC with a job he didn't like, feeling bitter.

But KC's perspective changed when he began listening several years ago to Back to God Ministries International's radio program *Listen to My Heart*.

KC, who lives in Hong Kong, shared his bitter thoughts with Laisin Cheung, the program's producer, who initiated a discipleship conversation with KC.

"It wasn't that KC didn't know about Jesus," explained Laisin. "He just needed someone to lead him to understand the relevance of the gospel to his life."

As he continued listening to the program, KC says, he was encouraged by the biblical advice on everyday issues.

Although BTGMI's Chinese ministry stopped producing *Listen to My Heart* in 2011 to focus on other outreach in mainland China,

BTGMI's contact with KC didn't end.

Laisin continued discipling KC through Facebook and introduced him to other discipleship resources.

Eventually, Laisin connected him with her brother, Jonathan Cheung, a pastor near KC's home.

Jonathan invited KC to his church and began a Bible study with him.

"I am very thankful Pastor Cheung would take time to teach and talk with me," says KC.

After years of writing letters, Facebook messages, and emails, Laisin was able to meet KC at her brother's church while traveling to Hong Kong last November.

KC has full faith in Christ. Thankful for God's faithfulness, he now approaches his work as a security officer with a much more positive attitude. ■

—Brian Clark, Back to God Ministries International



Laisin Cheung, a BTGMI Chinese ministry leader, and her brother, Pastor Jonathan Cheung, met with KC (his face obscured).

Missions for the Future

While teaching in a Nigerian primary school several years ago, Istifanus Bahago sensed God calling him to be a pastor.

So he left his job and entered the Theological College of Northern Nigeria. There he realized the need for

Christians to share the gospel beyond their own country.

He later became president of the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN) and promoted this message throughout the denomination.

In January 2013, the CRCN sent Bahago and his wife to Sierra Leone as missionaries.

The CRCN was able to send the Bahagos because of support provided by Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) to the denomination.

Helping the Nigerian denomination send missionaries to Sierra Leone is one example of how CRWM's

long-term commitment to evangelism, church planting, and leadership development and training with local denominations is showing fruit. Local denominations are becoming international missions sending agencies.

CRWM is giving grants to local denominations such as the CRCN so that they can carry out the Great Commission in their circumstances. In addition to subsidizing evangelists' salaries, the grants enable a wide variety of leaders to receive further training for their roles.

The grants also provide believers with Bibles, fund seminary scholarships, help provide Christian education for children, and much more.

In this changing environment, CRWM also needs to continue sending missionaries overseas. Christians in many countries are just starting to get a vision for applying God's Word to their lives. Others are looking for biblical leadership training. Millions of people—most of them in predominantly Muslim cultures—have yet to hear the gospel. The needs are many.

As it does this work, CRWM has found it necessary to change its missionary-support model to cover the rising cost of meeting these needs.

Instead of basing missionary support-raising goals on a worldwide average, the new model is based on individualized budgets. These budgets, cut down to basic costs, enable

A Grandmother's Love

There is little that Paskulina Adokorach, 70, wouldn't do to help improve the lives of her children and grandchildren.

That's why, when World Renew and its partner came to her village in Uganda in January 2013 and talked about starting a women's Village Savings and Loan group, she was eager to participate.

The program would run by having the 18 group members meet weekly, each contributing 1,000 shillings (about 38 U.S. cents) of their earnings to a joint account. They could use the savings to provide each other with low-interest loans and to work on community projects.

At first, people in the community didn't think Paskulina would "be able to actively participate at her age," recalls World Renew staff member, Joseph Mutebi.

But Paskulina was determined.

She worked hard, contributing funds every week, participating in decision-making, holding others accountable for repaying their loans, and suggesting ways the group could contribute to the community.

With her loan, Paskulina started a small business buying, drying, and selling silver fish. She also boils maize to sell to workers for breakfast.

When asked how she manages despite her age, she replies, "I do it on a scale and at a pace that is within my capacity and energy. I do it to support my grandchildren."

Paskulina has also become an influential member of the group.

Other group members used to be intimidated to lead an opening prayer. Paskulina paved the way, setting an example and encouraging others to join her.

Her financial goal is to earn enough money to construct a permanent house for herself, her children, and her grandchildren. ■



Paskulina and her grandchildren.

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg, *World Renew*

You add.

Faith Alive Promotes *Seeking God's Face*

Jane's church bought a copy of *Seeking God's Face* for everyone in the congregation. Individuals have been giving the book, copublished by Faith Alive Christian Resources and Baker Books, as gifts for many occasions.

And it was a resource for the CRC's 2012 Prayer Summit featuring the theme "Seeking God's Face."

"Since it was first released in October of 2010, people have really caught on to this book," said Chris Scotti, a sales representative for Faith Alive.

Because of the interest, Faith Alive has launched a special promotion providing bulk discounts for the books.

The Christian Reformed Church's publishing ministry is also offering people the opportunity to download a free PDF of the Advent portion of the book. People will be able to share the link for the book on social media, print it in their bulletins, and put it on church websites.

"If people sample it this way, many will likely be hooked and want to buy their own copy and possibly several more," said Scotti.

Written by Philip F. Reinders, the book is available in multiple formats and includes daily readings comprised of an opening prayer, a psalm and Scripture reading, suggestions for personal prayer, a prayer based on a classic creed or confession, and a closing blessing.

For more information, call 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.faihaliveresources.org. ■



churches and individuals to know the direct costs of having missionaries in their ministry locations.

By 2020, CRWM career missionaries will see their support-raising goals rise over several years to 90 percent of their individualized budgets. CRWM staff members, meanwhile, have redoubled their efforts to help missionaries reach their new support goals.

The new goals will enable CRWM to maintain current ministry initiatives, replace retiring missionaries, and send out new missionaries in response to urgent needs. As they do now, Ministry Shares will cover a portion of CRWM's missionary budgets and overall ministry initiatives.

Through these missionary support changes, CRWM will continue partnering with churches and leaders around the world to expand God's kingdom. ■

—Sarah Lin,
Christian Reformed
World Missions

Opening Doors for Muslim Prayer

The Multi-Faith Centre at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Richmond, British Columbia, nurtures the spiritual lives of a bustling, multicultural student body.

The ministry, a Christian Reformed Home Missions partner, is led by Chaplain Sam Lee.

In September 2011, Lee began the Multi-Faith Centre to provide pastoral care for students, discipleship for believers, and outreach to non-Christians.

"We ask, 'How can we affirm the life of faith here?'" said Lee.

At first the university didn't seem to appreciate the presence of the Multi-Faith Centre, confining its work to two or three days a week in a crowded office space.

But that promises to change. "Now Kwantlen is investing in us. The blueprint for school



Chaplain Sam Lee nurtures the spiritual lives of a bustling, multicultural student body.

renovations has dedicated office space and prayer space for the Multi-Faith Centre," Lee said.

Holiday dinners, Bible studies, and an invitation to pray are just a few ways Lee draws students eager for understanding and grace.

"There's a growing Muslim population on campus, and they pray all over the place—in the hallways and wherever they are," said Lee.

"This was causing some disruptions, and I reached out to the Muslims and said they could have our space to pray."

A Muslim student told Lee how deeply he appreciates the policy. "He said, 'When I go to mosque, nobody talks to me, but when I come here you talk to me with respect and listen to me. I really appreciate that.'" ■

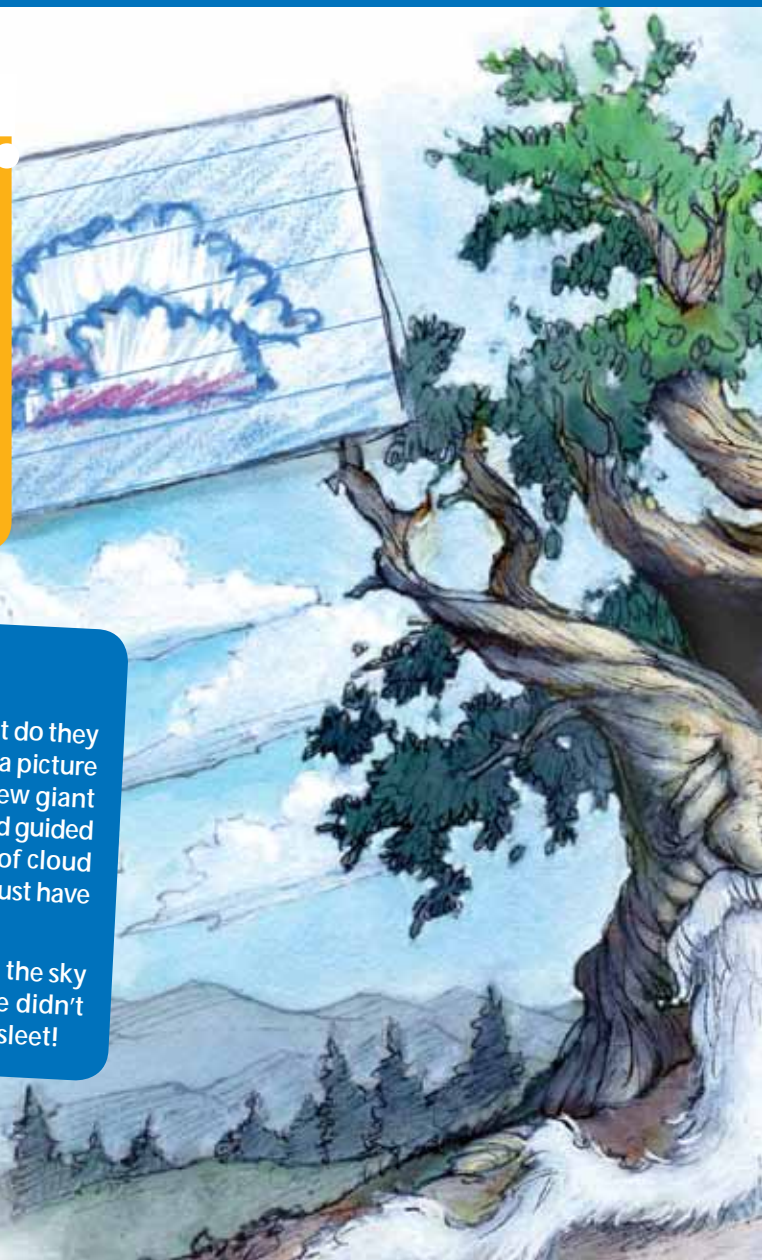
—Lorilee Craker,
Christian Reformed
Home Missions

You can find longer
versions of many of these
stories online at
thebanner.org/together.

Take a Hike.

Would you like to take a hike with God? You can! Any time you hike through the woods or take a stroll around the block, God is with you. Let's take a look at some of the amazing things God has created. **Grab this magazine, a notebook, and some colored pencils.** Walk through your neighborhood, or ask your mom or dad to take you to a park. Follow the suggestions below—and have fun!

Can't go outside? Cuddle up on a comfy couch and imagine that you are walking with God anywhere in the world!



On Cloud Nine

Look up into the sky. Do you see any clouds? If so, what do they look like? Are they big and fluffy? Thin and flat? Draw a picture of what you see. If there are no clouds, then draw a few giant marshmallow clouds! Exodus 13:21 talks about how God guided the people of Israel to the Promised Land in a pillar of cloud during the day. Imagine what this magnificent cloud must have looked like. Then draw a picture in your notebook.

Cool Cloud Facts: Clouds form when water rises to the sky and collects in the form of white or gray clouds. If we didn't have clouds, we would never have rain, snow, hail, or sleet!

ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY



Beautiful Birds

As you continue your hike with God, try to find a bird flying in the sky or perched in a tree. What kind of bird is it? What color is it? Draw a picture of your new feathered friend in your notebook. Matthew 6:26 reminds us that Jesus loves us much more than anything in creation: "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" We are much more important than a small bird, in God's eyes. So if God provides food for the birds of the sky, then he will definitely take care of us!

Cool Bird Facts: The smallest bird egg is a hummingbird's egg—it's about the size of a pea. The biggest bird egg belongs to the Ostrich—its egg can be as large as a cantaloupe!





Tons of Trees

Pick out a large tree that stands out to you. What kind of tree is it? What do its leaves look like? Draw a picture of this tree in your notebook. Trace around the edges of a single leaf and then color it in, if you like.

Isaiah 55:12 says, "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands." Perhaps trees clap their hands as their branches sway in the wind. Everything in God's creation can "clap" their hands in praise to God—including you!

Cool Tree Facts: Did you know that trees are the longest-living organisms on earth? The world's oldest trees are Bristlecone pine trees. Some are of them are around 4,600 years old!



A Solid Rock

Keep your eyes peeled for a smooth stone that fits in your hand, and draw a picture of the rock you have chosen. Psalm 18:2 describes God as a rock. Just as a rock is strong and firm, God is strong and will protect us. Take your rock home with you as a reminder of God's strength!

Cool Rock Facts: *Igneous* rocks are formed from magma—really hot liquid from volcanoes! *Sedimentary* rocks are formed from dirt and sand that is pressed together over a long period of time.

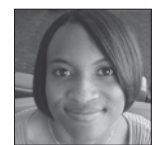


After you've finished your hike with God, write him a letter in your notebook. Thank God for the amazing things in creation that remind us of the many ways he loves us and takes care of us!

Interesting Insects

Now it's time to stop for a minute and take a closer look at the ground. See any interesting bugs? Look how fast they go! Choose one insect to sketch in your notebook. Most insects are very small but very strong and fast. Proverbs 6:7 highlights the ant: "It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest." The next time you have to clean your room, think of the hard-working ant!

Cool Ant Facts: Ants can lift 20 times their own body weight—that's quite a load! Ants usually live for around 45 to 60 days.



Christin Baker is a full-time stay-at-home mom who also writes for Faith Alive. She is a member of Resurrection Fellowship Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

You Really Should Go

YOU MIGHT BE ANGRY AT YOUR CHURCH. Maybe you're upset at its style or direction, displeased with its doctrine, or utterly disenchanted with its pastor.

If so, I truly hope that you make a prayerful and godly effort to resolve the problem with your pastor and council and that you choose to stay. However, if after trying to work things out you are still visibly, audibly, persistently unhappy, you should leave—and soon.

You should leave in a clear, orderly, mature fashion for the good of the church. Since the church is God's household, suggests the apostle Paul, we are all under holy and disciplined constraint. We need to consider how we "ought to conduct" ourselves within the church—even in the process of leaving.

What's Going On?

As a pastor, I love the people of my congregation. I want to serve them; eagerly I pray to feed and nourish them in the body of Christ. It would be terrific if the church were numerically strong and growing, if we could all serve God's kingdom shoulder to shoulder, wrapped in the grace and truth of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, in churches that are experiencing pain and conflict, this vision may seem like an elusive dream. Perpetually unhappy members do damage to the household of God. A group from one congregation is deeply displeased with the pastor for changing the style of worship services. The last straw comes when the council changes the time of the morning worship service. The group absents themselves from worship because the time change interferes with their weekly golf plans. They also begin streaming bad news about the pastor to anyone who will listen. Their vocal discontent creates stress for the congregation, bruises the pastor, and casts a pall on the church. And this is not an isolated example.

It's as if two vehicles are on a collision course. One is a bus filled with parishioners who have different passions and hopes. Some want the church to be the way it was back when life made sense and the kids were little and the world wasn't so crazy. Others are trying to get their kids to come to church with them instead of to the mega-church across town, but they're on the verge of giving up because the truth is, it's pretty cool over there. Or they watched Joel Osteen on TV before leaving for church, and they wish their pastor would preach like that, even once.

In the other vehicle is a pastor who wants to spread the gospel. The pastor has read the latest books and ministry journals. He or she has all sorts of ideas for ministry that require big adjustments and cost money. Meanwhile, he or she must adhere to Reformed doctrine and church order and be more concerned with pleasing God than pleasing people. She might, for example,



refuse to officiate a wedding for reasons of Christian principle. Or gently counsel husbands or wives to repent of having sex with someone who is not their spouse. Or step in to protect someone from abuse. Of course, pastors make mistakes too. They have weaknesses, insecurities, and limitations. They may try to push the congregation in a new direction too hard.

At the intersection there's a traffic jam, and everyone is yelling. People are losing jobs and losing market share; they're losing their kids and losing their hair. Everyone's on edge.

Weary and disappointed, they arrive at church on Sunday morning. A kid is playing video games during the prelude. One person wants a sermon about Christian education, another wants one about abortion. A dad has to have his daughter at soccer camp by 1 p.m. And some just want to eat a donut and make their tee time.

Why You Should Leave

To get through this intersection, the congregation needs to steer a course. The pastor and the elders, in tune with the Lord, must define what this church is for and where it's going. It needs to set a vision and a plan. Once that course is set in place, the members need to prayerfully get on board.

If you cannot do that, you should leave.

Why? First, because your fellow church members want to worship and serve the Lord. People who create hissy-fit drama

Two vehicles are on a collision course.

church's agenda that is bigger than me, well, that's the day I should leave.

So it is with you and your church. If your unhappiness is damaging the unity of the church, you should leave. Visitors feel your cloud and smell it too. And ask yourself what you're teaching your kids or grandkids about being a Christian. If you're going to stay, you must, before God, resolve not to spread your discontent, lest you infect the rest of the body.

How You Should Leave

How you leave matters. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus teaches us to try to work out our problems person to person. Unfortunately the practice of this teaching is rare. Often the pastor or the elders find out about a problem long after it surfaces. It may be months before they find out that a member has been boycotting church. During that time, however, that person may have told a great many people about the perceived offence.

If you have a problem with the church, ask to meet with the pastor and an elder. If they reach out to you, agree to meet and talk. Or write a letter to the elders. Think carefully and state the issue with mature, courteous language. Avoid sarcasm or personal attacks. Write in such a way that you could show it to God. Have the dignity to sign it.

If you still intend to leave, seek a new church. When you find it, request a transfer of membership, or, if the church is from another denomination, graciously inform them and ask to have your name removed from membership. Don't string this out for years. Don't make life more difficult for the elders. Take the initiative to transfer your membership, and do it like a grown-up follower of Jesus.

When people see you at a restaurant and say, "Hey, we've noticed you haven't been at church" say, "Yes, we needed a change." Then change the subject. Be humble, confidential, and gracious. For God's sake, and for the good of his church, act like a Christian.

Change is really, really difficult. We're not all going to agree all the time. Yet if we all behave in biblical, godly fashion, we can build churches that are warm and joyful in purpose and fruitful in ministry. One woman from our congregation said it best: "Just tell us if you're in the boat or not. And if you're in, grab an oar!" ■



Keith Mannes is pastor of Highland Christian Reformed Church in Marion, Mich.

instead hurt the church. Second, because the church is doing God's work—work that is life-changing and loaded with divine power. In order to move forward, God's people need a unified vision. The church needs cheerful supporters, not grenade-launching detractors.

I'm not arguing here against people holding opposing viewpoints. As a pastor under the authority of council, the council sometimes says no to me. Sometimes their way is better. At major junctures where I don't get my way, I have to ask myself, Is this a deal-breaker? Can I cheerfully live and serve in ministry here? The church needs strong leaders and strong church members, and we have to figure out ministry together.

Every church member is under authority. Professing members of the Christian Reformed church promise to "honor and submit to the authority and discipline of the church." We promise to "join with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord everywhere." When we ordain pastors, we promise to "joyfully receive [them] in the Lord" and to give the pastor the honor of the office, remembering that through the pastor "God speaks to us." We are charged to hold elders and deacons "in honor." Members are bound by these commitments. This is the church of the living God. We serve it—and him.

I may or may not agree with everything in the Christian Reformed Church, but I must be able to serve within it with a basic, workable cheerfulness. The day I become harmful to the



PHOTO BY FREDERIC RVOULLER/FLICKE

Living Fully in the Third Third of Life



TWENTY YEARS AGO WE BEGAN keeping a family record of all the books we read. Looking at that list now, we see the phases and stages of our lives and those of our families, friends, and communities, covering subjects from faith and farming to gardening, growing “fine young men,” and grandparenting. Most recently a title added to our list indicates we are edging toward a new phase.

I will carry Walter C. Wright’s *The Third Third of Life: Preparing for Your Future* (InterVarsity) with me into the rest of my life. Wright thinks of life in thirds divided into segments: ages birth to 30, 30 to 60, and 60 onward. Early into his third third, Wright asked his mentor, Max De Pree, for counsel on transitioning his leadership gifts into this next phase of his life. Drawing on their long friendship, Wright and De Pree spent time in conversation about how one enters into this stage of life with a sense of calling, purpose, and grace. Wright then invites others to join in this thoughtful dialog.

Drawing on the stories of people who have lived fully into the latter third,

What are your hopes and dreams for the future?

Wright invites readers to consider their own future, asking, How have you faced fear and embraced hope in the past? What are your hopes and dreams for the future? Who are your mentors? Who looks to you to be mentored? Wright encourages readers to be proactive in engaging the conversation by forming a “third third group of trust” and spending six to eight sessions together in communal self-reflection.

As a compendium to Wright’s book, you might read *10 Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me about Retirement*, co-authored by Rein Selles, a member of West End Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta. The authors identify key principles that are a part of responsible fiscal planning.

My husband and I are not yet in the third third of our lives as Wright defines it, but his book opened the door to conversations we want to have with our family, with friends, and in our community as to what our lives might look like beyond our present work. We are tiptoeing toward entering this place with thoughtful and graceful steps. ■



Jenny deGroot is a teacher and librarian in Langley, British Columbia.



Better Food for a Better World

by Erin McGraw

reviewed by Adele Konyndyk

How do you better the world? In this novel, three offbeat young couples believe the answer lies in ice cream—at least in part. These ice cream shop co-owners also put great stock in vocational gifts and artful entertainment, from classical concerts to circus contortionist acts.

Unsurprisingly, tensions arise among these entangled pairs. Yet this is far from a predictable read. These complicated characters hunger for the good and true—for “the real thing.” They will frustrate you as they chase rightness in the wrong ways and they will charm you as they painfully change for the better. Thanks to McGraw’s superb ear for sharp, funny dialogue, they will even make you laugh. (Wipf & Stock)



Pursuing Justice: The Call to Live & Die for Bigger Things

by Ken Wytmsa with D. R. Jacobsen
reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema



With clarity, scriptural truth, and deep compassion for a suffering world, Ken Wytmsa explores the many elements of justice and its implications for our relationship with God, others, and creation. Between chapters, interludes of imagery, poetry, short meditations, and interviews allow other voices to “help illuminate a brighter understanding of justice.” Perhaps most comforting and compelling is his chapter on “How Justice Surfaces the Need for Grace.” (Thomas Nelson)



Grandma and the Great Gourd

by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni
reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema



In this retelling of a Bengali folktale, Grandma travels from her Indian village through a vast jungle fraught with dangers to visit her lonely daughter. Though Grandma is afraid, she thinks, “What’s life without a little adventure?” And that’s what Grandma finds as she confronts a clever fox, a fierce bear, and a crafty tiger. Grandma outwits them all. This charming, vividly illustrated picture book, told in a lyrical voice with engaging sound effects, will have young readers cheering for Grandma. (Roaring Brook Press)

The Network

reviewed by Leon H. Johnston

The Network is an online networking site that the Christian Reformed Church provides for the benefit of local churches. Maybe you have a question about worship or would like to learn about small group ministry. The Network allows you to connect with pastors and colleagues from near and far about your ministry questions and concerns. There are 15 different “networks” or areas of ministry listed for discussion and Q & A. The Network also offers webinars on various topics to facilitate continuing education. (network.crcna.org)

Spirityouall

by Bobby McFerrin
reviewed by Otto Selles



As a child, Bobby McFerrin heard his father learn how to sing African-American spirituals from Hall Johnson, who had learned them from his grandmother, a former slave. So the roots of this album run deep, with seven traditional spirituals. But the album also goes wide, with five of McFerrin’s own spirituals sung in a range of styles from the blues to bluegrass to jazz. Bassist Esperanza Spalding appears on some tracks, providing beautiful harmony. If you are ready to hear spirituals sung in a fresh way, this recording will definitely delight. (Sony)

THE LOWDOWN



Catechism Class
In *A Faith Worth Teaching*, contributing writers explore the history and importance of the Heidelberg Catechism in today’s world. (Reformation Heritage)



Rewritten
If you need to take a break from seriousness, take a look at the “Kid History” videos on YouTube, where children tell the stories in their own voices while parents act them out.



Of Mud and Men
Iron Man 3 and *Mud* are both now available on disc; see thebanner.org for earlier reviews.



Write On
From September 25-28, the Maranatha Christian Writers’ Conference offers panels and workshops on the shores of Lake Michigan in Muskegon, Mich. (writewithpurpose.org)

Daily Rituals: How Artists Work

by Mason Currey
reviewed by Phil Christman Jr.

Gustav Mahler composed his symphonies from a stone hut in the woods. Truman Capote wrote and later drank in bed, while freakishly tall Thomas Wolfe leaned up against his refrigerator to scribble. Balzac maintained a famously tough work schedule with the aid of coffee; W. H. Auden and the mathematician Paul Erdos used mild amphetamines to the same purpose. Marilynne Robinson follows no routine at all. Reading from this addictive little book will quickly become a part of yours. (Knopf)



MORE REVIEWS
ONLINE

Cyber Bullying

What Parents and Schools Can Do



A S A HIGH SCHOOL vice-principal, I've seen my share of bullying. This fall will bring on familiar scenarios: Girls will shun a girl so that she refuses to come to school. Boys will make homophobic or racial comments to that kid in class who looks different and doesn't seem to have any buddies. Parents will call me about a threat their son has received. A girl will be crying in my office about photos taken by her now ex-boyfriend that are making the rounds. There will be stare-downs, shoulder bumps, threats, and all kinds of gossip. And most of the bullying will include an online component.

Why Kids Bully

I'm always perplexed when adults can't understand why bullying is so rampant amongst teens. Even a casual look at media

and popular culture shows that bullying is not only prevalent in the adult world but is valued. Our culture models bullying.

Check out the website of any major newspaper and you'll see comments after an article in which adults belittle and attack one another. We call that "open discussion." Watch competitive reality shows such as *Survivor* or *Amazing Race* where competitors lie, gossip, and spread rumours about each other. We call that "good strategy." On shows like *Glee* the humor often relies on kids and teachers being venomous toward one another. We call that "entertainment." Take your beloved sport—hockey, basketball, football—and witness the trash-talk, put-downs, and physical intimidation. We call that "the game within the game"—a necessary element to win. In fact, fans stand up and cheer when it happens.

Many researchers believe the prefrontal cortex of the human brain—where good judgment and empathy live—doesn't fully develop until people are in their mid-20s. So when we give fifth-grade

children cell phones and tablets, as a growing number of parents are doing, and place them in a media and sports landscape that actually values bullying, should we be surprised when kids have the tools and are surrounded by role models to talk "smack" about each other? Just sayin'.

Why do kids bully? There are no neat answers. Yes, bullies probably have low self-esteem and were likely bullied themselves. Yes, kids like to empower themselves over other kids for no good reason. But the stereotypical "meanie" who steals a kid's lunch money no longer defines the profile of a bully. More and more it's "good" kids from stable families who are bullying other kids—mostly online. Recent media stories about bullying have featured cyber bullying: pictures of girls taken at parties or humiliating videos posted to YouTube. Social media are the wild, wild west for teens.

Often parents have no idea how their children are conducting themselves online. They think they do—but judging

Our culture models bullying.

from the exasperated expressions on their faces when their child gets caught, it's obvious they do not. Just yesterday I removed a student from school for homophobic slurs and threats toward another student. As his parents read the printed-out Twitter feed in disbelief, the son casually said, "It's just the Internet, what's the big deal? Everyone says that stuff on the Internet." And he's right.

Recently, we dealt with student council students who were making verbal attacks on several students and teachers. These are top students, athletes, and leaders. There seems to be a disconnect (there's the prefrontal cortex not working again) with teens that their actions are even wrong. Why else would football players convicted of rape boast about their exploits online and completely expose themselves for their crime?

What Can Schools Do?

Schools need to develop deliberate strategies to both prevent and respond to bullying. Schools need to communicate clearly to parents that no forms of bullying will be tolerated; they need policies and pro-

cesses with escalating consequences for bullies. That may seem obvious, but it's surprising how often adults in a position to respond to bullying don't acknowledge it as anything other than a teenage rite of passage. Even though it's been decades now since schools endorsed initiation days for freshmen, there are still sports coaches who turn a blind eye to hazing.

Schools need a plan to embed digital citizenry in the lesson plans of every subject, starting in kindergarten. As more and more teachers use web 2.0 tools as communication and collaboration devices in the classroom, appropriate online interaction needs to be taught. At my school, we are planning a wider response to increased cyber bullying. We're collecting samples of what kids are saying online and in texts and sharing them with students (minus the names) at a school assembly. We're inviting a police officer, a counselor, an employer, and a college recruitment officer to talk to kids about how they are not only hurting others but how they are hurting their future prospects for acceptance to college or employment. Finally, bullying has to be part of daily conversation. Responses can't simply be a one-off Pink Shirt Day or a school assembly. We need to engage students continuously in their responsibility to respect others.

The Role of Parents

It's easy to tell parents that they need to monitor their children's online and cell phone activity. *Effective* monitoring is a different story. As the world becomes wireless and as kids' priorities turn increasingly to their digital devices, they find all kinds of ways to veil their online activity. They open Twitter and Instagram accounts for Mom's eyes and have secondary accounts with their friends. Some parents take the "I don't even want to know" attitude because the job has become so unwieldy. They will tell me they don't even know how Twitter works.

Parents, you need to figure it out! As you give your kids tools such as cell phones and tablets, you need to deliber-

Before you use social media . . .

THINK!

- Is it **True**?
- Is it **Hurtful**?
- Is it **Illegal**?
- Is it **Necessary**?
- Is it **Kind**?



ately learn how those tools work and teach them digital citizenry. A simple online search will turn up many resources to draw from (see sidebar). Don't wait for a workshop leader to tell you what to do. Be proactive. Keep in mind that the social media scene is changing monthly.

Parents also need to take a hard look at their own online activity. The fastest-growing Facebook demographic is middle-aged people posting their own or their children's accomplishments online, inviting those "likes" and "Wow" comments from extended family. This culture of display—some might call it narcissism—invites a response. And when kids imitate it, their peers aren't equipped with the empathy and good judgment that parents might have in their responses. We put our kids at risk by modelling this kind of sharing when they naively do the same in a less accepting teen environment.

Bullying has been around since Cain and Abel, and it will be around until the end of time. When sin came into the world, humans turned on each other. We are called to love one another online as well as everywhere else—but simply telling teens to love one another isn't enough. We need to execute a deliberate plan, the foundation of which is love for one another, at school and at home. ■

Getting Started

nasponline.org/index.aspx National Association of School Psychologists, a highly respected organization with lots of bullying resources for schools.

stopbullying.gov An excellent resource that highlights the role of bystanders and methods to stop cyber bullying.

Dosomething.org A savvy website with some really excellent bullying materials.

tvoparents.tv.org Articles and videos with multiple perspectives about bullying to help parents of bullies and the bullied.

Stopabully.ca A national nonprofit begun by a British Columbia teacher gives kids a place to report bullying.

bullying.org Offers a course on bullying and gives those who are bullied a voice.



Ron DeBoer is vice-principal at Galt Collegiate Institute in Cambridge, Ontario. He is a member of the The Journey Church in Kitchener, Ontario.

Gun Violence: Are We Part of the Problem?

TO WHAT EXTENT DO WE TOLERATE VIOLENCE in our own lives? It's easy to point fingers at the gun culture in the United States and the problem of gangs in Toronto. But how willing are we to own our part of the terrible problem that everyone is discussing again since the latest tragic shooting spree?

As Christians, we should be troubled by anything that deliberately stirs up violent feelings in us toward other human beings, real or imagined. Unfortunately, many of us are among the insatiable consumers who support the industries that glorify violence.

The Lord certainly has a problem with violence. God was "grieved" in the days of Noah when "the earth was corrupt in God's sight and full of violence." God's prophets promoted a peaceful kingdom in which people "beat their swords into plowshares." And Isaiah makes special mention of the fact that the Messiah was slaughtered even though "he had done no violence."

Where does violence start? Not in a weapon but in the human heart. Jesus clearly said that anyone who is angry with his brother or sister is a murderer, while the Heidelberg Catechism identifies envy, hatred, anger, and vindictiveness as the root of murder.

A date at the movies earlier this year highlighted the prevalence and acceptability of violence. Marja and I went to see the latest James Bond movie, expecting to see some incredible stunts and a memorable villain. We'd forgotten how much killing there is in a 007 flick!

The worst part of our night out, however, was watching the trailers preceding the movie, especially one promoting *Django Unchained*, a remake of a bloody Western starring Jamie Foxx as a slave turned bounty hunter who rescues his wife from a brutal plantation owner. In the span of one minute and 25 seconds we were battered by 19 separate killings, a vicious fistfight, and the shocking image of crimson blood splattering on white cotton bolls. At one point, the lead character growls, "I like the way you die, boy." As Marja pushed her face into my shoulder, the trailer ironically announced that this ultra-violent film was set to premiere on Christmas Day! While the Newtown massacre last December prompted the studio to briefly consider delaying the release of this controversial box office hit, the movie's director and cast are adamant that there's no connection between violence in film and violence in real life.

Where does violence start?
Not in a weapon
but in the human heart.

While that debate continues, thoughtful followers of Jesus understand that a violent spirit must not be welcomed into our hearts, since all evil thoughts come from there. When a video game or movie inspires you to think, "Kill him," or a sporting event makes you scream, "Hit him again. He's still breathing," your heart is being turned from plowshares to swords, from peacemaking to war. Isn't this "anti-Christ?"

A print ad by Henry Repeating Arms featured a man wearing a specially designed holster carrying a Bible on one side and a gun on the other. The ad proclaimed, "There is nothing wrong with clinging to your guns and religion."

As offensive as this ad is, it doesn't offend God as much as a heart that smoothly shifts between worshiping the Prince of Peace and participating in mental bloodbaths. If our hearts shift too easily between "no violence" and "violence" and we comfortably go from worshiping Jesus on Sunday morning to playing *Grand Theft Auto* on Sunday afternoon, we have a serious problem: a divided heart.

The problem of gun violence needs more than a ban on assault weapons. It needs a wholehearted commitment to Christ's "peace on earth."

Starting with us. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



Peter Slofstra is pastor of Hope Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Courtice, Ontario.

Punch Lines

What has made *you* smile lately? Got a joke or funny incident you'd care to share with your wider church family? Please send it to *The Banner* at 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508; or email it to editorial@thebanner.org. Thanks!

While driving my grandchildren to school I heard a voice from the back of the van. "Opa, could you unlock the doors?"

"No. Why do you want to unlock the doors?" I asked.

"So we can jump out!" they said.

"Why do you want to jump out?" I managed.

"The music!"

The radio was tuned to a classical station.

—Gerry Schinkel

A friend of mine who's a doctor told this story about her 4-year-old daughter. On the way to preschool, the child began playing with the stethoscope she'd left on the car seat. "Wow," thought my friend, "my daughter wants to follow in my footsteps and be a doctor!"

Then the child spoke into the instrument: "Welcome to McDonald's. May I take your order?"

—Sue Lauritzen

My husband is a first-time deacon. Our 3-year-old daughter doesn't quite understand where the money goes when he brings the offering to the front of the church. One day we found

some spare change on the ground. I told her we should put it in the piggybank so we could save it. She replied, "I don't want to save it. I want to give it to Pastor John!"

—Ashley Wynia

A group of soldiers stood in formation at an Army base. The drill sergeant yelled, "All right! All you idiots fall out."

As the rest of the squad wandered away, one soldier remained at attention. The drill sergeant walked over until he was eye to eye with him and raised a single eyebrow. The soldier smiled and said, "Sure was a lot of 'em, huh Sarge?"

—George Vanderweit

A little boy was attending his first wedding. Looking for an opportunity to teach a little about the sanctity of marriage, his grandma asked, "How many women can a man marry?"

"Sixteen," said the boy.

Shocked, his grandma said, "Whatever made you say that?"

"Simple," he said. "Add it up like the preacher said: four better, four worse, four richer, four poorer."

—Chester VanderZee

Fresh out of law school, a young lawyer was pleading his first case. A train had killed 24 pigs, and the attorney was trying to impress the jury with the magnitude of the injury.

"Yes, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, 24 pigs," he said. "Twice the number there is in the jury box."

—John Veltkamp

It seems that our 3-year-old daughter, Megan, has already learned the Sunday afternoon routine of reading *The Banner* and having a nap on the couch!

—Steve and Sherry TenHove



While taking a vandalism report at an elementary school, I was interrupted by a little girl, about 6 years old. Looking up and down at my uniform, she asked, "Are you a cop?"

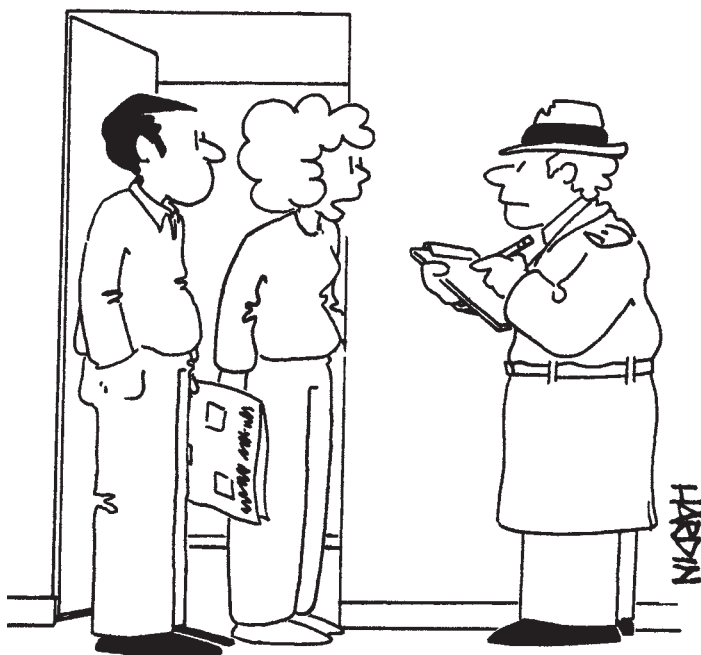
"Yes," I answered, and continued writing the report.

"My mother said if I ever needed help I should ask the police," she announced. "Is that right?"

"Yes, that's right," I replied.

"Well then," she said, extending her sneaker toward me, "would you please tie my shoe?"

—Herm Kelderman



"We're wavering between 'undecided' and 'no opinion.'"