

BANNER

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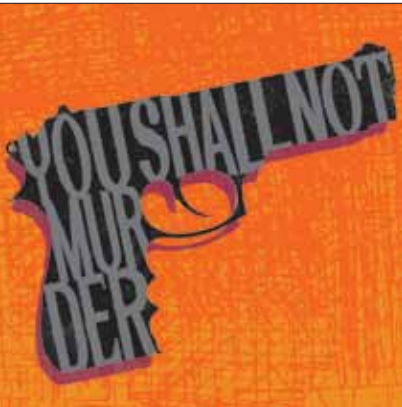
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Twenty Things You Might Not Know About Synod

YOU MAY KNOW THAT SYNOD is our denomination's annual leadership meeting. Our "broadest assembly" has final say over all matters denominational. It makes decisions on issues that affect us all: doctrinal, ethical, pastoral, and whatnot. It mandates our denominational agencies and ministries to do the work we best do together. And it holds our classes (regional groupings of churches) and congregations accountable to the Bible, our confessions, and the Church Order.

Here are 20 things you probably don't know about synod:

1) "Synod" is Greek for "roads coming together." 2) Most often, the "roads" of the 188 delegates (four from each classis), together with some advisors, converge for a week in June in Grand Rapids, Mich. 3) But some years synod meets elsewhere. 4) This year synod meets at Central College in Pella, Iowa, where it will conduct some joint sessions with the synod of the Reformed Church in America.

5) Synod's authority is "delegated authority," so it usually doesn't overrule decisions of local councils, 6) which have "original authority." 7) However, sometimes synod can depose an entire council, even "disaffiliate" an errant congregation, 8) which almost never happens.

Any CRC member can recommend changes in our teachings, practices, or ministries.

9) Between synod meetings the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA carries out synod's wishes. 10) Its delegates are appointed by the classes. 11) Synods have lots to talk about—the *Agenda for Synod* usually runs more than 400 pages. 12) Three main sources provide discussion/decision fodder: reports from committees synod has commissioned, reports from the CRC's agencies and ministries (consolidated into the mother of all reports by the denomination's executive director), and "overtures" from classes, congregations, and individuals asking synod to do or not do something. 13) Any CRC member can recommend to synod changes in our teachings, practices, or ministries—or appeal decisions of church councils or classes. 14) To do this, you start from the local level: for example, if you want synod to add "You Ain't Nothin' but a Hound Dog" to our denominational songbook, you would ask your local council to "overture" your classis. If your council agrees, it will take your request to classis. If classis agrees, then it will overture synod. 15) If your council demurs, you can overture classis yourself, and classis can take the matter further if it wants. If it doesn't want to, then you can make your own case directly to synod.

16) All delegates to synod are divided into eight or so "advisory committees" that pre-chew specific agenda items so they can help synod make decisions more efficiently (it works!). 17) So the first few days of synod are mostly devoted to these smaller meetings.

18) The *Agenda for Synod* is published in book form in mid-April and posted online at crcna.org by April 1. 19) After that date, delegates also receive supplementary reports, most of which also get posted.

20) The reason I'm saying all this in February is that in order to get any significant input into synod's conversations we need to be on the ball locally. It takes significant advance time to engage the process.

What happens at synod really matters. So tune in early—and lend your voice to this fascinating yearly conversation. ■



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Winter Grace

IT'S A GREY February day and I've just arrived home from work. I gaze out the window that opens to the yard and see a lone squirrel trying valiantly to find some water in the frozen birdbath. No other critters are in sight. It's as if this bone-chilling cold is not fit for flights of fancy or casual foraging—only the activities necessary to sustain life.

My observation reminds me of an article I read about winter. The author suggests that every season, no matter how we engage it, invites us to see with new eyes—to be open to a new perspective on what the poet Mary Oliver calls “the daily presentations.”

Trappist monk and author Thomas Merton often prefaced his observations on life and faith with a view of his landscape. He says, “Our mentioning of the weather—our perfunctory observations on what kind of day it is—are perhaps not idle. Perhaps we have a deep and

legitimate need to know in our entire being what the day is like, to *see* it and to *feel* it, to know how the sky is grey, paler in the south, with patches of blue in the southwest, with snow on the ground, the thermometer at 18 [minus 7.7C], the cold wind making your ears ache. . . . [A] day in which I have not shared truly in all this is no day at all. It is certainly part of my life of prayer.”

This day I've come home to an empty house—empty except for my dog and my elderly cat, who interprets my entrance as his meal ticket and begins his vocal request. The animals, unlike me, have spent their day in quiet slumber, waiting for a human to return and to reward them for their patient endurance.

I move into this space with joy. I'm thankful for the warmth and quiet of the house and the subtle winter light that fills the room with an understated abundance. Although many people I know struggle with this season, I love its unassuming hue. It fits my nature; it's not splashy and

conversational but rather demure and soft-spoken.

The garlic mashed potatoes I've begun to cook infuse the air with their fragrance and will soon provide me with their creamy sustenance. The dog awaits his trip to the park. Upon reflection, these simple events and the inside and outside landscape are like still-life paintings: moments in time that contain the sacramental mystery of God's presence through their simple beauty. In this time and place, I am aware of my body and my soul.

Both are amply fed. ■



Joyce Kane, a former *Banner* staff member, lives in Seattle, Wash.



Every breath we draw
is a gift of God's love;
every moment of existence
is a grace.

— THOMAS MERTON

Asking the Right Question

OPINION



Our faith is lived out in the public square.

IN 2006, Classis Zeeland brought a concern to synod: how should we worship with undocumented immigrants? The question was born out of the life of its churches, which were ministering to a growing Latino population in the area. Synod 2007 commissioned a study committee, which came back in 2010 with the *Report on the Migration of Workers* (easily found at crcna.org).

Among its many important findings, perhaps the report's central assertion is this: "God's Word calls upon believers to respect the governing authorities and the laws of the state. However, citizenship in the kingdom of God obligates believers to the highest law of love for God and neighbor above all, and the exercise of this love should lead believers to advocate for laws that will mandate the just and humane treatment of immigrant peoples" (p. 31).

As the immigration debate continues in the United States, I would like to humbly call all of us back to this great command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). How simple, and yet how difficult. Classis Zeeland's question could easily be translated to "How do we love our undocumented neighbor?" How indeed?

I've been involved in advocacy for immigration reform in the U.S. for about a year now, and I've heard a lot of answers to the question "What do we do with undocumented immigrants?" Should we make them citizens? Deport them? Create a process toward legalization? This is the question being asked by government leaders, judges, and law enforcement officials—and well it should be. This has also become the driving question being asked by the church. While this question is right and good, for our faith is lived out in the public square, rarely within the church does it seem to be informed by the great command to love our neighbor as ourself. What would happen to our discussions if they were always driven by that great command?

Perhaps instead of criminals, we would begin to see upright people trapped in a broken system. Instead of takers, hardworking people paying taxes into a system they are excluded from. Instead of distance, relationship. Instead of the "other," a friend.

Members of Christ's body will have differing opinions on how best to go about addressing the brokenness of our immigration system. And that's OK. What is not OK, however, is allowing these discussions to be divorced from that great commandment given to love above *all else*. Love and compassion must always be our starting point; hate and rhetoric have no place in the discussion. May we all recommit ourselves to asking, above all else, "How can I love my undocumented neighbor?" ■



Kyle Schaap is a policy analyst and advocacy fellow at the CRC Office of Social Justice. He lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., and attends First Christian Reformed Church.

LE



Faces of Persecution

It's not helpful to the situation in Nigeria to [suggest] that the actions of Boko Haram are at the root religious grievances or anti-Christian sentiment ("The Many Faces of Religious Persecution," Nov. 2013). As in many parts of the world, religious motivations are only one aspect of the groups' struggle, and mostly mask larger grievances over rampant corruption, the gross underdevelopment of the North of Nigeria, political disenfranchisement, and the heavy-handed crackdown of state security forces. BH was a peaceful movement until its leader and many followers were executed in police custody. The vast majority of victims of BH (including in the horrific attacks the article mentions) are Muslims, not Christians.

Local and international human rights groups see a danger of a backlash from a poor population that feels marginalized and remote from the political center of Nigeria and its Christian president, Goodluck Jonathan.

—Name withheld
Abuja, Nigeria

It Can Happen to Anyone

It was good to read H. David Schuringa's article about children questioning our faith ("It Can Happen to Anyone," Nov. 2013). We have three adult children, and all three

TTERS

do not attend church. We are very close to each other. It is hard to deal with the fact that we worked to bring them up in the church and then see them move their own ways. We have been praying about this lately. Thanks for the article.

—Edward Alblas
Grimsby, Ontario

New Lessons from Timothy

As a former student of Timothy Christian School and a current member of a CRC congregation that is intentional about racial reconciliation, I was disappointed by the recent recommendation that the moment has come “to stop citing that sad time in the school’s history” when racial tensions precipitated the school’s move (“New Lessons from Timothy,” Nov. 2013). It is certainly important to “see what can be learned from where Timothy is today,” but in a denomination and a world that is still hurting and deeply impacted by racial sins of the past and present, we must not sweep our challenging past under the rug.

—David Boven
Chicago, Ill.

As a K-12 alumna I remember the buses were turned around because of the riots (“New Lessons from Timothy”). In its own way, Timothy Christian School is really putting the Great Commission into action as more nationalities are learning God’s Word.

—Roberta Winters
Bay City, Mich.

BOT’s ‘Disappointment’

We read with collective shame the report of the Board of Trustees expressing their disappointment with the *Banner* editor (“Board of Trustees Expresses Disappointment,” Nov. 2013) and noting that now they are censoring what the editorial

board can print. This is a major step in the wrong direction.

Based on what Scripture says, we should all be preaching, teaching, and writing about politics, sexuality, science, war, gun violence, the Belhar, the poor, and social injustice . . . areas in which the BOT could provide some positive encouragement.

—Paul and Mary Kortenhoven
Grand Rapids, Mich.

I am 69 years old and grew up in a CRC neighborhood. I was very grateful the BOT decided to keep our editor, as I feel that God and his Word guide Mr. De Moor’s choices for *The Banner* (“Board of Trustees Expresses Disappointment”). For those of us who raise grandchildren, he helps us see the temptations our children have to deal with and establish Bible-based beliefs. Promoting [these kinds of] conversations is important to us.

—Diane Strauss
Kentwood, Mich.

Censorship is always counterproductive (“Board of Trustees Expresses Disappointment”). What are people afraid of? Particularly in the Old Testament, believers brazenly question God’s trustworthiness, faithfulness, and motivation. None of that was expunged. Must *The Banner* be more holy than the Bible?

We need a publication that is vibrant, inspirational, and challenging, produced by Christian journalists and writers who are at arm’s length [from the denomination]. Cut the denominational apron strings and make it subscription-based!

—Nick Loenen
Richmond, British Columbia

It is with amazement that I read that the board is disappointed with Mr. De Moor (“Board of Trustees Expresses Disappointment”). I was very happy that finally some other views came in *The Banner*.

Everybody knows that what writers write does not have to be the view of the editor or the board. What is the board so afraid of? This is a free country with people who know how to think and to believe. Give us a little bit of credit to know and think for ourselves!

—Geeske de Boer
Pitt Meadows, British Columbia

What are the trustees afraid of (“Board of Trustees Expresses Disappointment”)?

I’m afraid this will understandably make [the editor] “gun shy” of other issues that we need to address, such as capital punishment, war, nuclear radiation, and the occupation of Palestine. The term “justice” appears in the Bible more often than love, and though Christ often spoke of it, we have virtually kept it hidden. [These issues] are crying for help from the Christian community.

Churches were silent on major issues that needed Christ’s perspective, issues such as the drug trade, slavery, and Manifest Destiny. The issues are different now, but our response is similar.

—Jake Terpstra
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Reflecting on the article “Tomorrow’s Theology” (June 2013) and some reactions to that article as reported in the News (“Board of Trustees Expresses Disappointment,” Nov. 2013), I have a couple of comments:

1. The world we live in is God’s. He created it and he sustains it every moment.
2. Science is the study of God’s created world, his handiwork.

So we ought to follow the examples of John Calvin and Augustine by giving serious consideration to conclusions from the scientific study of God’s handwork, and not lightly dismiss or reject them.

—Clarence Menninga
Grand Rapids, Mich.

NEWS

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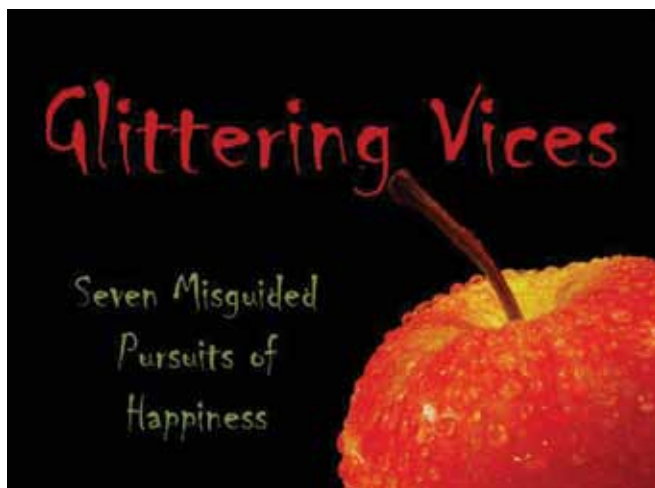
Drama Helps Church Address Intense Topics

For a church of about 150 families, it's a lot of work to perform a drama every week.

But this fall when leaders at Community Christian Reformed Church in Roselawn, Ind., planned a sermon series on the seven deadly sins, they decided to do just that: produce a skit to match the sermon for eight weeks straight.

"Drama is a great way to address a deep, intense topic, to help people see how applicable it is to their life," said Joel Zuidema, who preached the series.

The church occasionally plans skits led by its volunteer director of drama, Sara Solis.



Community CRC added a drama to each sermon on the seven deadly sins.

This was the church's most ambitious dramatic undertaking yet. It was a lot of work, but

the all-volunteer drama team pulled it off.

"With the way that Joel preached, combining the theoretical and the practical, and with the drama adding a dose of

Ontario Church Celebrates Hockey Day in Canada

Playing road hockey is a rite of childhood for most Canadian kids. So Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Woodstock, Ontario, brings adults and kids together every year for a road hockey tournament to raise both fun and funds.

The event is run by the church's Cadets and youth group to raise funds for mis-

sion trips, SERVE projects, and the Cadet Camporee.

But it is also a way to draw community members to the church for a full day of fun and friendly competition. Last year, 12 teams came out for the main three-on-three tournament, while five teams of younger players competed in the day's indoor mini-stick hockey tournament.



The tournament started out as a fundraiser for a trip to Haiti. "One year, the proceeds went to buy new gym equipment. The last three years, it's gone to the Cadets and youth," said Harry Kiers, a Cadet counselor who helps with the organizing.

The event is planned to be around the time of the annual Hockey Day in Canada, a day when communities across the country organize hockey-related events.

"Each town usually has something happening," said Kiers. For Woodstock, Maranatha CRC has filled that gap.

—Anita Brinkman

The road hockey tournament is an annual event in Woodstock, Ontario.

The set for "But Now I See: Stories of Spiritual Intimacy and Healing."



humor, people were really engaged," said Kyle Vanderzee, the church's director of worship and the arts.

"A lot of creative energy built up inside of me," explained Solis, who has a theater degree. "It's always fun to hear what people have to say [about a skit]," Solis said. "Even if it's negative, it means that they were paying attention."

Last spring, Solis dreamed up a "Pentecost flash mob" in which, following a prayer, people in the congregation suddenly began singing about the Holy Spirit and reading from Acts chapter 2 in different languages.

"Everybody was like 'Wow, what is going on, this is crazy,'" said Solis.

Solis hopes to direct a full-length play at her church in order to bring the gospel to life for people. "It takes a lot to do something like that," she said. "It's my calling."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

'But Now I See' Drama at Calvin Explores Intimacy with God

Not a dry eye or an empty seat remained in the Lab Theater at Calvin College on the final night of "But Now I See: Stories of Spiritual Intimacy and Healing," a play compiled by David Ellens. The play was in the style of ethnographic or verbatim theater, meaning that every word of the script came from real-life interviews.

Ellens, who works at Calvin College, interviewed 50 members of Calvin's community, including students, staff, faculty, and alumni. He then transcribed the interviews and selected six excerpts for the actual script.

"We talked about what 'closeness' with God is all about and whether or not we should be striving for it as Christians, as well as what hope and healing might look like in times of spiritual wilderness," said Ellens.

The result was a raw, honest, moving, "up close and personal" experience of these six people's lives, which included physical and emotional healing, losing a spouse, sexual abuse, grief, and physical disabilities. These real-life experiences created a platform for each character to delve further into the question of his or her relationship with God.

"The whole process has been more of a gift than I ever could have asked for," said Calvin student Virginia Lodge, who played the part of "Rachel," a woman who was born with cerebral palsy and is legally blind. "The most transformative part was having the opportunity to intentionally empathize with one person for four months. Being entrusted with someone's intimate and vulnerable experiences has been astounding and a deeply spiritual practice of solidarity with someone different from me."

—Daina Kraai

Michigan Church Builds Bridge with Local School

With Third Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, providing the supper and Winchell Public School the dessert, more than 500 people in the neighborhood were served at a fall picnic. It is one recent sign that Third CRC and Winchell have bridged the street between them.

Kenneth Baker, pastor of Third, said that there is such a level of trust between the church and the school that the school does not hesitate to ask for Third's assistance with all sorts of needs. "[The relationship] has been a catalyst for developing a much deeper sense of commitment to our immediate neighborhood," Baker



Families arrive at Third CRC for the annual Winchell Neighborhood Picnic.

said. The church's perspective has shifted from that of a commuter church to "one of the stakeholders in the well-being of our neighborhood. We have become more missional in our thinking and strategy."

According to Baker, the school, once wary of the church's intentions, allowed Third to bring in Kids Hope mentors. Now celebrating the 10th year of Kids Hope at Winchell, principal Mike Hughes noted, "As mentors have also built

relationships with the school staff, our partnership with the church has become our most valuable [connection] and has brought our entire community closer."

Kids Hope director Cyndee Viel reported that the church often provides winter clothing, healthy snacks, plants for student gardens, cheerleaders for a school run, and more.

Baker noted that the relationship brings more opportunities and challenges for Third's children and youth ministries. "The blessing this relationship has brought to Third is profound," concluded Baker.

—Anita Ensing Beem

Search for New Executive Director Proceeding

The search for a new executive director for the Christian Reformed Church is underway. The search committee, made up of six people, plans to bring its nominee to the February 2014 meeting of the CRC's Board of Trustees. If the nominee sustains an interview there, he or she will be recommended to Synod 2014, which is scheduled to convene in Iowa in June.

This is the second search in as many years. The search committee had intended to bring a nominee to the Board last May, but the nominee pulled out just days before that interview.

In June, Synod 2013 broadened the search by allowing, by way of exception, for the appointment of a person who is not ordained as a minister but is considered exceptionally gifted for the task of executive director.

Loren Veldhuizen, a retired attorney in Orange City, Iowa, is chairing the committee. "We are certainly blessed as a denomination by having so many highly gifted members, both ordained and unordained," he said.

The CRC has been without a permanent executive director since 2011, when Rev. Jerry Dykstra resigned. Since then Rev. Joel Boot has been filling the position.

While this search is happening, there is also a search for a new Canadian Ministries Director. It is hoped that both nominees will be ready for approval by Synod 2014.

—Gayla R. Postma

Staff and children in Haiti's Grace House.



Prinsburg Builds Strong Connection to Haiti

Prinsburg, Minn., is not often thought of as diverse. But an international connection with a Haiti orphanage is slowly changing the community's demographics.

Children of the Promise is a nondenominational Christian organization that was started in 1999 by Willmar (Minn.) natives

Bud and Jan Bonnema and developed into the permanent establishment of a crèche, the Haitian term for temporary housing for children.

Jamie Groen, stateside director of the crèche, travels to Haiti approximately four times each year to organize adoptions in addition to raising funds. Groen is excited about the way a small community can command such a global presence. "Central Minnesota is not very diverse, and yet we're sitting here with 22 Haitian kids, and many of them go to the Christian schools," he said.

Several Christian Reformed churches in the greater Prinsburg area continue to consistently provide support for the crèche, both financially and physically. The organization supports 15 long-term missionary staff who aid in nursing and teaching. They hire about 100 Haitian nationals for administrative roles, childcare, and household duties.

In the spring of 2014, Children of the Promise will partner with Dordt College and Willmar's Community Christian School in welcoming groups of student volunteers. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Jessica Oosterhouse

The Difference One Phone Call Can Make

When Alice Plug-Buist, a parent at Calvin Christian School in Hamilton, Ontario, heard that children at an inner-city school couldn't play outside for recess because some kids didn't have proper winter clothing, she wanted to help.

Through a friend she learned how great the need was, especially for snow pants for kids in junior Kindergarten to grade 2 and gloves for all ages, and that the school was eager for any assistance.

Plug-Buist sent an e-mail to Calvin's principal Ted Postma, and an e-mail blast went to parents asking for any donations to be brought in over the next two days, as Christmas holidays would begin that Friday. "I knew that there is a great interest by the school community for involvement in supporting the greater community. I thought this would be a wonderful way for the school to practically spread God's love," Plug-Buist said.



MARLENE GALLEA

Winter snow gear was donated for an inner-city school.

That next morning, the items began to pile up. When Plug-Buist and her children sorted through the items collected in just two days, they counted 70 pairs of snow pants, 135 pairs of mittens, and three more big bags full of winter coats, boots, scarves, and hats.

"It was a simple need—children were not able to play outside—and Christians are responding in simple love," she said. "It's been beautiful to witness it, and I am looking forward to this witness moving on to the recipients in the inner-city school community."

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

Colorado Dolls on a Worldwide Mission

Members at Hillcrest Christian Reformed Church in Denver and Eastern Hills CRC in Aurora, Colo., are knitting dolls to distribute to children in poverty-stricken areas all over the world. To date they have knitted over 400 dolls.

The pattern is from a group in Holland, Mich., and came to Colorado by way of Verla Klaver of Eastern Hills.

"I first became aware of the dolls in North Carolina," Klaver said. "Two ladies from Michigan were making them. I took the idea back to Denver when I returned home."

Shortly after receiving the pattern, about four women started knitting dolls. Soon Winnie Tjeerdsma, a member of Hillcrest, called Klaver to ask her



what to do with the dolls they had made.

"They had made 250 by that time," Klaver said. "I was overwhelmed, thinking each group would have lots of places to donate them. I called my mission group at Eastern Hills and they wanted to send some to Zambia."

"We really want to spread the word to missionaries and people who go to other countries," Tjeerdsma said. "We don't want to pay postage costs to send

them wherever they have to go. We want to let the kids have toys, especially in these poverty-stricken areas, because some of them don't have anything."

The number of dolls knitted has surpassed expectations. "It is an easy project . . . and these dolls go to a good cause," Tjeerdsma said.

—Estafania deLeon

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Jay De Vries

1930 – 2013

Jay De Vries, 82, soft-spoken pastor, student of the Word, and accomplished linguist, passed away at home on November 18 following a brief struggle with cancer.

De Vries graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1957 and served Christian Reformed congregations in Iowa, Illinois, and Michigan. He retired in 1993.

De Vries was an attentive listener, deeply interested in people's well-being. The congregations he served remember him for his ready helpfulness. He loved English literature and European history. He was an avid golfer.

De Vries studied tax law in his spare time and helped people with their tax returns. He developed a keen interest in literature, geography, and history; with his second wife, Norma, he coauthored three Michigan pictorial histories: "Dutch Heritage in Kent and Ottawa Counties," "Legendary Locals of Grand Rapids," and "Wyoming."

De Vries was preceded in death by his first wife, Marcia, in 2002. He is survived by his wife, Norma, four children and their spouses, 10 grandchildren, two step-grandchildren, and 10 great-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 and on The Banner's website.*

Church Runs Fantasy Football League

At Cadillac Christian Reformed Church, fellowship and outreach take a new and fun twist in the form of a fantasy football league.

"It's a great chance to meet new people around a common interest. There are lots of other groups: why not fantasy football?" asked participant Sue Lanser.

The league at Cadillac CRC functions similar to other leagues in that league managers choose their real NFL players to form a team during the draft at the beginning of the season and then accumulate points for things players do, such as touchdowns and passes, in real-life NFL games.

League members and their families gather to watch NFL games, enjoy fellowship, and eat good food over the course of a 12- to 16-week season, which then



Players in Cadillac CRC's fantasy football league work hard during the initial league draft.

ends in a Superbowl party the church puts on.

"The league is an outreach that is a little different than what is

typically done: an event or a Bible study. We seek to build relationships with people first. This relationship can take its own speed over the course of a fantasy football season," said pastor Brian Seifert, who functions as league commissioner.

"When we all get together as an entire fantasy football league watching football and eating together, we have as many as 38 people with children and spouses. It's a perfect way to introduce new people to people already in the church," said Seifert.

[MORE ONLINE](#)

—Daina Kraai

NEWS

Bringing Hope to an Ontario Inner City Neighborhood

Eight years after the 2005 Sea to Sea bicycle tour across Canada, some of the funds raised are still bringing love and hope to the inner city neighborhoods of Hamilton, Ontario.

New Hope Christian Reformed Church began in 2008 in partnership with First CRC in Hamilton. It was sponsored by funds from that first cycling tour. Alida van Dijk, a cyclist on that tour, joined the church plant after moving to Hamilton. She is excited to have cycled across Canada in 2005 and to be part of New Hope Church.

The church initiated New Hope Community Bikes, a program that refurbishes and sells

donated bikes at a reasonable price, and runs free after-school youth mountain bike programs. It also provides employment and training opportunities for young people.

New Hope member Tim Brand partners with a team to run an affordable soccer league in the summer in Gage Park. This past summer, 80 families participated in this program.

Even New Hope's place of worship tells a story of redemption. Once a bar and a brothel, it has been transformed into the Perkins Centre, a multipurpose space.

"One can't put a price tag on a church's presence in a neighborhood or the ripple effects on their streets," said van Dijk, "but the



KRISTA DAM-VANDEKUYT

Alida van Dijk

funds raised through the Sea to Sea bike tour have definitely had an impact on East Hamilton. I am thrilled that I get to be a part of this adventure—both the cycling and the church planting." [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

Ontario Congregation Faces Pornography Issue

The congregation at ClearView Christian Reformed Church in Oakville (Ontario) took on the challenge of facing pornography use on the last Sunday in November.

Led by Rev. Geoff Vandermolen, the conversation both sought to develop awareness of the problem of pornography and to encourage those who are trapped by this vice, either personally or by way of friends or family members who use pornography.

In an interview format, therapist Janet Goodhoofd explained how pornography use can trap both young and old, male and female, and how it slowly rewires the neurotransmitters, affecting the proper function of the brain. She noted that nine out of 10



ClearView CRC's invitation to church on November 24.

pornography users access free material. The highest rate of usage is found among those aged 12 to 17 years, with exposure starting as early as 11 years old.

Yet "there is always hope for those who are living through this problem, for no matter how bad the situation appears, there is always victory in Christ," she said.

Pastor Peter Roebbelen spoke on how pornography specifically

affects our relationship with Christ. He explained that pornography use leads to a lot of brokenness, and it's important that we take a close look at the problem. "Discipleship is a journey to become more and more like Jesus," he said. "Pornography gets in the way of us being disciples and of our mission."

Vandermolen wrapped up the conversation with concrete resources for addressing the problem. Those who are or who have been secretly using pornography, or those who love

someone who is compulsively engaged in pornography, he said, should "come before your heavenly Father and be naked and without shame before him, and receive from him his love and care and compassion, and refuse to be defined by brokenness, for we are defined by the redeeming work of Jesus Christ."

—Jose A. Luna



Jovita de Jong and her puppet, Sam.

Puppets Tell Students That Bullying Hurts

In elementary school gymnasiums across the Niagara region of Ontario, students are captivated by the antics of colorful puppets spreading the message “Bullying Hurts.”

It’s a 25-minute story of schoolyard exclusion interspersed with video testimonials of past and current cast members sharing their experiences of bullying.

Jovita de Jong, a member of Jubilee Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, is one of nine puppeteers. She plays the role of Sam, a 4th-grader nearly convinced by classmates to throw rocks at another student.

It’s personal storytelling for many cast members as they talk in the video clips about being bullied and the reasons why children treated them that way. De Jong, who has Down syndrome, said she doesn’t mind revisiting or hearing these personal stories.

“I feel OK about it, knowing that people besides myself are being bullied, so this gets the message across,” she said.

Already performed for more than 73 schools to date, “Bullying Hurts” will visit 59 more schools by the end of the production’s run in May 2014. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Alissa Vernon

Healing for Sri Lankans in Canada and Back Home



The armed ethnic conflict that devastated much of Sri Lankan society for 25 years may be over, but its deep social and emotional scars are still carried by its citizens, both in Sri Lanka and in those who now live elsewhere.

Chris Pullenayegem, a member of Friendship Community Christian Reformed Church in Toronto, Ontario, was born in Sri Lanka. He understands the pain and hatred that remained and would continue to be gangrene to the soul of Sri Lankans.

Pullenayegem designed a 12-module course, Journey to Forgiveness, to address the evident animosity and unwillingness to forgive among the Christians of the Sri Lankan diaspora in Canada. The result was testimonies of healing, release, restoration, and blessings. The course has been translated into Sinhala and Tamil and is ready to be used by the local churches in Sri Lanka.

“I had to work through my own challenges of forgiveness before the Holy Spirit could write this course through me. Looking back,

in many ways it seems that God took me through a lifetime of preparation for this single task,” Pullenayegem explained. “Unforgiveness is a blessing- and grace-blocker. It can completely paralyze a believer’s effectiveness and fragment the church.”

Pullenayegem has been working with local partners in Sri Lanka to train small group facilitators in preparation for the roll-out of the program in January 2014 to churches in the entire island. It will cover the three language groups and every Christian denomination.

As the vision unfolds, Pullenayegem said that other frontiers are already being sought in the Middle East, including Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and South Sudan in Africa.

“The power of forgiveness is the best-kept secret of the church,” he said. “This tool can be used by God to bring healing and reconciliation within the church, which then gives it the credibility to work for reconciliation outside the church.” —Jose A. Luna

Chris Pullenayegem trains facilitators in Sri Lanka.

More Stories at thebanner.org

For more news, please visit our website, thebanner.org. There you’ll find many more stories, including these:

- **Accountants Partner with Mental Health Service Provider:** Bankruptcy accountants make space available for counseling for clients.
- **Michigan Car Ministry Celebrates 20 Years of Caring:** In an area that lacks public transportation, reliable cars are essential.
- **Texas Church Restarts Local Reading Program:** The Springs Community CRC outreach helps children and the whole community.

NEWS

CHURCH WORLDWIDE



RNS PHOTO COURTESY TOBY CRABTREE/SADLEBACK CHURCH

Dr. Mehmet Oz measures megachurch pastor Rick Warren's waistline at a "Daniel Plan" forum at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif.

Rick Warren Shares Good News About Daniel Weight Loss Plan

Pastor Rick Warren's life has always been an open book.

He spread the word about how to live a Christ-centered life in his best-selling book *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Over the years, he and his wife, Kay, have shared heart-breaking experiences, including her battle with breast cancer and, more recently, the death of their son, Matthew, who struggled with mental illness and committed suicide.

Now Warren, 59, is trying to help people heal their health. *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Zondervan), was written with doctors Mark Hyman and Daniel Amen. It details a lifestyle program that helped Warren lose 65 pounds in 2011 and propelled members of his congregation to get healthier by dropping more than 250,000 pounds collectively that year.

The program incorporates healthy eating, regular exercise, stress reduction, prayer, and support from other church members in small home groups.

—USA Today

Cross Has Become a Fashion Symbol

The Christian cross has become little more than a piece of jewelry worn around the necks of celebrities, said Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby.

"For those early Christians, it was a badge of shame," Welby said. "Today it is more commonly seen as a symbol of beauty to hang around your neck. As a friend of mine used to say, you might as well hang a tiny golden gallows or an electric chair around your neck."

—Religion News Service

As the World Mourns Nelson Mandela, Abortion Foes Protest

As world leaders and ordinary citizens gathered to remember Nelson Mandela, abortion foes pushed a message that went against the global outpouring of praise: The anti-apartheid leader, they argued, backed a sweeping abortion rights law that negates any good he achieved.

"I cannot get past this and cannot view Mandela as any other than a leader who engaged in mass genocide of his own innocent people," wrote Jill Stanek, a prominent abortion opponent, on her blog at LifeNews.com.

"Nelson Mandela was no saint," wrote Paul Tuns, editor of *The Interim*, an anti-abortion paper in Canada. "My concern is with pro-lifers and Christians joining in the praise," he added.

In 1994, Mandela was elected the first president of a post-apartheid South Africa, and in 1996 he backed the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act. The law reversed what had been a very restrictive abortion policy under the previous government. The Guttmacher Institute called the act "one of the most liberal abortion laws in the world."

—Religion News Service

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



Children's worship boxes.

"Worship and Wonder" Thinks Inside the Box

As she was considering how to prepare for children's worship, Theresa Moeller thought of a box.

Moeller was preparing for the Kids Worship and Wonder program at Covenant Christian Reformed Church in North Haledon, N.J.

What she had in mind was a custom-made box for each child in which to keep all their "work for God." Her husband, Jeff, got to work with a pallet of plywood the church donated and made over 100 boxes for the children to use as they respond to God's story.

Each week, the children are told a Bible story. "The stories are told very slowly and dramatically," said Sharon Visbeen, one of the storytellers. "The kids are mesmerized!"

After the story, there is personal quiet time. The kids get their boxes, filled with journals, art supplies, bookmarks to help them find Bible stories, and pens and pencils. "They are not told how to respond," Moeller says, "They are asked what they want to do." Sometimes they want to pray; sometimes they want to write in their journal; sometimes they want to create something.

"The children love it," Moeller said. "They are completely engaged."

—Callie Feyen

FAQs

Justice

Q Is the “living wage” movement a good thing to support if I want to seek justice?

A Living wage campaigns draw attention to the reality that many people living in poverty are working, but their wages are not adequate to pay for basic living costs. A living wage is defined as the minimum hourly wage that each of two workers in a family of four needs to meet basic needs and participate in society. It is calculated locally and based on actual expenses.

Living wage is not legislated, but it is a helpful basis for dialogue between employers, workers, and the community. It fosters understanding of the situation faced by low-income working families and avoids skepticism about poverty lines and welfare systems. It is different than the minimum wage, which is a corporate calculation of the lowest amount employers can pay workers under the law.

Some employers and municipalities are voluntarily adopting living wage policies. At the local level it can be good business because money for family needs comes back into the local economy.

In scriptural terms, the concept of a living wage respects the dignity of all workers, regardless of what position they hold, and recognizes that they have other human obligations. If one believes that every person is created in the image of God and is called to serve others, a living wage is what a person needs to do that in a modern city. It helps to put a human face on economic policy discussions. And that is a good thing in our current context.

—Kathy Vandergrift teaches public ethics to university students and advocates for the rights of children.

The concept of a living wage respects the dignity of all workers.

Faith Formation

Q My brother-in-law’s church just hired a “pastor of faith formation.” (She had served elsewhere as a youth pastor.) That’s a new one for me. What’s a PFF?

A I’m hearing about such newly named positions too, and I’m also noticing that some congregations are setting up their own “faith formation committees” with mandates that expand the ministries of what were formerly church education committees or children’s and youth ministry committees.

I see these developments as positive signs that throughout the denomination we are practicing more seriously something we’ve always preached: lifelong intentional discipleship. As the Heidelberg Catechism declares, “Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit after his own image, that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for his benefits” (Q&A 86). One pastor reworded this recently in a sermon: “We are not [just] church members; we are cradle-to-grave whole-life disciples of Jesus.”

Our church systems (which include job descriptions and committee mandates) work best when they intentionally reflect our theology. I’m very grateful and encouraged to see congregations doing such good pioneering work. My prayer is that this pioneering will make space for the Holy Spirit’s wonderful fruit of ministry synergy. When we discern creative ways to coordinate the faith formation blessings of worship, preaching, family devotions, age-focused ministries, and much more, this coordination often provides more opportunities for the Spirit’s transformational power to work.

—Syd Hielema is a professor of religion and theology at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario.

Outreach

Q I like the idea of a “pub theology” group that gathers for conversation in a public setting. However, our church has a ministry to a number of folks who are in recovery, and a setting that features alcohol doesn’t seem ideal. Do you have any suggestions?

A Glad you asked. It’s important to note who is in our current circles, who we are trying to reach, and how we are attempting to do it. We cannot be too sensitive on this and similar issues. If you know from the start that a bar isn’t an ideal space for the group you envision and the people you hope to connect with, you’re ahead of the game.

I tell people regularly that our gatherings at the pub are not about what we are drinking. The fact that many of us who gather enjoy a good craft brew is a bonus, but we are all there for the connection and the conversation. We could just as easily gather over coffee or iced tea.

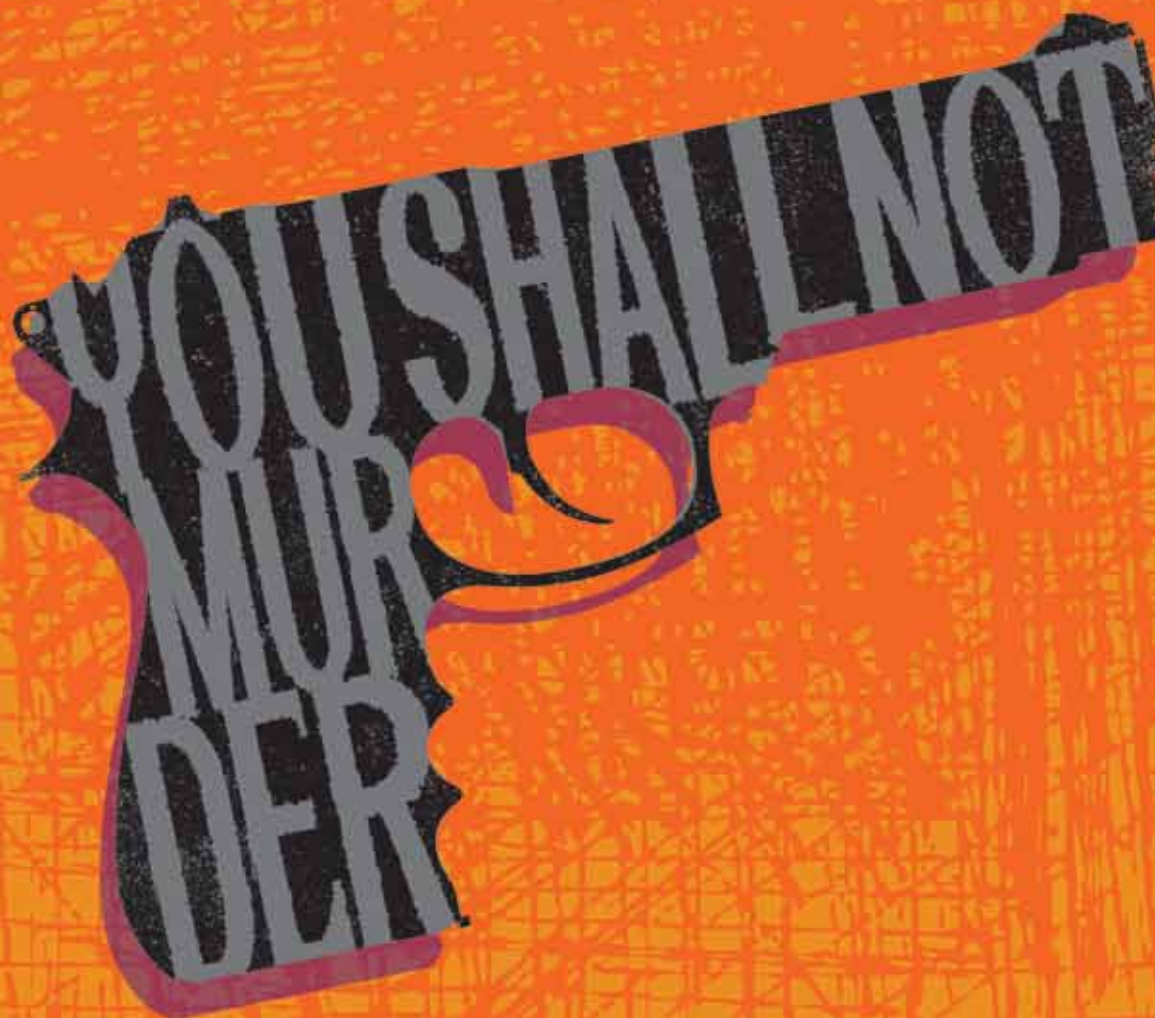
I know that some “Theology on Draft”-style groups meet in living rooms, which adds an intimacy to the gathering, but a public setting has the advantage of being more accessible. A friend of mine leads a group called “Coffee and Doubt.” They meet at a local coffee shop and invite conversation on spiritual topics for people who are seeking to work out struggles with their own faith in a safe environment. You could also meet at a library, a bookstore, or a community center. The important thing is to let people know what kind of conversations will take place, convey a spirit of openness and hospitality, and be ready to welcome and love whoever sits at the table! Blessings as you seek to connect with the disconnected.

—Bryan Berghoef is a church planter in Washington, D.C., and is the author of Pub Theology: Beer, Conversation, and God.

BY RICHARD W. WARNER AND BRYAN BERGHOEF

SHOULD CHRISTIANS CARRY?

TWO PERSPECTIVES



I AM ONE of the most boringly “normal” persons you will ever meet. I live in a modest “empty nest” home with my wife of 42 years. I’m fond of dogs and cats, and because I have a desk job I really should exercise more. Like many Christians, we read the Bible and do our fair share of participating in the life of our local church.

Whenever I leave the house, in addition to my wallet, car keys, and bifocals, I carry a Glock 19 pistol, well concealed in a tactical holster at my side.

Perhaps you’re wondering why an elder in a local congregation would ever carry a firearm or even have one in the house. Maybe you think carrying a firearm, except for police officers or soldiers, is incompatible with being a Christian. Why, you may wonder, would a Christian be so fearful? How can the meek inherit the earth if they are packing heat?

While my trust in God is, by grace, unshakable, my trust in humans is not. It is this lack of faith in mankind’s ability to rise above myriad societal ills that leads me to carry a weapon as a deterrent and for self-defense in desperate situations.

In any discussion of this hot-potato issue, Scripture is a good place to start. Most people are aware of the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.” “The sum of this Commandment,” says John Calvin in his Commentary, “is that we should not unjustly do violence to anyone.” Yet Calvin also goes on to state that common sense demands more than that we should abstain from wrongdoing; we should also “endeavor to resist the wicked.”

The unjust taking of a life “with malice aforethought” is against God’s law, but the taking of another life in defense of one’s own life or that of a family member, while certainly not to be taken lightly, is not prohibited. In fact, most accurate translations depict this passage as “You shall not murder.” This responsibility is found in the office of “the one in authority” (Rom. 13:4). But in the absence of, or the time lag associated with, getting the authority to show up, individual self-defense may be warranted in extreme cases.

Picture the following scenario:

“Nine-one-one; what is your emergency?”

“There’s a stranger in my garage trying to drag away my lawn mower!”

“Stay on the line; we have a unit on the way.”

“OK, but make sure they identify themselves as police officers because I have a handgun for self-defense. I’m staying inside my house and locking the door until they arrive.”

Clearly this homeowner understands that the loss of a piece of yard equipment is not worth taking a human life. But here is another scenario:

“Nine-one-one; what is your emergency?”

“I just heard the sound of breaking glass from my basement window. Someone is downstairs and I am at home taking care of my elderly mother. We are in an upstairs bedroom. Please hurry!”

“OK, lock your bedroom door and stay on the line with me.”

“We’ll stay in the bedroom, but you need to let the officers on the way know that I have a handgun for protection, and if the person comes up the stairs to hurt us, I will stop him.”

“Dispatch to all units; please approach with extreme caution and identify as the homeowner is in an upstairs bedroom and is armed.”

In this situation, the homeowner is taking prudent steps by staying put and not roaming around looking for the bad guy. But he gives notice that he will act if the situation deteriorates into a life-or-death choice. The homeowner’s intent is not to kill but to *stop the threat*.

Stopping the threat and a misplaced desire to cause harm or death (retribution) are not the same. No responsibly armed and legally authorized person carries a weapon with a wish to take a life.

Some Christians may bring up the virtue of “turning the other cheek” (Matt. 5:38-39). Does this mean that we should capitulate to every form of injustice or evil that comes our way? Matthew 5:38-39 is warning not against self-defense but against blood revenge, something ancient cultures were often mired in and that continues among some people to this day. Again, we turn to John Calvin’s Commentary: “Though Christ does not permit his people to repel violence by violence, yet he does not forbid them to endeavor to avoid an unjust attack.”

Consider another passage in Matthew. The mob has just come to Gethsemane to

arrest Jesus. Peter becomes irate; he grabs a sword and strikes the high priest’s servant. Emotions are running high when Jesus says to him, “Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword” (26:52).

Jesus’ disciples were anticipating the establishment of an earthly kingdom and, by extension, their own status in that kingdom. In John 18:36, Jesus reminds all who would listen: “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” His rebuke informs them that his kingdom would not come through human schemes (the sword), but by the Spirit. If Jesus were steadfastly opposed to the use of the sword under any circumstances, he would have prohibited his disciples from carrying one in the first place. His message is clear: Do not let anger or the desire for revenge get the best of you. Do not use aggression to advance your own personal brand of righteousness. The Lord is perfectly capable of dispensing justice. Limit your actions to self-defense.

So there’s nothing incompatible with my faith if I choose to legally carry a firearm in case of a life-threatening event. Those who disagree have the right not to carry or own a firearm. They are free to rely on the authorities to arrive in the nick of time. But using the Bible to bolster criticism directed at responsibly armed citizens is a misuse of Scripture.

Those who choose to carry firearms for self-defense in extreme situations should pray fervently that their use will never be required. That is my persistent prayer. The Spirit can change hearts and intervene even in the most life-threatening of situations. But I also pray that my faith, my mind, my body, and my training would allow me to protect my own life and the lives of my loved ones in the face of evil. In this choice, I am comforted by Galatians 5:14, where we are enjoined to both love ourselves and our neighbor with a godly respect.

That is why this elder chooses to legally carry a firearm. »



Richard W. Warner is an elder in the Christian Reformed Church in St. Joseph, Mich.

MY NEIGHBORS were recently mugged at gun-point not far from where I live in Washington, D.C. A nice evening out for dinner with another couple quickly went awry as two young men pulled a gun on them and demanded their wallets and phones. The four of them hit the ground and did as they were asked. After being accosted in this way, my friends felt rattled. Unsafe. Sad.

Some might say: “If only they’d been carrying a weapon of their own, they might have been able to turn the tables, or at least hold onto their wallets.” After all, the best defense is a good offense, so why not be ready to take charge in such a situation? An argument could be made that a gun might have helped. The instigators could have been forced to flee out of fear and my friends might have been able to take control of the situation.

But it’s also true that bringing a second gun into the picture might have escalated things. It is likely that the perpetrators did not plan to use the gun. There’s a good chance that these two young men found themselves in a situation requiring desperate action.

I’m pretty sure this situation would not have been improved by issuing a threat of violence in response to the initial threat of violence.

With these types of incidents happening close to where I live—in an urban setting—some might recommend that I own a weapon. That I protect my family. That I prepare for the worst.

Yet I remain unarmed.

For me, carrying a weapon is in direct conflict with my desire to be a faithful disciple of Jesus. How can I justify responding to violence with more violence when I follow the Prince of Peace? How can I think of carrying a weapon designed solely to kill efficiently if I’m seeking to follow a God who instructs us, “Do not kill”? How can I think of owning a gun when Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek, to love our enemies, and to pray for those who hurt us? How can I stock up on ammunition when Romans 12 clearly instructs us to “not repay evil for evil” and to “live at peace with everyone” (vv. 17-18)?

These days there is a lot of conversation about guns and gun rights, particularly in the wake of last year’s Newtown school shooting and the Trayvon Martin murder trial. Many note that it is their constitutional

or even God-given right to carry a gun. Some are sure that the answer to the outbreak of violence in our schools, homes, and streets is not fewer guns, but more.

More guns in our schools. More guns in our homes. More guns in our neighborhoods.

The argument that we need more guns, and more people trained to use them, boils down to “we can kill before we get killed.” This strategy may well be effective—even the most effective. But what kind of society do we want to have? What kind of people do we want to be?

How can I justify responding to violence with more violence when I follow the Prince of Peace?

One response to violence is to admit that we live in a sick society and increase weapon proliferation to deal with the issue. “It’s effective.” “I’ll feel safer.” But do we really want a society in which there are *more* weapons that can be unleashed on a schoolroom full of unsuspecting children? A society where our children are afraid to walk the streets because there may be a neighborhood watch person following them with a gun?

The more poignant question is this: Do I really want to become someone who has to be trained to kill someone else as the answer to reducing violence? To me, this stems from a lack of imagination and a lack of hope.

I’d rather we work on connecting better with our neighbors, getting involved in our neighborhood schools, and learning the opportunities and challenges we face together.

I’d rather we deal with mental health issues and make counseling accessible to those who need it.

I’d rather be a person who is trained to love than one who is trained to kill—even in self-defense.

That’s why I am simply not interested in carrying a firearm. In the U.S., the Constitution may grant me such a right. But I follow someone who eschewed his rights to self-defense (and many other things).

Some will point to Jesus endorsing the carrying of swords in Luke 22 and note that even he knew when it was time to arm oneself. Yet when the disciples say, “See, Lord, here are two swords,” Jesus replies, “That’s enough.” Or as another translation puts it:

“Enough of that!” The point is *not* that he endorses the private right to carry weapons. Rather, the display of two weapons in the face of a contingent of armed Roman soldiers from Pilate makes the point that Jesus and his disciples are not there to act in violence. Jesus notes that he has the power to call down legions of angels to his defense. But he refuses to resort to such violence, even when self-defense might call for it. He says, “My kingdom is not of this world, otherwise my servants would fight.”

When the kingdom of heaven breaks in, there is a refusal to respond to violence with more violence. There is a love that is greater than calling upon our “rights.” There is a forgiveness that can be extended even to those who would put us to death, as Jesus and many of his earliest followers exemplified.

In our society, people have the right to carry or own a gun. But I’m not going to be one of them because my hope for peace outweighs my desire for personal safety. My desire to follow Jesus exceeds my desire to defend myself. Responding to a threat upon my life with an act of love, even if it costs me my life, might be one small piece of God’s kingdom being realized here and now.

There are no easy answers or solutions to the reality of gun violence in our nation and our world.

But should that stop us from dreaming? What if we tried to enact the prophetic dream now, and gave up our obsession with violence? What if we didn’t wait for someone else to beat the pistols into plowshares but set the example ourselves? What’s the worst that could happen?

Ask Jesus. ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



Bryan Berghoef lives in Washington, D.C., and is the pastor of Roots DC, a new urban faith community seeking to follow Jesus for the good of the city. He is also the author of *Pub Theology: Beer, Conversation, and God*. You can follow Bryan on Twitter: @bryberg.

I Love Pharisees

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!)



NEXT

In evangelical culture, few personal flaws are as stigmatized as judgmentalism.

WHO IS A LOST SHEEP in your church? What does the prodigal son look like in your mind's eye? It's likely these parables invoke images of a wayward partier, a self-destructive addict, or an aggressive atheist. Jesus undoubtedly had each of these souls in mind when he told his great parables, but I wonder if he would include a Pharisee in that bunch.

In evangelical culture, few personal flaws are as stigmatized as judgmentalism. Over the past few decades, the Holy Spirit has transformed churches into places where sinners are embraced and the homeless can receive an unending supply of socks and shirts. We are even making strides to reach out to those struggling with addiction and sexual sin, which were once considered unmentionable. But the moment we hear a hypocritical or legalistic remark from a fellow member, we secretly wish they could be banished to the church down the street.

Consider your reaction upon hearing of someone who is leaving your congregation. When an addict relapses and disappears from church, we are deeply saddened that he or she is gone. We pray fervently for the Lord to bring transformation into people's hearts and to restore them to the body of Christ. But when a hypercritical member storms out of a congregational meeting vowing never to return, we're more likely to sinfully rejoice that he will soon be some other church's problem. We're more likely to say "Good riddance!" than "Lord, help him!"

What has caused this unhealthy disregard for the spiritual health of the "Pharisees"

among us? Perhaps our worship of Jesus has changed into a worship of the transformation that Jesus offers. Pastors and church leaders alike desire not only positive but dramatic results, both of which seem more likely with "down-and-outers" than with entrenched insiders. After all, a redeemed rock musician makes for a more exciting sermon illustration than an apologetic critic.

Yet Jesus desires that the lost sheep are found and fed, regardless of who they are. During his three years of ministry, our Lord spent significant time teaching the Pharisees. He did so because he loved them. He invested his valuable time with the teachers of the law and the scribes so that they might be transformed alongside the sinners and tax collectors. And at least one of them was.

In John 3:16, Jesus delivers his good news to Nicodemus—a Pharisee: "Whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life." He offers life to the dying, no matter what kind of death they are experiencing, because in his eyes the Pharisee and the tax collector probably looked quite similar.

The Lord desires a "rags to riches" conversion story for every person. Whether the rags are literal or spiritual, it is our job as Christ-followers to offer the riches of his grace. ■

Mark Van Dyke is pastor of Sumas Christian Reformed Church in Sumas, Washington.



Breaking the Silence

by Chris Meehan

Lynn Hamilton

Lynn Hamilton said the depression seemed to descend out of nowhere; it was unlike anything she'd ever experienced. She felt as if her world had caved in.

When her doctor diagnosed bipolar II disorder, a form of mental illness characterized by moods cycling between high and low, she initially fought the diagnosis. This couldn't be happening to her, she thought. But the signs were there.

Eventually she came to accept the diagnosis, and with it the fact that her life would never be the same.

"I've learned that you are up and down when you have bipolar, but I've learned to ride the bumps," said Hamilton.

She also learned the importance of speaking publicly about her illness.

"I learn a great deal by sharing stories with other people, by letting them know there is no need to be afraid of mental illness," Hamilton said. "If you are not willing to explain what the problem is, how are you going to help anyone?"

In presentations at her church, Brighton (Ontario) Fellowship Christian Reformed Church, Hamilton says mental illness will only get worse if you try to keep it secret. "Other people can give you support, helping to make mental illness less frightening."

She said she was motivated to speak about her illness partly through her participation in two initiatives connected to her church. One of these was a four-week Bible study called "Let's Talk: Breaking the Silence Around Mental Illness in Our Communities of Faith."

Developed by the CRC's Office of Disability Concerns in collaboration with Faith and Hope Ministries in Ontario, the Bible study is available to churches.

Hamilton said she gained strength and confidence by discussing biblical

Pray for Recovery

Ask God to give grace, strength, and recovery to people with mental illness and their families.

Pray that churches can be safe communities where people affected by mental health issues can find love and spiritual nurture.

Pray that God will bless hundreds of disability advocates as they serve Christian Reformed churches and classes in their ministry with people who have disabilities.

You add.
God multiplies.

reflections on aspects of mental illness when meeting with others with similar experiences.

After completing the Bible study, she started a support group for those who wanted to continue to share their experiences of everyday living and encourage one another.

Also helpful has been her involvement in Faith and Hope Ministries, which partners with congregations in order to help people get the mental health services they need. The initiative is supported by Classis Quinte, east of Toronto.

Hamilton said that she has learned the significance of breaking the stigma of mental illness through these initiatives.

Last year, Hamilton addressed Classis Quinte about Faith and Hope Ministries. She spoke of the many struggles she has encountered—from hospitalizations to suicide attempts—in dealing with the disease.

Even though she had been a nurse for more than 30 years, Hamilton said she couldn't identify why the depression that came upon her in 2001 was so intense.

She had been a mom who hardly needed sleep, baked cookies, and sewed costumes for the school plays. Her bosses came to her when they needed someone to work a double shift.

But by 2001 those things were slipping away. Her children had grown, and she was downsized out of a job.

Hamilton said she sees now that she had kept the illness at bay by staying busy. Constant activity was her medicine.

Although her husband was right there at her side, she said, she went into a free fall. "I did a crash and burn. All of a sudden, I had no interest in things."

She visited her family doctor, who initially prescribed Prozac, "which »

Speaking Out on Immigration

For the past several months, the CRC's Office of Social Justice and the Office of Race Relations have joined to speak out for immigration reform at congressional hearings and meetings, at church events, and in a variety of other settings.

They have advocated in other ways as well.

Last fall, when the U.S. Senate was debating immigration reform, the offices sponsored a call-in program asking people to contact their legislators, especially lawmakers who were on the fence on the issue, and request that they vote in favor of reform.

The Senate passed immigration reform. But the issue still must be dealt with by the U.S. House of Representatives, whose members have been more skeptical of passing reform.

"We have been working very hard on immigration reform, and we will be doing the same in 2014," said Peter Vander Meulen, director of OSJ. "This is our top priority."

OSJ and Race Relations are doing this as part of a mission to continue to carry out the recommendations of the 2010 synodical study committee on migration. These recommendations called for church members to

- welcome the "stranger" (who may actually be our fellow church member and neighbor) without regard to immigration status;
- educate ourselves on the complexities of immigration issues;
- promote fair and compassionate treatment of immigrants in our communities and churches, whatever their status; and
- become advocates for a more just, humane, and workable U.S. immigration system.

—Chris Meehan, CRC Communications

Pray for Justice

God of the stranger, you remind us that we were once foreigners in Egypt.

Help us to hear your call to love the foreigner, for we are all created in your image.

Guide our leaders as they work to bring reform to the broken immigration system.

Guide our efforts as we advocate for laws based on just and humane treatment of immigrants, migrant workers, refugees, and asylum seekers.

May your true light shine through. Amen.



Demonstrators advocate for immigration reform.

elevated my mood into a state of high energy and well-being,” she said.

The medication put her back on top and she started flying along. But her doctor worried because the antidepressant lifted her depression into mania.

Aware that some antidepressants can make bipolar disorder worse, he prescribed a different medication. He also told Hamilton that medications can help control the disorder, which has a strong genetic component, but not cure it.

Hamilton says his comments about genetics led her to start thinking about her mother and aunt in a new way. She recalled how they had acted and the pain they had gone through and put others through.

“My mother and aunt showed signs of mental illness much of their lives, and both ended up committing suicide,” she said.

Hamilton knew that she wanted to get better. Once she decided this, she started the difficult journey back, progress coming in fits and starts.

“Trials of successive mood stabilizers were ineffective, mostly because of intolerable side effects,” she says. She got discouraged, finding it hard to remember herself as happy, active, and hopeful about life.

She wanted to give up, but kept her feelings hidden from her family until she tried to take her own life, an attempt that landed her in the hospital.



A dinner for Safe Churches supporters.

A Healing Circle

“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matt. 18:20).

Faithfully, the three of us gather in our healing circle.

We first knew each other as members of a committee at a small Christian Reformed church. We began to share deeper issues, including emotional abuse we felt at church.

What we experienced connected with deeper personal experiences of past abuse. We realized that we needed to pray and seek the Lord’s healing.

We made a decision together to go beyond “forgive and forget.” We would face the pain and hurt in God’s power. We started a Bible study and prayer group. Safe Church suggested study materials, which we adapted to fit our needs. We met in the safety and privacy of homes, sharing thoughts over coffee.

Much could be said about what this group has meant and how it has impacted our lives. We traveled together on a sacred journey that was at times unbearably painful, like walking on broken stained glass. Yet through it all God has sustained and loved us.

Bruises come from blows; the initial strikes are painful and the lasting effects take a long time to heal. A bruise changes color from deep purple to yellow over time. We were injured and bruised where only God can see, where only he sees health returning.

Sharing pain is difficult, yet each time the hurt becomes lighter. In our healing circle, pain has been transformed into personal growth and a closer walk with our Savior. We have been truly blessed. Our families share in our peace, joy, and happiness.

—Name withheld by request

Pray for Safety

Safe Church Ministry helps equip churches to more effectively prevent and respond to abuse.

- Pray for the Lord’s blessings of wisdom, strength, perseverance, and collaboration for more than 300 volunteer Safe Church team members across Canada and the U.S. These team members work in their congregations as a resource and to increase awareness about abuse.
- Pray for efforts to form new Safe Church teams where none exist.
- Pray for pastors and church leaders to resist the temptation to misuse the power and authority entrusted to them. Pray that they, empowered by the Holy Spirit, will follow the example of Christ, who humbly submitted to others in love.
- Pray that all church leaders bring honor and glory to the Lord as they follow his way.

You add.
God multiplies.



Lynn Hamilton and Winnie Visser

When she got out, she did fine for a while, but then the depression hit again. This time she entered the hospital for a round of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), a treatment that sends pulses of electricity through the brain.

ECT was helpful, she said, as were group therapy sessions, which taught her stress management and the significance of rest, exercise, and good nutrition. She also realized the significance of talking about her condition.

These self-care elements, along with psychiatric treatments, put her in a position for the next important phase of recovery.

Seeking a quieter life, she and her husband moved from a city to the small town of Brighton, Ontario. After not attending a church for a while, she and her husband fell in love with Brighton Fellowship CRC. The first time they visited was on Friendship Sunday, a day that celebrates Friendship Ministries, a program for people who have cognitive impairments.

Watching those men and women participate in the service, she remembers thinking, "If members of Fellowship CRC can accept Friendship people, maybe they will also accept the likes of me."

From that day, she said, the church community, with its strong sense of inclusiveness, has meant a great deal to her and her husband and has played a significant role in her recovery.

Attending worship services, taking care of kids in the nursery, pitching in at vacation Bible school, mentoring in the Friendship group, attending the "Let's Talk" Bible study and Women's Coffee Break, and volunteering for Faith and

Pray for Unity

Lord God, in a world filled with indifference and intolerance, help us to reflect attitudes that are revealed in your kingdom.

Help us to look at ourselves no longer from a worldly point of view but from a kingdom point of view.

Help us to manifest your character.

As there is unity in the Godhead, may we live that unity. Amen.

Hope Ministries have all been satisfying and enriching.

But she had her struggles. She recalls how, one morning, her small group leader took her aside and quietly asked how she was doing.

"My low energy and a sad countenance were apparent. I disclosed my bipolar diagnosis. This lady shared her own experience with depression and offered to pray for me," said Hamilton.

"This concept of support, understanding, and prayer was entirely new to me. Over the next year, I shared my diagnosis with each woman who noticed my sadness and was met with support."

In this way, she said, she truly opened up to others and received many blessings in return.

Participating in a women's retreat allowed her to share a long-time spiritual emptiness that the church was now helping to address.

"Our pastor spoke often about the suffering of those with mental illness. I found strength in reading the psalms," she says.

She returns to the psalms often as she continues to experience difficult bouts with the illness, reminding her that this

is a lifelong condition requiring ongoing vigilance.

Looking back, Hamilton said she really had no idea what mental illness meant or how it felt to live with it, even though she had seen its effects on others in her family.

"My silent response to the depression at first had been to 'snap out of it,'" she recalls. Once she had accepted the diagnosis, another reality set in and she began to wonder, *Why me?* It didn't seem fair.

In attending Brighton Fellowship CRC, she came to understand that God has a purpose for her life, said Hamilton. "Perhaps sharing my journey and knowledge of mood disorders and providing the support and encouragement that I had received may be part of that purpose." ■



Chris Meehan is news and media manager for CRC Communications.

Fast Facts

The "Let's Talk" Bible study developed by June Zwier and Winnie Visser for the Office of Disability Concerns Mental Health Task Force in collaboration with Faith and Hope Ministries, Ontario, is available to all churches.

Find "Let's Talk" and much more on the "Resources for Mental Health Ministry" page of Disability Concern's website—crcna.org/disability.

Other organizations providing excellent resources include:

- Faith and Hope Ministries faithandhopeministries.net
- Shalem Network shalemnetwork.org
- Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services pinerest.org
- Pathways to Promise pathways2promise.org
- Mental Health Ministries mentalhealthministries.net

A Veggie-Tales Witness

It was March 15, 1961, at Westminster Abbey—a worship service to dedicate the New English Bible after 13 years of translating work. An impressive occasion complete with the royal family in attendance, exquisite music, and a magnificent liturgy.

The gathered worshipers anticipated the first public reading from this long-awaited translation. Which passage had been chosen?

Then the voice of George Duncan of the Church of Scotland echoed through the sanctuary: “I entreat you, then . . . as God has called you, live up to your calling. Be humble always and gentle and patient too. Be forbearing with one another and charitable. Spare no effort to make fast with bonds of peace the unity which the Spirit gives” (Eph. 4:1-3).

In the hush of that holy moment, Christians from around the globe heard again the call of the gospel to be little for the Lord and to demonstrate by our lives that “There is one body and one Spirit, as there is also one hope held out in God’s call to you; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6).

What a profoundly simple and incredibly impossible mission! “Saved to serve” is how we sometimes put it: ministering to one another, caring for one another, helping one another. In situations of brokenness and pain, in institutions and hospitals, despite disabilities and in spite of injustice, we are to be a presence of peace, loving one and all in such a way as to represent both the heart and the unity of God.

It is an awesome calling, one we have recognized in establishing “specialized ministries” to welcome and encourage the gifts

of people with disabilities; to make our churches truly safe; to serve also outside the walls of our sanctuaries; to enhance pastor-church relations; to stand up for the rights of one and of all. In our denominational structure we have tried to model what God tells us we must mirror in our individual lives.

I was in a Christian bookstore once when Veggie Tales were at the height of their popularity. For the uninitiated, these are video renditions of Bible stories starring animated vegetables.

As I walked to the counter with my purchase, I heard the clerk say to a customer on the phone, “Yes, Larry and Bob will be here from 1 to 3.” What you need to know is that Larry is an animated cucumber and Bob is a talking tomato.

The clerk hung up the phone and said to me, “That person asked me if the real Larry and Bob were going to be here or if they were only going to be people dressed up in Larry and

Bob costumes!” It was the second time someone had called to ask that question, she said, and we laughed about it.

But suppose we change the question a little and realize that people all around us are actually asking, “Are the real Christ-people going to show up, or just some people wearing Christ costumes?”

Are we authentic? The real thing? Living examples of the love of Christ: “humble always and gentle and patient too . . . forbearing with one another and charitable”? Or do we just pretend “to make fast with bonds of peace the unity which the Spirit gives”?

That day back in 1961, Ephesians 4 was chosen to be read—a reminder that beneath the pomp and pageantry and robes and crowns there beat in each chest a heart called to reflect the love of Christ and to point to the one true God.

And that day in the bookstore I was reminded of the importance of that witness by a silly question about Larry and Bob.

Let both remind us always of our true mission! ■



Are we authentic?
The real thing? Living
examples of the love of
Christ?



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



Tyler Smies runs with young golfers.

Learning About God in Golf

Tyler Smies simply wanted a college where he could earn a well-respected degree, grow in his faith—and make the golf team.

Calvin College fit all three, and he enrolled there.

Since then, he has spent four years on Calvin’s golf team and the past three as an assistant coach.

Smies has transitioned his love of the sport into a full-time career. As executive director of a small nonprofit, The First Tee of West Michigan, he leads a team that teaches young people life skills, core values, and healthy habits through golf.

A 2010 graduate, Smies credits Calvin with building his faith.

“My faith before going to Calvin hadn’t affected my behavior or changed my heart;

it was based on information and facts,” he said. “I relied heavily on people at Calvin . . . and they helped me shift into a ‘walk the talk’ faith in Christ.”

The opportunities provided through Smies’s business major helped as well.

Interning at two nonprofits during his senior year, he sensed a call from God. “When the opportunity arose to start a nonprofit that helps young people through golf, I grabbed it and ran.”

Now Smies has the chance to model Christ’s love to young people in the same way that he was mentored at Calvin.

“The First Tee is really relationship-building with kids at its core—we just happen to do it around the game of golf.” ■

—Beth Heinen Bell,
Calvin College
Communications

Program Focuses on Women



BTGMI’s new radio/web-based program reaches out to young women.

Wen gave her life to the Lord, quitting her job to serve in a church.

But because of the lack of biblically sound resources in China, her “beliefs were not grounded on God’s Word,” said Jean Chen, Chinese program producer for Back to God Ministries International.

When BTGMI’s Chinese ministry team visited China, they invited Wen to a conference and shared resources from “Bible and Women,” a radio program and website encouraging women like Wen.

“The site reaches young women as well as professional women in China who are struggling to balance their professional, family, and church life,” explained Rev. Jimmy Lin, Chinese ministry leader.

After discovering “Bible and Women,” Wen approached Jean and said that she had been dealing with depression and family issues. Jean helped counsel Wen and connected her with a local church leader who would provide ongoing spiritual counsel. ■

—Brian Clark, Back to God Ministries International



N. T. Wright speaks at the Calvin Theological Seminary missions conference.

Discussing the Grand Narrative of Scripture

More than 700 people from 16 different countries attended the Calvin Theological Seminary-sponsored conference “A Missional Reading of Scripture.”

Over the past several decades, a number of scholars have recognized that mission is not simply a peripheral theme in the biblical story but is central.

Thus, a missional hermeneutic is a way of reading Scripture in which mission is an interpretive key unlocking the narrative of Scripture.

That was the focus of this conference, explored in workshops and by plenary speakers including Christopher Wright, Michael Goheen (CTS missiologist), Darrell Guder, and N. T. Wright.

As part of the conference, bestselling author N. T. Wright gave a free public lecture called “The Big Picture: The New Testament and the Mission of God.” More than 2,500 attended.

After the lecture, Wright praised CTS for being a vocation-shaping place that “holds up before people the larger picture of the world and the Bible,” a critical need in a contemporary culture that knows little about theology and Scripture.

Asked for feedback on the conference, one person said, “Embracing the nature of how we fit into the grand narrative of God is always helpful in my missional context.”

The seminary’s Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal organized the conference and hopes to convene future conferences on other missional issues.

Podcasts of the lectures and a video of the public lecture by N. T. Wright are available on the CTS webpage (calvinseminary.edu). ■

—Alena De Young, *Calvin Theological Seminary*

Home Missions Helps Launch Church Planting Effort in New York City

Presbyterian pastor and well-known author Tim Keller has high praise for a joint church planting effort underway between the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America in New York City.

Keller appears in a short video that looks at the Kingdom Enterprise Zone (KEZ) that has begun in New York. KEZs are areas in which the denominations collaborate in order to start churches, often churches that have a fresh focus for ministry.

So far, 10 of these initiatives have taken place in regions across North America. Christian Reformed Home Missions is overseeing the KEZ effort for the CRC.



Keller, who is the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, says that efforts such as these are needed in the nation’s largest metropolitan area, home to 22 million people representing many cultures and religions.

“This KEZ . . . will reach out to the whole city with the gospel,” Keller says.

Rev. Pete Armstrong, coleader of the KEZ, says on the video that he came to New York City more than three years ago to start a church that is now called Dwell.

He says most new churches start out serving an area that has about 10,000 people, while in New York the number is 80,000.

Dwell Church is nestled in a neighborhood between the homeless along the Bowery and the wealthier Nolita and SoHo.

Ten leaders from across the metro region have been meeting together to pray and dream about formation of the new KEZ. ■

—Chris Meehan, *CRC Communications*

Mexican Leaders Respond to Call

After several years of co-leading Agua Viva, a church plant in Tijuana, Mexico, Christian Reformed World Missions missionaries Scott and Marcia Geurink are passing leadership on to national leaders.

Israel and Elizabeth Ponce will be taking over Agua Viva, which Cristo Arca de Salvacion, their home church, asked them to help launch in 2007.

Israel has preached occasionally, and Elizabeth leads children's classes. But since they also have three young children, and Israel has had to juggle two full-time jobs, they could devote only so much time to the ministry.

Meanwhile, the church planting team began Bible studies, and North American and Mexican churches joined the outreach. In time the church expanded from six families to over 50 people.

In 2011, the Geurinks and the council of Cristo Arca de Salvacion began praying about who would lead the church, growing convinced that God was calling them to approach the Ponces.

They told Cristo Arca de Salvacion's pastor, Israel's brother, what they were sensing. The pastor had been feeling the same thing.

When the Geurinks approached the Ponces, they said that they had put this in God's hands, believing that "if Scott asked them if they were interested in pursuing more training and leadership, it would be the sign they needed from God," said Marcia Geurink.

Since then, Israel has dropped one of his jobs, and he and Elizabeth have enrolled in the Tijuana Bible Institute. With the Geurinks as mentors, the Ponces have gradually taken on more responsibilities at Agua Viva.

"They both have a strong love for God [and] a heart for the ministry and for people who are hurting," says Scott Geurink. ■

—Sarah Lin,
Christian Reformed World Missions



Israel and Elizabeth Ponce will assume leadership of Agua Viva.



Lucía Sub now grows vegetables and herbs.

Guatemalans Receive Training

Lucía Sub is among those who faced many struggles when civil war ransacked Guatemala from 1960 to 1996.

"Our people were persecuted and our leaders disappeared," Sub recalled. "My husband was taken prisoner and was presumed dead. I found him months later, very sick."

During those years, her family's prime agricultural land was given to rich landlords.

Forced to resettle in marshlands, the family had a hard time growing food and were cut off from community services such as schools and health clinics.

With her husband weakened by imprisonment, Sub walked 15 kilometers to work as a laundress in town to supplement her family's income, only returning home on weekends.

When a peace treaty was signed in 1996, the government promised changes that didn't come.

World Renew and its local partner, the Asociación de Desar-

rollo Integral Polochic (ADIP) stepped in, inviting Sub and others to participate in preventative health and sustainable agriculture training programs.

Afterward, Sub put her training to use, cultivating a small plot of land and growing native herbs for cooking or medicine.

Now when she travels into town, it is to sell her herbs at the local market. She earns enough to support her family.

"The trainings with a biblical perspective changed my life," she explained. "I now understand that as a child of God, I am capable of achieving great things." ■

—Kristen DeRoo Vandenberg,
World Renew

These stories are also available
online at thebanner.org.

Your Busy Brain

Your brain is one of the hardest-working parts of your body. Most of the time you don't realize how many different things your brain is doing: it tells your heart to beat, your lungs to breathe,

your eyes to blink, your mouth to swallow—and much more. God designed your amazing brain to work with the rest of your body to keep you healthy in sometimes surprising ways!



ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

Aaaah-choo!

A sneeze starts when something irritates your nose, causing the part of your brain that controls sneezes to leap into action. Its job is to get things that aren't supposed to be in your nose and throat out of there—FAST! Without even trying, you take a deep breath. Your sneeze controller makes the muscles in your chest and throat push the air out really fast. That clears dust or other stuff out of your nose and throat.

In ancient times, some people believed that when someone sneezed, his soul could escape through his nose. Others believed that evil spirits could enter when people sneezed. That's why people all over the world say nice things to each other when they sneeze. Here people might say, "God bless you." A Hindu might say, "Live well." In China, people say, "May you live 100 years."

A Famous Sneeze

One of the earliest copyrighted films ever made was a film of a sneeze! In 1894 William Dickson used a machine called a kinetograph, invented by Thomas Edison, to film a man sneezing. It was amazing to people who had never seen moving pictures before. You can watch this very short, very old movie at memory.loc.gov/mbrs/edmp/0026A.mpg.



FuN Facts

A man named Charles Osborne who lived in Anthon, Iowa, started hiccupping in 1922 when he was butchering a pig. He kept on hiccupping for the next **68 years!** The year before he died the hiccups finally went away.

Sneezes can come out of your nose at **100 miles (150 km) per hour!** That's why it's important to cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze. If you don't, you spread germs really fast and far.

The **scientific name** for "brain freeze" might make your brain hurt when you try to pronounce it: it's "sphenopalatine ganglioneuralgia."

Unborn babies can yawn, hiccup, and suck their thumbs!

The Mystery of Yawning

Being tired, bored, or nervous can make you yawn. But exactly why people yawn is still a mystery. Some scientists think we do it to get more oxygen to our brain or to cool our brain. Others think we do it to show sympathy for other people who are tired.

Lots of people yawn when they see or hear someone else yawning—or even when they read about yawning. Are you yawning yet? Try this: next time your family is having dinner or watching TV, fake a yawn—and see if anyone else yawns!

Brrrr . . . Brain Freeze!

You're eating ice cream when suddenly your head feels like it's ready to explode and you stop to catch your breath. You have brain freeze! It happens when something very cold touches the roof of your mouth. Why is that so painful?

Scientists say that the brain is sensitive to temperature. When it suddenly feels cold, it tells your body to rush warm blood to the cold spot. That sudden extra blood flow stretches the artery the blood runs through, giving you a headache.

Brain freeze usually goes away in a minute or two. To make it stop faster, drink a glass of warm water. That tells your brain that everything's OK again.



Hiccups

Almost everybody gets the hiccups now and then. There's a muscle in your chest just below your lungs called the diaphragm. When it gets irritated, your brain tells it to jump—just like you would jump if someone poked you with a stick. When your diaphragm jumps, it sucks air down your throat really fast. When it goes past your vocal chords, that air makes a hiccupping noise.

Hiccups usually go away by themselves. But if you can't get rid of them, try one of these cures. Which one works best for you?

- Pinch your nose closed. Then take a deep breath and hold it as long as you can.
- Drink some water using the far side of a glass.
- Bite on a lemon slice.
- Stick out your tongue and pull on it with your fingers.



Read More About It

For more information about your busy brain, visit a bookstore or library to get the book *What Makes You Cough, Sneeze, Burp, Hiccup, Blink, Yawn, Sweat, and Shiver?* by Jean Stangl.



Sandy Swartzentruber is a freelance writer and editor who attends Sherman Street Christian

Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. She yawned at least 20 times while writing about yawning.



Personalized Medicine

IS IT GOOD FOR THE BODY?

I**N THE TELEVISION SHOW** “Community,” a doctor tells health fanatic Jeff Winger that he has high cholesterol.

“But I treat my body like a temple!” he says.

To which his doctor replies, “I can’t be the first person to tell you that the temple doesn’t last forever. I mean, it’s made of hamburger. This is a temple of doom. . . . It represents the inconvenient fact that all good things—be they people or movie franchises—eventually collapse into sagging, sloppy, rotten piles of hard-to-follow nonsense.”

It’s a funny exchange with a serious point. No matter how hard we may try to keep up the “temple,” our efforts, ultimately, are doomed. Everyone ages. Everyone gets sick. Everyone dies. And yet many of us do our very best to stave off the effects of illness and old age as long as possible.

Broadly speaking, there are three main ways we try to stay healthy. The first is by visiting the doctor or hospital when we are sick or injured to try to take care of our immediate problem. That’s called “curative” medicine. The second is by eating well and getting exercise, either on

our own or guided by nutritionists or trainers, to maintain good health. That’s “preventive” medicine. All of us have some experience with these two traditional ways of safeguarding our health. A third way, though, is relatively new. It’s called “personalized” medicine.

Personalized medicine is a hybrid of preventive and curative medicine. As the name implies, personalized medicine is about developing treatments and management for a variety of illnesses in a way that’s tailored to an individual patient, but *before* the symptoms of a disease appear. The key to personalized medicine

is genetics. By analyzing a person's specific genetic code, doctors—and, to an increasing degree, the patients themselves—can identify the risk of developing a disease. And if they choose to, they can take targeted action to head it off at the pass.

This practice is gaining in popularity. A high-profile example of personalized medicine is actress Angelina Jolie's decision to undergo a double mastectomy, even though she showed no symptoms of breast cancer. Jolie's mother had passed away at age 56 after fighting ovarian cancer for a decade. A genetic test revealed that Jolie had inherited a faulty copy of the BRCA1 gene from her mother, meaning that she had an 87 percent risk of developing breast cancer and a 50 percent risk of ovarian cancer. Rather than dealing with the potential cancer if and when it came, Jolie made the decision to prevent it through radical surgery.

Jolie's case was controversial, but early intervention, including surgery and submitting to drug trials, is increasingly an option for people who carry faulty genes that could make them susceptible to inherited forms of dementia and certain types of cancer. It's also big business. A major study of the personalized medicine sector in 2009 showed that the market for personalized medicine in the United States was \$252 billion. The study estimated that it would grow by 11 percent a year and be worth \$452 billion by 2015. This includes not only the sale of genetic tests but pharmaceutical, medical device, and diagnostics support for the burgeoning industry.

With this new approach to medicine has come a variety of ethical concerns. For example, if I submit to a genetic test for Alzheimer's disease, the data from my test becomes not only valuable to researchers but is also essential to developing effective treatment. However, since there's nothing more personal and private than my own genetic code, how can I keep my privacy safe while still helping to move research forward?

Another issue is access to testing and treatment. Right now, personalized medicine is expensive. The costs of tests

Never before have we had such an intimate and detailed look at the very stitches God used to knit us together.

for a faulty BRCA1 gene, for example, can range from hundreds to thousands of dollars, depending on the type of test. So the question becomes this: are we creating two classes of patients? The rich, who can afford genetic screening and treatment, and the poor, who cannot?

But a third ethical issue in personalized medicine is, in many ways, the thorniest. If I learn that I carry the risk of a disease—as Jolie did—should I be able to direct doctors to take action, even though there's a chance I may not develop the disease at all? If the first rule for physicians is “do no harm,” where does highly invasive surgery on healthy tissue fit into the mix?

For Christians, the ethical issue also takes on a spiritual dimension—and takes us into that most maddeningly circular of dinnertime theological discussions: the issue of free will versus predestination.

After all, we are people who profess, along with the psalmist, that God created our inmost being and knit each of us together in our mother's womb. We believe Christ's words that not a hair can fall from our head without the will of the Father in heaven. We know that our days are divinely numbered, and we trust that when Jesus asks, “Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” he is referring to the plan God has for our lives. But how, in all of this, does personalized medicine—which seems to give us greater freedom to decide the

course of our own life and health—square with our belief in that divine plan? Does giving ourselves over to predictive genetic testing represent a kind of vanity or, worse, a kind of idolatry? At what point does doing our part to “take care of the temple” become a kind of self-worship? Never before have we had such an intimate and detailed look at the very stitches God used to knit us together—and never before have we had as much control over how and when we allow those stitches to ultimately and inevitably unravel.

Christians have spent a lot of time discussing medical issues around the beginning of life (abortion) and the end of life (euthanasia). But as new genetic tests become available, we're seeing a blurring of those lines. Every day we get closer to the possibility that genetic screening at the moment of our birth could give us information on all the risk factors in our lives—and possibly pinpoint the cause, or even the year, of our probable death. Knowing these things would put pressure on parents to make all kinds of choices for their children that they have never had to make before. Can you imagine holding your newborn and getting the news that she stands a 75 percent chance of developing early onset dementia? That kind of insight used to be the domain of God himself—and it represents a very different kind of fruit of the tree of knowledge for all of us.

One thing is certain: as personalized medicine continues to become more widely available—and as our population continues to age and life spans continue to grow—these and other spiritual issues around “temple keeping” are, for many of us, going to become less a question of theology and more of an issue of personal and clinical experience.

It's a dimension of human health that deserves some serious spiritual attention. ■



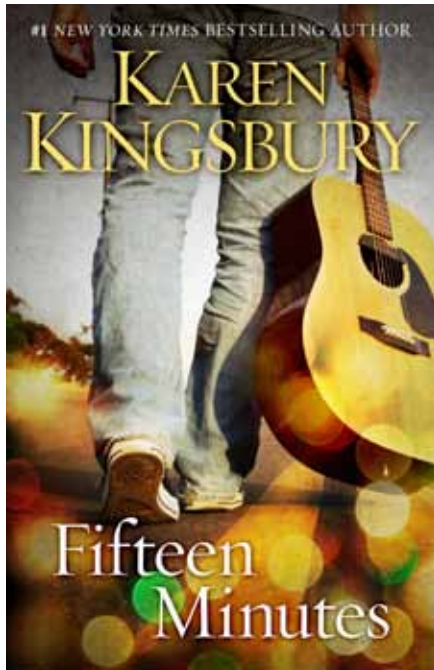
Lloyd Rang is a writer and a member of Rehoboth Christian Reformed Church in Bowmanville, Ontario.

Faith vs. Fame

A RISING THEME in popular Christian culture is the dichotomy between our faith as followers of Christ and the fame with which mainstream North American consumers are obsessed. The adage “The love of money is the root of all evil” has evolved into “Fame is the root of all evil.” But the question remains: Is fame itself against God’s will for us, or is it simply a tool that can be used to illuminate other, often more complex, desires and insecurities?

In her most recent novel, *Fifteen Minutes*, Karen Kingsbury alludes to the unholiness of fame in Zack Dylan’s journey through a popular singing competition called “Fifteen Minutes.” Before participating in the show, Zack had enjoyed a contented lifestyle on his parents’ Kentucky horse farm. He and his girlfriend were happy; he turned to his grandfather for spiritual guidance and wisdom. However, the footage that “Fifteen Minutes” airs of him, and the image the show created for him, cause Zack’s family and girlfriend to believe he has lost his way.

Other characters in the novel struggle between faith and fame as well. Fame has destroyed the families of two of the judges: Chandra and Kelly. In a desperate



attempt to reach Kelly, Chandra tells her, “Marriage is beautiful. Fame is ugly,” as if Kelly’s rise to fame were the single factor in Kelly’s separation from her husband.

In contrast, Bob Briner argues that Christians don’t have enough of a presence in popular culture. In his book *Roaring Lambs*, Briner suggests that the lack of positive, family-affirming content in main-

stream media is directly tied to the lack of Christians creating that media.

“What I’m calling for is a radically different way of thinking about our world,” Briner writes. “Instead of running from it, we need to rush into it. And instead of just hanging around the fringes of our culture, we need to be right smack dab in the middle of it.”

Briner argues that if more Christians were to immerse themselves in the mainstream culture, even if it is fame-obsessed, the content produced by that culture would contain the values Christians could stand behind. ■

Is fame itself against God’s will for us?



Kate Padilla is a staff writer at the *Spencer Daily Reporter* in Spencer, Iowa, where she is a member of Hope Church.



Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate

by Justin Lee

reviewed by Jenny deGroot

“This book is about a controversial subject that touches many people’s lives,” writes Justin Lee in his opening notes. Lee experienced pain and judgment as a young, committed Christian when he realized that he was not who he, his family, and his church thought he was. Lee opens up the wounds of his own young life and his journey with his parents, friends, and pastors. How could God have created him gay? And how would God want him to live? Having experienced confusion, alienation, and hatred at a personal level, Lee envisions a world of respect, conversation, and wholeness. He invites readers to be part of that reality. (Jericho Books)



Reflektor

by **Arcade Fire**

reviewed by **Robert N. Hosack**

What does a “former” indie rock band, the surprise Grammy winner of 2011 Album of the Year for *The Suburbs*, do for an encore? The anxious, ambitious two-disc *Reflektor* is the answer—a soaring sonic soundscape ranging across modern rock’s world. This fourth Arcade Fire album clocks in at over 75 minutes. Like their earlier works, it asks big questions in between the beats about (false) faith and heaven in “Reflektor” and “Afterlife.” (Merge Records).



Prayer of the Woods

by **Tony Dekker**

reviewed by **Adele Konyndyk**

Prayer of the Woods is the solo offering by Tony Dekker, lead singer of the Canadian folk-rock group Great Lake Swimmers. Long-time fans will likely note the resemblance to the sparsely intimate sound of the group’s early work and appreciate Dekker’s consistently wildlife-rich lyrics. These are unique songs of solitude—wistful new explorations of love, memory, mortality, and dreams. Although Dekker never mentions Christ directly, this gently inviting album might still bring to listeners’ minds Jesus himself, who would often slip away to the wilderness and pray. (Netzwerk Records)

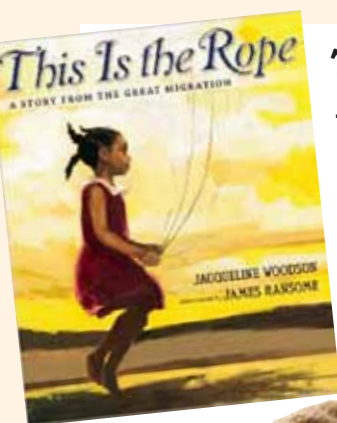


Thank God It's Thursday

by **William H. Willimon**

reviewed by **Randall Engle**

For all those who love William Willimon’s evocative and crisp biblical commentary, this book will not disappoint. Though the subtitle is “Encountering Jesus at the Lord’s Table as if for the last time,” the slim volume is more than a descriptor of Maundy Thursday. The review of the stories of John 13-15 is insightful for any time. Beyond biblical exposition, Willimon applies lessons for our world and church, and he includes a poignant prayer before each chapter. (Abingdon)



This Is the Rope: A Story from the Great Migration

by **Jacqueline Woodson**

reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

From the early 1900s to the 1970s, 6 million African Americans moved from the South of the U.S. to the North in an exodus now known as the Great Migration. In this fictional picture book, a young girl skips using a rope she found near her South Carolina home. Years later, the rope is a vital link to the past. Vivid, energetic illustrations portray a family and community that loves, laughs, works, and flourishes in a context of justice and opportunity for all. (Nancy Paulsen Books)



THE LOWDOWN: OSCAR EDITION

Academy Awards time is coming, but *The Banner* has already weighed in on many movies from the last year. Check online at thebanner.org for full reviews of these and many other movies:

12 Years a Slave: “The story is difficult yet redemptive. Northup’s story is history we need to know.”

42: “Rather than worshiping at the altar of violence and revenge, the movie encourages the best in humanity.”

All Is Lost: “Minimal dialogue and a very limited set . . . an unusual, edge-of-the-seat experience.”

Captain Phillips: “Tom Hanks’s brilliant performance . . . is well-balanced by first-time Somali-American actor Barkhad Abdi, who brings to life a character driven to piracy by the extreme circumstances of his homeland.”

Frozen: “Promotes the futility and danger of pretending to be someone you are not.”

Fruitvale Station: “[Director] Coogler attempts to paint a portrait of [shooting victim] Oscar Grant as a human being: a real person with gifts and flaws.”

Gravity: “A rollercoaster of a movie that will keep you on the edge of your seat while providing some of the most amazing visuals of space seen in a movie.”

Hellbound? “Shows that much of our understanding of hell is tied up in tradition and Bosch-like images rather than in the words of Scripture.”

Hunger Games: Catching Fire: “Well-made, well-acted, exciting, and thought-provoking . . . it offers a multitude of talking points for parents, teachers, and other leaders.”

Iron Man 3: “Summer blockbusters often reflect our society’s fears and also our hopes for a superhero—or, you could say, for a savior.”

Lee Daniels’ The Butler: “Family dynamics are the heart and soul of this movie, and the fine acting elevates it above some of the more contrived moments.”

Mud: “An awakening to the gray, uncertain areas of life that bring both beauty and pain.”

**MORE REVIEWS
ONLINE**

OUTSIDER FAITH

Ruth's Story Is Ours

SOME TIME AGO a young man showed up at our church. He had never gone to church before and was not a Christian. But he had been dating a believer and was increasingly uncomfortable with some spiritual oppression in his life. He told me that God had pushed him out of his house and to our church to seek help. I had the privilege of coming alongside that young man against the spiritual forces of darkness at work in his life in the name of Jesus. After he came to faith in Christ, that sense of spiritual oppression went away, leaving him with a deep sense of peace and joy.

His story reminds me of the Old Testament story of Ruth, for God gives faith and draws people into his family in unpredictable ways.

Ruth lived during the time when the judges ruled over Israel. It was a time of great lawlessness and idolatry (Judg. 2:10-12; 17); God's people chose to worship the Canaanite god Baal and to do whatever they pleased. They did this in

spite of God's warning that when they abandoned him for other gods, their fields would be cursed, their crops would fail, and there would be famine in the land (Deut. 28:15-18).

And so it happened. Bethlehem, which means "house of bread," had no bread. The famine that plagued the Israelites wasn't just a lack of rain. It was God's judgment on them—a form of tough love in an attempt to get them to return to God. It showed them that Baal was powerless to make their crops grow or to provide them with food.

Leaving Israel

The Israelites should have repented of their sin and turned back to God. But instead, Elimelech and Naomi left Israel to look for a better life among the pagan people of Moab. There, things simply went from bad to worse. They were living apart from God in a pagan land where the likelihood of ever turning back to him was slim.

Very quickly Elimelech and Naomi experienced what life apart from God can be like. Elimelech died. Their two sons married

pagan women, something God had consistently warned them against. Then Naomi's sons died, leaving Naomi destitute. Harsh consequences. Life apart from God and from God's people was not what they hoped it would be. It never is.

Sometimes we just don't get it. God sends us warning after warning that the way we're living is not going to end well, but we keep on doing what we want—a path that often leads to death of one kind or another.

A Turning Point

Naomi decided to cut her losses and return to Israel. Since she couldn't provide for herself—much less for Orpah and Ruth, her daughters-in-law—she encourages them to go back to their families in Moab. But Ruth refuses to leave Naomi. "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay," she says. "Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me" (Ruth 1:16-17). In one of the great surprises in this story, Ruth the Moabite is drawn to faith in God.

SOMETIMES GOD PLANTS FAITH IN THE HEARTS OF PEOPLE WHO SEEM UNLIKELY TO BELIEVE.

Faith is a gift from God. Sometimes we find faith in places we hope and pray to find it—such as in the hearts of our sons and daughters who have been raised to love and follow Jesus. Other times God plants faith in the hearts of people who seem unlikely to believe.

When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, Ruth did what poor people did in those days: she scavenged for grain behind the workers who were harvesting barley. This particular field belonged to a relative of Naomi named Boaz. Boaz was "a man of standing" as a wealthy landowner in Bethlehem. But would he help Naomi and Ruth?

Ruth was a Moabite, a foreigner. Jews didn't like foreigners. And she was a woman, which made it easy for others to take advantage of her. But Ruth wasn't the first foreigner God had brought into Boaz's family. His mother was Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho who believed in the God of Israel and risked her life by protecting Israelite spies. As a result, she and her family were saved (Josh. 2). So God had a history of bringing Gentiles to faith in Boaz's family!

Boaz invited Ruth to continue to glean in his fields for the rest of the harvest season. Temporarily then, Naomi and Ruth would have all the food they needed. But that food would eventually run out, and once again they would be hungry and destitute. What they really needed was a male relative to step up and protect them as members of his extended family. What they really needed was a redeemer.

In Boaz, that's exactly what God provided for Ruth and Naomi. As one of their closest relatives, he could fulfill the role of kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 2:20). He could buy their property, marry Ruth, and provide sons to carry on Elimelech's family name. Chapters 3 and 4 tell the story: a bizarre wedding proposal, the refusal of a closer male relative to buy the property, the purchase of Elimelech's property by Boaz, and the marriage of Boaz and Ruth.

Ruth's Story Is Ours

Just as Boaz left his threshing floor to redeem Naomi and Ruth, Jesus left heaven to come to earth and redeem us. Just as Boaz risked his reputation and his estate in order to help two poor widows, Jesus gave his life in order to redeem us from sin and shame. Just as Boaz made a legal transaction in order to acquire land and people to be his very own, Jesus bought us to be his very own through his death and resurrection. And just as Boaz was willing to take in an outsider who was not part of God's covenant family, so Jesus has taken in many of us Gentile outsiders and adopted us to be a part of his eternal family.

God blessed Boaz and Ruth with a son they named Obed. Obed was the grandfather of King David, and David was the ancestor of Jesus. In the story of Ruth, we see God grafting Ruth into his family tree through Boaz. What a remarkable turn of events! God used the poor choices of a God-fearing family that led them away from him to lead a Moabite woman to faith. Not only did God welcome Ruth into a God-fearing family, but he made her an ancestor of Jesus Christ.

God does the same thing for us. He has adopted us into his family and grafted us onto his family tree (Rom. 11:17-24). For God's goal is not to condemn us but to save us through Christ. God continues to draw those outside of his kingdom into his family, just as he recently drew a young man into our community. Most often he uses our relationships with "outsiders" to do so, just as he used Boaz to draw Ruth to himself.

Who might God want to reach through you? ■



Curt Walters is pastor of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Cutlerville, Mich.

What We Can Learn from Galileo

AS REFORMED CHRISTIANS, how do we approach critical and controversial contemporary issues? There really are only two possible choices. We can use our faith as a reason to deflect consideration of these issues, or we can use our faith as a prism to fully engage them. Frank, honest discussion and faith are not mutually exclusive. They are interdependent and lie at the heart of our commitment to the 17th-century concept *semper reformanda*—always reforming.

This issue is not new to the Christian Reformed Church or to the broader church. Throughout history, the church has struggled to accept open and honest dialogue. There have always been Christians who have argued that such and such an argument must be rejected because it violates accepted theological norms. Very often, advances in knowledge have been put forward that were rejected by sincere Christians but ultimately were proved valid and accepted by the church. The key to whether or not we accept a “new” idea rests on the willingness of Christians to examine it in light of our faith *before* a decision is made.

The 17th-century case of Galileo, a devout Christian, is a telling example of the church’s unwillingness to engage in honest, open investigation of an argument. Most astronomers and Christians of that time accepted the geocentric argument. Originally the church had been cautiously open to Galileo’s heliocentric position. But, eventually—out of fear—the church establishment turned against Galileo. Ultimately the Inquisition found him guilty of heresy, and Galileo spent the rest of his life under house arrest. Galileo was condemned not because his scientific position was discredited but because the Pope and the established community of astronomers felt their power and prestige were being challenged. Today no one denies that the earth revolves around the sun. But 300 years ago, the church relied on an argument that still is used today: we have years of doctrine behind us, so there’s no reason to investigate any further.

When our Reformed faith and the Dutch ancestry of many members of the CRC were intimately entwined, it was somewhat easier to be of one mind on a whole host of issues. Our insularity provided comfort and security. It is much more difficult today to maintain unity as the denomination is in the midst of fundamental demographic change. We are losing

Our faith is not about ethnicity, race, age, or gender.

members, especially among our young people. We now have more gay members. Transfers from other denominations have broadened our cultural, ethnic, and racial configuration. Centers of Dutch culture and ancestry are declining, and the racial and ethnic composition of the denomination is changing. It is a fact that after about 160 years, the demographic reality of the Christian Reformed Church is not what it was for many of our parents and grandparents. That “cocoon” is gone forever. Perhaps we have been too wrapped up in our historic cultural identity, and God is now telling us to deal with a new reality as mature Christians.

Our faith is not about ethnicity, race, age, or gender. It is about fidelity to Christ as he is revealed in Scripture. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). This means approaching every issue that affects us all with open, contrite hearts. It means applying our faith and our intellect to pressing contemporary issues without prejudging them. If we do not do that, our denomination’s future is indeed bleak.

So let’s learn from the example of Galileo. We do not have to accept every new argument that is proposed, but we do need to honestly and openly investigate every new argument, in keeping with *semper reformanda*. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)

Steven E. Meyer is retired from service in the federal government. He consults, lectures, and writes on political, economic, and security issues primarily in the U.S., Europe, and Russia. He is a member of the Christian Reformed Church in Washington, D.C.

ADS

Deadlines: March issue is 2/3/14; April issue is 3/10/14. Details online.

Prices: Most ads are \$0.33^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.26^{US} per character applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements. Photos are \$22^{US} extra.

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Denominational and Classical

AGENDA FOR SYNOD 2014 Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the office of the executive director of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda:

- a. Reports of standing committees and affiliated youth and educational agencies are due on February 15.
- b. Reports of agency boards are due ten days after the conclusion of the board meetings, but no later than March 1.
- c. Overtures and appeals are due no later than March 15.
- d. Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the Credentials for Synod, as well as the completed information sheet on each delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes as soon as possible but no later than March 15.

Materials will be included in the printed Agenda if received before the synodically established deadlines.

Joel R. Boot Executive Director

ANNUAL DAY OF PRAYER – WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2014

Synod has designated Wednesday, March 12, 2014, as the Annual Day of Prayer. All CRC congregations are requested to assemble to ask for God's blessing upon the world, our nations, crops and industry, and the church worldwide. Councils are reminded that if it is judged that the observance of the Annual Day of Prayer can be more meaningfully observed in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer (U. S.), they have the right to change the date of service accordingly (*Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 578). The National Day of Prayer (U. S.) is May 1, 2014.

Joel R. Boot Executive Director

Calls Accepted

BETHEL CHURCH of Sun Valley, CA joyfully announces the acceptance of call and ordination of Pastor Micah Bruxvoort on Oct. 27, 2013. Praise God for His faithful provision.

Financial Aid

CLASSIS KALAMAZOO STUDENT AID The Student Aid Fund Committee of Classis Kalamazoo, Michigan invites students from their Classis who are planning to pursue full-time ministry in the CRC (undergraduate or graduate level) and are in need of financial aid for the academic year 2014-2015 to apply no later than March 31, 2014 by contacting Paul Vander Kamp, 2221 Ridgefield Rd., Portage, MI 49024, phone 269-321-0709, or e-mail vdrkmp@juno.com. Undergraduate students must be at least in their junior year during 2014-2015. Students presently receiving aid must reapply."

Announcements

HULL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL with thanks to God will celebrate its 100th anniversary with activities on April 24-26, 2014. For more information call 712-439-2273 or check www.hullchristian.com.

LK ALFRED MINISTRY: located on Rt. 17/92, Lk. Alfred, Fl. Close to Winter Haven & Rt. 27. Services 10:30 AM, 5:50 PM. February - Rev. A. Jongsma preaching. March/April - Dr. George Kroeze. Phone: 863-422-2187, 863-422-6442.

WINTER CHURCH SERVICES in Mesa, AZ. Please join us for our 10am Sunday Worship Service at Maranatha Comm. CRC, 6159 E University, Mesa, AZ. We are a winter church and our services start the 1st Sunday in December through the 2nd Sunday in April. For more information contact, Rev. Gary Hutt @ 509-499-4561.

Birthdays

95th Birthday

JOHN VAN SCHEPEN of 16300 Louis Ave., South Holland, IL celebrated his 95th birthday on January 14. His family thanks God for his faith,

wisdom and love. Congratulations with love from all of the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren!

90th Birthday



AUKEMAN Elizabeth DeJong Aukeman (Feb. 17) and Mark J. Aukeman (Apr. 4) 2991 Hope St., Hudsonville, MI 49426. Daughters (Carol, Shirley, Gloria, Nancy) and extended family thank God for their lives of loving service.

IDA (HANNINK) DEYOUNG of 5117 Ridge Ct., Hudsonville, MI 49426 will celebrate her 90th birthday on February 24, 2014. Her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren give thanks for her love. Happy Birthday Mom!

HELEN (HARINGA) HALMA wife of the late Cornelius (1992) will celebrate her 90th birthday on February 6. She gives thanks to God that she can still enjoy living on her own at 918 Burgundy Way, Wayne, NJ 07470. Her children, Linda (Michael), Ruth, Joan (Bob), Barbara, Edward (Debbie), 6 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren, thank God for her and the blessing she has been in our lives.



DORDT COLLEGE

Dordt College is currently accepting applications for the following:

Administrative Positions

Dean for Research & Scholarship
Director of the Andreas Center

Faculty Positions

Art • Education • Psychology • Statistics

Application reviews will begin immediately. Qualified persons committed to a Reformed, Biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of interest and curriculum vitae/résumé to:

Dr. Eric Forseth, Provost
Dordt College
498 4th Avenue NE
Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697
Fax: (712) 722-6035
E-mail: provost@dordt.edu
Web: www.dordt.edu/prospective_employees/faculty/

Dordt College does not discriminate as to age, sex, national origin, marital status or against those who are disabled.



Seeking nominees and applicants for

Canadian Ministries Director of the CRCNA

A leader to cultivate a shared and vibrant vision for engaging the mission of God in Canada by collaborating with congregations, classes and agencies and ministries of the CRCNA.

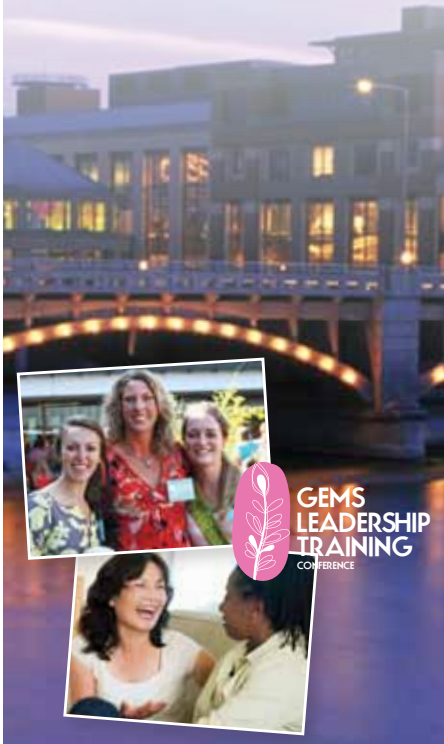
Grounded in scripture and a Reformed worldview, trusting in the Holy Spirit's leading; able to nurture and communicate strategic vision in a dynamic and complex cultural environment; be an empowering leader who prefers to work collaboratively.

A servant leader engaging congregations, classes and agencies to cultivate vision, stimulate engagement in God's mission and plan for effective ministry.

For more information visit www.crcna.org/CMDsearch

Direct all inquiries to Ms. Yvonne Schenk
Chair, Canadian Ministries Director Search Committee
cmdsearch@crcna.org

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NOBLE-SCHLAMM Kay (Goudberg) of 180B W. Maberry, Lynden, WA 98264 will celebrate her 90th birthday on Feb. 5. Her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren give thanks for her love, life and legacy.



DOROTHY (HOVING) RIBBENS celebrates her 90th birthday on February 22. Her children - Ginger (Perry) Hines, Linda (Randy) Buteyn, Cindy (Jim) Holwerda, Dave (Deb) Ribbens, Dale (Kris) Ribbens and Karen Bocks, eleven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren praise God for her life of faith, service, and love. Dot resides at 567 Crestview, Holland, MI 49423



JOHAN SCHRIPSEMA will celebrate his 90th birthday on March 6, 2014. His family thanks God for his faith, wisdom, and positive outlook on life. Well wishes can be sent to 7606 W. 173rd Pl., Tinley Park, IL 60477.

80th Birthday

FRANK AND REVENA GRITTERS are blessed to be celebrating their 80th birthdays in 2014. Frank's birthday is Jan. 29 and Revena's is March 26. The couple also was privileged to celebrate 60 years of marriage on Oct. 22, 2013. Their six children (one deceased) and spouses, 20 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren love them dearly and praise God for His love and faithfulness. Well wishes can be sent to 7 Independence St., Pella, IA 50219.

Church Position Announcements

SENIOR PASTOR: The congregation of River Park Church (CRC), located in Calgary, Alberta, continues to look to fill the position of Senior Pastor to lead a staff ministry. All candidates should direct any inquires and resumes to Tony Bouma, Calling Committee Chair at 403-281-7292 or email atbouma@shaw.ca

PASTOR: Orland Park Christian Reformed Church, located in the southwest suburbs of Chicago, seeks an energetic, passionate pastor who will champion OPCRC's mission of REACHING OUT with the Good News of Jesus Christ and BUILDING UP people in their faith. We are seeking a team pastor, especially gifted in congregational care and outreach ministries, who will challenge the congregation spiritually and provide in the leadership of staff and church ministries. For a complete job description and to learn more about what God is doing at OPCRC, visit www.orlandchurch.com. Resumes and questions regarding this position should be directed to pastorsearch@oprc.org.

SENIOR PASTOR: Faith CRC in Holland, MI seeks a partner in our covenant to become a diverse, spiritual community of reconciliation, healing, and hope. Will you walk this path of discernment with us? Contact us at search@faithcrrc.org

PASTOR: Willoughby CRC is searching to grow into its calling of greater service to our community of Langley, British Columbia. We are seeking a fulltime pastor with strengths in preaching, leadership and relational gifts to help us in that service. The pastor would work in a team staffing model. For more information contact search@willoughbychurch.com

FULL TIME PASTOR: Grace Fellowship CRC of Pella, IA, an 18-year old, non-liturgical church with a casual, contemporary style of worship is continuing to search for a relational pastor to lead us in reaching our vision of having intergenerational worship experiences,

Anniversaries

65th Anniversary

SCHIPPER Clarence & Betty celebrate 65 years together on Feb. 10. Their children, David & Diana, Jone & Dick VanderWall, Gary & Rose, Brenda & Bob Hoeksema, grandchildren & great grandchildren praise God for His faithfulness.

50th Anniversary



ZWIERS Robert & Carolyn will celebrate their Jubilee Anniversary! on January 25. We thank God for His unfailing love shown through you - We love you! Blessings from all your family.

Obituaries

BREUKER Roger 81 of Muskegon MI went to his eternal home suddenly 11/24/13. Beloved husband of Marilyn (Weesies) Loving father of Betty (Dale) Darling, Connie (Mark) Johnston, Kathy (Brian) Buter, Trena (Alan) Buter. 10 grandchildren, 8 great grandchildren. Brother John (Christine) Breuker, Jr. Preceded in death by son Harvey, one grandson and one great granddaughter, 2 brothers Burton and Peter and sister Thelma Sikkenga.

DEVRIES Johannes J., age 77, died at home in Davis, CA on Dec. 8, 2013. He is survived by his wife of 45 years, Donna; son Jeff DeVries; daughter Doney DeVries Biggs and grandchildren Ellora and Carson Biggs.

DYKSTRA Minnie Catherine Olthoff, age 93 of Lansing, IL. peacefully went to be with Jesus, Dec. 28, 2013. Her husband Andrew and son in law Dave Ornee, preceded her in death. She is survived by daughters Ruth (Vern) VanderZee and Jan Ornee, and grandchildren: Anne

intimate small groups, and effective outreach to the un-churched. Send profile/resume to pastorsearch@gracepella.org or call 641-628-1885

PASTOR: If you would like to serve in Heartland Fellowship, an outreach oriented Church in Chilliwack, B. C. that is:

- wanting to connect and enfold our neighbours
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GREAT OPPORTUNITY IN THE NW: The Tacoma Christian Reformed Community Church in Tacoma, WA, seeks a Worship/Youth Director to serve a vibrant, committed and diverse congregation located in a multi-ethnic community. The ideal candidate will have a heart for youth and be gifted in worship with a desire to serve the community alongside a team of devoted staff and volunteers. We are a supportive and united congregation of 200 members that combines diverse backgrounds with CRC values and traditions. Please send inquiries to Jerry Ritsema at pastorsearch@tacomacrc.org.

ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR: Creston CRC in Grand Rapids, MI is seeking an administrative coordinator. For more information visit crestonchurch.org or e-mail crestoncrc@gmail.com

PASTOR: Palo Alto CRC, a San Francisco Bay Area church, is seeking a pastor. We are a small congregation between two big cities. We are looking for a pastor to lead us in kingdom service as we love our neighbors, worship our Lord, and unfold the potential in creation. Resumes and questions regarding this position should be directed to paccr-search@sun.stanford.edu.

(Douglas) Heetderks, Glenn (Dalia) and Matthew (Vera) VanderZee and Amy, Chris (Jon) deRidder, and Mary Ornee and eight great grandchildren. A service of memory and celebration will be held Sat. Feb. 15, 10 AM at New Hope Church, 3642 Lake Street, Lansing, IL.

HAVEMAN Annemarie aged 86; December 17, 2013; Grand Rapids, MI. She is survived by her children: James and Sarah Haveman of Traverse City and Jack and Lori Haveman of Ada, and Steve Haveman of Grand Rapids; grandchildren: Kortney (Jamie) Hawkins, and Robert (Andrea) Haveman, Holly Haveman and Nick Haveman; great-grandchildren: Avery and Allie Hawkins and James and Andrew Haveman.

PIERSMA, Nell Alice (nee Hoving) Went to be with her Lord, June 7, 2013, at the age of 90. She was preceded in death by her husband of 56 years, Thomas Henry (1998). Survived by her daughter, Donna Hoekstra and husband, John; son Thomas Henry Jr. and wife Ellen (nee Bulthuis). Seven grandchildren, twelve great grandchildren.

POWELL Edna Louise (Boeskool) age 98; November 30, 2013; Grand Rapids, MI; She was preceded in death by her husband: J. Maurice Powell. She is survived by her siblings: Beatrice Ponto (Greenwood, SC), Lois Brookhouse (Fremont, MI), Irvin and Ruth Boeskool (Holland, MI); nieces and nephews: Kay and Jim Havenga, Jane and John Ohashi, Jill and Greg Hemingway, Gwynne and Peter vanZonneveld.

ROOKS Marius 85; December 28, 2013; Grand Rapids, MI; Marius was predeceased by his father and mother, Albertus and Grace, brother Rhinedale, and half-brother Corbin. Marius is survived by his children: Dean (Tina) Rooks, Jane (Barry) Rooks Ross, Tom Rooks, Jon Rooks (Patricia Du Bois); grandchildren: Tina Marie (Kevin) VanderKlok and Dan Rooks; and great grandchildren: Elyana and Lilia VanderKlok.



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SCHURMAN John R. age 85, November 25, 2013; Grand Rapids, MI; He was preceded in death by his wife, Betty J. Schurman. He is survived by his children: John II (Mary) Schurman and their children, Jennifer and Barry Leslie and their daughter, Avery, John III (Sarah) Schurman, Julie, and Jeffrey Schurman; Mary Beth (Richard) Mencarelli and their children, Matthew (Brittney) Mencarelli, Eric, and Chad Mencarelli; sisters: Judy (Peter) Kamp and Marian Donkerbrook; sister-in-law and brother-in-law: Mary and Roger Boerema.

TIEN Gradda (nee Veldhuizen) age 106, Dec 21, 2013 of Phillipsburg, KS formerly Prairie View, KS. Preceded in death by husband, Garrit Tien, three children, Arvid Tien; Theron Tien; Joyce Brower, 1 grandson, Rodney Brower; 1 granddaughter, Baby Tien; 1 great granddaughter, Jodi Griffin; 4 brothers Jay, William, Albert and Richard Veldhuizen, one sister Hendreen Branderhorst; 4 sons in law, Alfred Van Kooten; Herman Verhoef, Wayne Van Beek; John Bousema. Survived by 7

children, Henrietta Van Kooten; Marie Bousema; Dorothy and Gerald Huyser; Arlo Gale and Carolyn Tien, Edward and Barb Tien; Rosalee Verhoef; Carmen VanBeek; Son in law Kenneth Brower and daughter in law Thelma Tien, 1 bro. Dale Veldhizen, 1 sister Veda Bousema. 27 grandchildren; 67 great grandchildren and 52 great great grandchildren.

VANKLEY Harold - March 7, 1932-January 13, 2013 passed away at Palos Heights II. Community Hospital from advanced vascular dementia. He was predeceased by his wife Helen Priscilla Van Kley nee Hawks of fifty three years. Also predeceasing him were his Mother and Father, Jacob and Dora Van Kley and his sister Marge Speelman. Surviving him are his children, Michael Adrian Van Kley, and Cynthia Van Kley as well as grandchildren Shaun, Mike Jr, Amber, Michelle, and Nicholas Van Kley. He is survived also by his sister Joanne Sweetman and her three children, nephews, nieces and grandchildren. Harold was raised in the Christian Reformed Faith and attended Calvin College where he became interested in biochemistry and obtained a PH.D. in

that area of study from the University of Wisconsin. From there he taught at St. Louis University, and traveled to Sweden where he studied under Dr. Doisy at Uppsala University. In 1964 he obtained a U. S. Grant to do research at St. Mary's Hospital in St. Louis until 1981 when he returned to teach at Trinity until his retirement.

VIS Rev. Kenneth; age 71; December 6, 2013; 716 Winchell St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49507. Ken graduated from Calvin Seminary in 1967 and served as a minister in Christian Reformed Churches in Hawarden, IA, Wyoming, MI, Fremont, MI, and Spring Lake, MI; and as a chaplain at Trinity Health in Grand Rapids. He is survived by his wife of 49 years: Lorraine; daughters: Gail (Steven) Peterson and their children, Jenna and Alexa; LeRae (Mike) Kuperus and their children, Miles and Clay; and Alicia (Harvey) Kincaid, and their children, Quinn and Corrina; siblings: Elizabeth (Melvin) DeBoer, Evelyn (Jay) Koets, Harriet Karel, Esther (Mike) Alsum, Winona (Calvin) Geers, Lois (Charles) Hekman, William (Barb) Vis, Patricia Deur-Vis.

WOUDSTRA Allerdina Catharina "Dina/Dian" age 82; December 23, 2013; 2024 Mallard Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546; She was preceded by daughter Katherine Diane and granddaughter Hannah Renee Nelson; She is survived by her husband: Sierd Woudstra; children: John and Kathleen Woudstra; Irene and Timothy Noveroske; Christine and Mark Spoolstra; Timothy Woudstra and former daughter-in-law Karen Woudstra; Yvonne and Glen Joelson; Ingrid and James Nelson; grandchildren: Rachel, Anna, Sarah, Rebecca, and Deborah Noveroske; Stephen, Andrew, Katherine, and Leah Spoolstra; Jacob and Mitchell Woudstra (sons of Timothy and Karen Woudstra); Diane (Joshua) Gross and Matthew Stemler (children of Yvonne Joelson); Kali, Meghan, Emily, and Jack Nelson; great-grandchildren: Katarina, Lucas, Asher, and Milo Gross; sister: Ekie Bouwkamp (Netherlands).

Employment

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Windsor, Ontario

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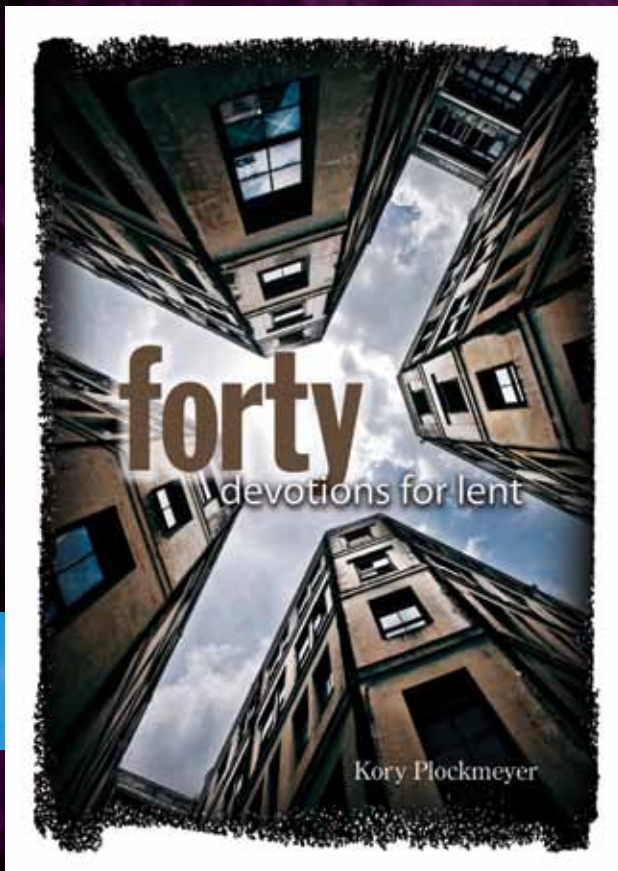


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THURSDAY, MARCH 13	LONDON, ON
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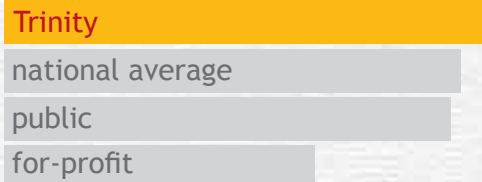
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Punch Lines

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 49508-1407; or email it to editorial@thebanner.org. Thanks!

I was visiting my saintly 95-year-old mother, who has significant memory loss. She had fallen and cracked her pelvis and was in rehab at a nursing home. At the dinner table, one of her tablemates noticed she was new and asked her, "How come you're here?"

Mother looked questioningly at me, having no clue about how to answer that. Hoping to nudge her memory a bit, I said, "Mom, you broke something, remember?"

With a stricken look on her face, she asked, "Was it one of the 10 Commandments?"

—Mary Worst

I was scheduled to preach at Ivanrest Christian Reformed Church in Grandville, Mich., on the evening of November 17, 2013. Violent storms, including over 70 tornadoes, struck the Midwest that evening. All the churches of West Michigan were cancelled because of the tornado watch. The title of the sermon I'd planned to preach that night: "What the Bible Says about Weather."

—Jay Pruim

I have long been encouraging my husband to go in for a hearing test. Finally he placed the call to make an appointment. My daughter

overheard the conversation. After a few preliminary questions, the receptionist asked him why he thought he needed to get his hearing tested. He replied, "Because my wife says I never listen to her."

A few questions later, my husband started to laugh. "A housecoat? Why do I need to bring a housecoat to a hearing test?"

My daughter then heard the receptionist burst out laughing too. "Sir, you really do need to get your hearing tested. I said you need to bring your *health card* to the appointment!"

—Doreen Horlings

They say it takes a village to raise a child. That was evident at the Cadet pancake breakfast fundraiser I attended recently at my church. We were waiting in line to pay for breakfast while two young Cadets helped the person ahead of us. Judging by the stack of cash in the open money box, it was obvious the Cadets had been doing a brisk business. An older member of the congregation approached the boys and asked if she could pay for a plant she wanted to buy.

"Sure," said Jacob, as she handed him a \$5 bill. "How much change should I give you?" "Well," she replied, "\$1.50."

Digging through the coins at the bottom of the box, the boy said, "Would you be willing to take a 'toonie'?" (a Canadian coin worth \$2).

Smiling, she said, "No, I really think you should give me \$1.50."

The next morning we heard that the fundraiser had been a success—the Cadets took in \$700!

—Lynda Marfisi

A 6-year-old boy wished and wished for \$100. His mother suggested he mail a postcard to God asking for \$100, which he did.

A postal employee read the card. Touched, he directed it to the Prime Minister's office. The Prime Minister, also touched, sent the boy three \$20 bills. A few days later, the envelope arrived. The boy opened it and pulled out \$60, beaming in amazement.

His mother said, "I thought you asked for \$100!"

Showing his mom the Ottawa postmark, the boy said, "God's mail gets sent through Ottawa, and even God gets taxed 40 percent."

—Richard Van Huizen

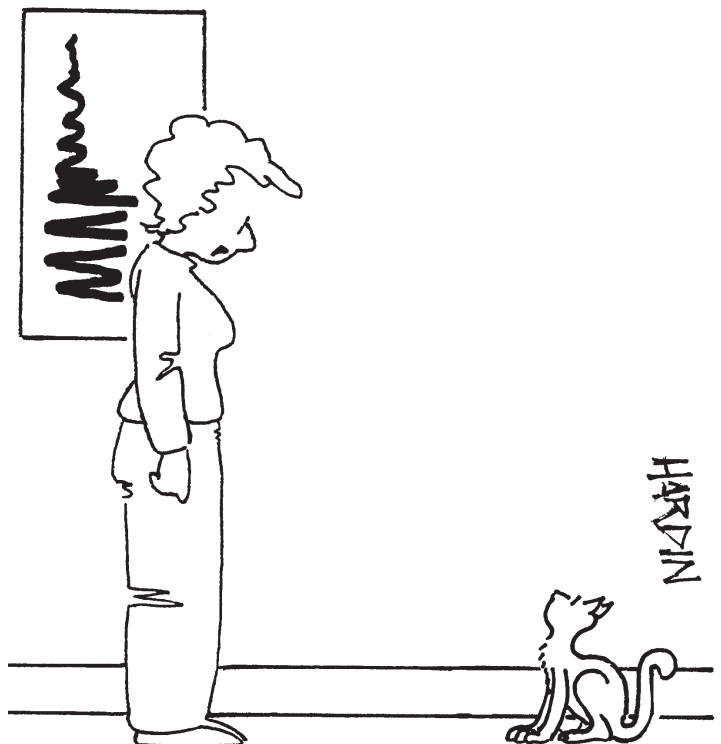
A young boy was waiting for his mother outside the grocery store. He was approached by a man who asked, "Son, can you tell me where the post office is?"

The boy replied, "Sure! Just go straight down this street a couple of blocks and turn to your right."

The man thanked the boy kindly and said, "I'm the new pastor in town. I'd like for you to come to church on Sunday so I can tell you how to get to heaven."

Chuckling, the boy replied, "You're kidding, right? You don't even know the way to the post office!"

—Harry Boessenkool



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