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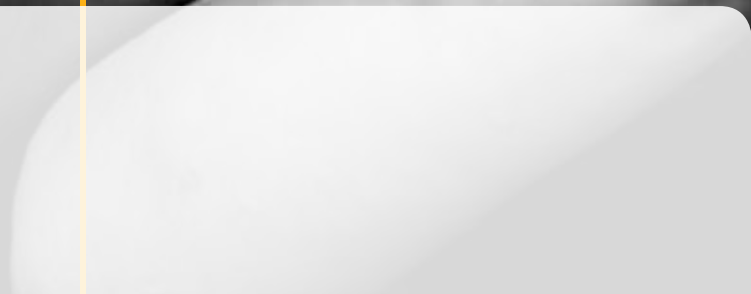
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³² God's Garden

³⁶ Health Care:
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Healthy Health Care

In this issue of *The Banner* and the next, the “Reformed Matters” column offers differing views on how we as Canadians and Americans can best meet the biblical principle of providing health care for those in need. That all God’s children should have access has always been a fundamental Christian tenet. Jesus himself eagerly provided health care to those who asked. And Scripture does not record that they were billed accordingly.

Decide for yourself which approach best works out that principle. But allow me to toss a few practical observations into the conversation. I grew up in Canada and pastored churches there for over two decades. I also spent seven years in the U.S. as a student and then another 10 years stateside working for the denomination. So I’ve experienced firsthand the universal health care approach used in Canada and the free market approach in the U.S.—though I’m certainly no expert.

For what it’s worth, some observations as a health care recipient and a longtime pastoral visitor. One heads-up: I’ve been living north of the line since well before the Affordable Care Act (also called Obamacare) kicked in.

- Overall, both countries provide excellent health care by competent and devoted professionals.
- Medical professionals make much more money in the U.S. but also have much higher costs.
- The U.S. system has more of the expensive “toys” like MRI machines, and they use them more often—maybe too often—to keep from being sued. Balance that against wait times in Canada being so long that often Canucks hop the border to get their “pictures” taken—accompanied, of course, by a fat wallet to pay for the privilege.
- My naïve perception is that more widely available technology in the U.S. may extend an average lifetime by some months. But that extra lifespan is spent on filling out form after form after form. In Canada you just flash your health card—then wait in line.
- In the U.S. your work (if you are blessed with such) pays for your health care and you copay plenty for it. If you’re uninsured, you get dinged extra for medical services because you’re “out of plan.” In Canada you pay for medical services through taxes, including heavy “sin” taxes on such items as gasoline, alcohol, and cigarettes.

Two things I like better about the Canadian system: it covers (almost) everybody and it allows medical professionals, not bureaucrats, to decide on appropriate treatment.

Maybe you’ve heard the story of a dearly departed who knocked on the pearly gates and requested admission. When the gatekeeper asked about her profession, she answered that she had been an HMO administrator. “Hmm,” the angel said, “I’m not sure if I can let you in. Let me check the policy.” He returned with a wry smile. “Yes, you may stay . . . for three days.”

Praise the Lord that our Great Physician doesn’t parcel out healing grace in such measured quantities. Wonder what that means for health care? ■



Bob De Moor is editor of *The Banner* and pastor of preaching and administration for West End CRC, Edmonton, Alberta.

Our Great Physician doesn’t parcel out healing grace in measured quantities.

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Blue Shirt



ON MAY 4, I raced to qualify for the Boston Marathon. The Boston race requires certain time thresholds to be met by various age groups. As for me, the 50-year-old cut is 3 hours and 30 minutes for the 26.2 miles. Beat 3:30, and you can register for the biggie—the Boston Marathon.

Lining up on that 48-degree (8.8 C) morning, I had planned to run 7:45 pace miles to finish in 3:25. As the race progressed through 21 miles, I had averaged a 7:39 pace, slightly faster than planned.

In the 18- to 22-mile range, there's a physical and mental milestone runners call "the wall." The wall wrecks races. It indiscriminately selects victims to slow, cramp, or sideline. It has plagued me four times before, causing anguish that messes with race planning, positive mantras, and mental fortitude. This time I was reminded of its stealthy grip at mile 21.

As my cadence slowed and my legs grew heavier, a young man in a blue shirt passed me by. No one is moving fast in miles 20 to 25. Blue Shirt didn't move quickly beyond

me, but his pace was steady; he was visually stuck in front. I resolved to let his pace dictate mine, staying within a few yards of his steady stride. My mental state didn't allow for doing much math, but I knew that if I ran at least 8:15s, I'd hit my goal.

It was simple to latch on to Blue Shirt on the quiet road. He pulled me along until, with a mile to go, he picked up his pace and disappeared with a slight finishing kick.

I crossed the line with a grimaced smile. The finish line timer clicked 3:25:21. I paused, hands on my knees, thankful for completing the distance—the end of an 18-week training plan with a lot of early morning miles.

While relaxing on a bench near the finish, I saw Blue Shirt again. Awkwardly rising and calling, "Hey—Blue Shirt," I stumbled over to the slightly confused young man. "Thank you," I said. "Thank you for pulling me through miles 21 to 25." He probably didn't realize how important he was to me that last five miles, but I wanted him to know.

Blue Shirt smiled and said, "Thanks for pulling *me* through 17 to 21."

It was a brief encounter. Just two tired runners expressing appreciation and congratulations for a race well run. I don't remember anything else we said.

Isn't that like the Christian walk? You're cruising along, steady and confident, and then you hit a wall. A temptation, a setback, a death, a loss. . . .

But then a "Blue Shirt" comes by. A friend, spouse, brother, sister, or a mentor from afar who reminds you that steady, unyielding effort will get you to the finish. To another day, a fresh start, a new outlook.

Who are you being a Blue Shirt to today? If someone else is *your* Blue Shirt, have you thanked her for helping you push past a wall?

In the words of Ecclesiastes, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up" (4:9-10). ■



Steve Spoelhof runs and lives in Saint Charles, Ill., and works at the Willow Creek Association. He'll lace up his shoes for his bucket-list race, the Boston Marathon, on April 21.



It is precisely when faith crumbles
and love grows dim
that hope really begins;
it is in the wonder and
weakness of our faith
that we find its real meaning.

— MICHAEL DOWNEY

A New Theology?

The only solution to our condition is Jesus.



ONE OF THE FIRST PRINCIPLES

I learned when I came to the Reformed family of churches was that we are “Reformed and ever reforming according to the Word of God.” It would seem we ought to adapt to the challenges of our contemporary culture and society. But this thought bothers me.

First, the numerous areas mentioned in the article “Tomorrow’s Theology” (June 2013) that need reforming, from origins to worldview, cannot be based on evolutionary theory informing orthodox theology. I do not inform my theology based on scientific theories or even discoveries. In fact, scientific discoveries reinforce my understanding of our sovereign God and his creation.

Second, theology ought to be done with humility, as should science. Humility dictates that principles and theories be subjected to rigorous testing and analysis in order to verify the truth of the hypothesis being put forth. With humility, then, we ought to carefully consider the consequences of switching to a “Tomorrow’s Theology” solution based on unverifiable and theoretical science.

Third, if the stated purpose for printing this article was to provide hope for college-age young people, perhaps we

ought to ask how this will help them deal effectively with their doubts about Scripture, the gospel, and Reformed theology. Redefining the nature of origins, sin, the sovereignty of God, the Trinity (and Jesus in particular), salvation, and a Christian worldview based on evolution can only create new doubts and fears because our new definitions can only be built on the shaky ground of the knowledge we can assert from our own history, reason, and ability.

Finally, there is the problem of heresy. By going down this path based on evolutionary theory, we are no better than gnostics, Christian scientists, or Scientologists. It’s hard to maintain our understanding of the Old and New Testaments when we take out the phrases “maker of the heavens and the earth” and “by whom all things are created.”

If we accept Mark 1:15 as a solid, compact statement of the gospel, we ought to reject all speculation that grounds our theology in anything less than the Word of God. Understanding the gospel as given by Jesus depends on a sinful-by-nature understanding of the human condition. The only solution to our condition is Jesus; all of Scripture points to this simple and significant fact. This view equips us to understand “Reformed and ever reforming” as our lives being reformed and ever reforming according to the Word of God, not the Scripture being reformed and ever reforming according to whatever human understanding we bring to it in each new generation. ■



Paul Hansen is pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, Artesia, Calif.



Offspring

Henry De Moor has an unfortunate swing-and-a-miss in his answer to the question about Adam and Eve’s offspring (FAQ, “Church,” Jan. 2014). The Bible may not be a science, history, or genetics textbook, but the answer to the question he addressed is right there. God created Adam and Eve. They had Cain, Abel, and Seth—all boys. Genesis 5:4 tells us that Adam also had other sons and daughters. So the first human offspring were the result of brothers and sisters marrying one another. It’s the only way it could have been, since we are all descended from Adam. In the beginning, this was allowed by God; indeed, it was necessary. However, he eventually forbade the practice of close relations marrying one another (see Lev. 18), so we no longer practice this.

—Rev. Aaron Gunsaulus
Newton, Iowa

Telling Our Stories

I’m delighted to read about the need to tell our personal faith stories within church families (FAQ “Faith Formation,” Dec. 2013). We have discovered the rich nurturing benefit of faith stories as published in our church journal, *The Gleanings*. Each issue features a focus theme, and participants write about their faith journey blended with some unique perspective on

LETTERS

church life. The storytelling is personalized for all age groups. As God's people, we are his witnesses to this generation that an invisible God is made visible through his work in our lives. Writing affirms the faith experiences of the author and is nurturing to the readers.

—Barbara Woodburn
Bradenton, Fla.

Women in the CRC

Sallie Ann Borrink is correct that the CRC is walking a narrow and somewhat lonely path on this issue ("A Beautiful Gift," Dec. 2013). Unfortunately, there are forces that seek to push us off the path.

We will be feeling more of that pressure very soon as we continue to get closer to a denomination that recently abandoned the path we have been on since 1995. I happen to think that the path we chose in 1995 was the correct one, and I hope that we resist any pressure to abandon it.

—Thomas Niehof
Ames, Iowa

Differences

I believe that a religious organization like the Christian Reformed Church should have religious uniformity but encourage diversity in politics, ethnicity, class, etc., just as I believe there should be political uniformity in a political organization that encourages religious, political, and class diversity.

Kathy Vandergrift disagrees with me politically on the issue of how to address hunger (FAQ "Justice," Dec. 2013). I work very hard in my church's food pantry. She thinks food pantries should close. But I appreciated what she had to say in response to the "liberal's" lament about her opponents' behavior. Instead of "an unhealthy polarization," we should have a healthy diversity with honest, humble, even passionate dialogue about our dif-

ferences that helps us learn from each other and appreciate the maddening complexity of our world.

—Raymond Opeka
Grand Rapids, Mich.

In response to the news story "Board Expresses Disappointment" (Nov. 2013), letters published in January fault the Board of Trustees for "shutting down public conversation of these topics" [origins and sexuality] and state that "we continue to undermine the scholars among us."

The real problem, it seems to me, is not *that* these issues are dealt with in *The Banner* but *how* they are dealt with. We need scholars who are rooted in the Scriptures, who help us form a biblical "understanding of the world we live in and how we are to relate to it and to each other." We need scholars who hold firmly to the sovereignty of God over all things, a God whose knowledge and wisdom immeasurably exceeds that of humans, a God who has given us timeless truth in his Word to guide us.

—Adrian Van Geest
Mount Hope, Ontario

Just a word of appreciation for the thought-provoking articles that have been in *The Banner* the last few months! They have been the reason I have gone back to reading it on a regular basis.

—Donna Allen
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Regarding the discussions about evolution, I was glad to see in the December issue someone mention God's other book, the book of nature, through which he reveals what a wonderful and mighty God he is (Letters, Dec. 2013). Because of that beautiful book I have no trouble believing the mysteries in God's *written* Book, the Bible.

—Didy Prinzen
Whitby, Ontario

There are Christian Reformed readers like me who greatly appreciate Bob De Moor's leadership at *The Banner*. I did scripturally disagree with several portions of the arguments presented in the two articles that resulted in controversy ("Board Expresses Disappointment"). Whether they were appropriate for *The Banner* [to publish] or not is not my place to decide, but I want to thank Bob for allowing me to be challenged by them (and by many others over the years).

Truth be told, I come up against similar opinions from Christians and non-Christians alike these days, and I appreciate the chance to wrestle with controversial opinions in print and compare them to Scripture before I get into an on-the-spot discussion with a growing Christian or curious non-Christian and say something stupid or false in the heat of the moment.

—Darrin Matter
Blaine, Wash.

Correction

The news story "Drama Helps Church Address Intense Topics" included artwork with the words "Glittering Vices" (Feb. 2014, p. 10). That is also the title of the book by Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung (Brazos, 2009) on which the sermon series was based, a fact that was not mentioned in the article. We apologize for this omission.

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Psalm Composition Contest Honors Musician's Memory

Each December, Church of the Servant Christian Reformed Church (COS) in Grand Rapids, Mich., announces a new winner of its annual COS New Psalm Contest. This year's winning compositions made their congregational singing debut in February.

The contest draws dozens of submissions from all over the

world, some from very high-profile composers. A number have gone on to be published or recorded. For the first time in the contest's four-year history, two compositions shared the win: Kathy McGrath and Carol Browning's "Psalm 139: Search Me, O God," and Bruce Benedict and Wendell Kimbrough's "Psalm 113: Who Is Like Our God?"

"I love the psalms," said Browning, who also won the 2011 contest for her paraphrase of Psalm 131. "They are the people's prayer." She appreciated collaborating this year with a friend who had wanted to do a setting for Psalm 139. "We had set it aside but revisited it when we saw the announcement for this year's psalm contest." »

Florida Vacation Turns to Nightmare for Snowbirds

Several members of Christian Reformed churches in Ontario were killed or seriously injured in a bizarre accident on February 2 at Sugar Creek Estates mobile home park in Bradenton, Fla.

Margaret Vanderlaan, 72, of Wallaceburg (Ontario) CRC; Wilhemina Paul, 70, of Ancaster (Ontario) CRC; and Johanna Dijkhoff of the Netherlands were killed when a fellow visitor lost control of her vehicle.

The three women had been chatting with others in the parking lot of the clubhouse where their winter congregation, Sugar Creek Community Church, had just worshiped.

Doreen Landstra of Palmetto, Fla., backed up her SUV, then apparently thought she had shifted the vehicle into "drive" and accelerated. The SUV "suddenly accelerated in reverse and with so much power" that it plowed over the conversation circle in "a couple of seconds," said Rev. Gerrit Koedoot, a member of Ferrysburg Community Christian Reformed Church in Spring Lake, Mich. He pastors the snowbird congregation. The car hit a tree and landed in a creek, with the driver and her husband (in the passenger seat) uninjured.

Taken to hospital were Fred Eringa, 89, of Maranatha CRC, Woodstock, Ontario; Mike Claus, 71, of Hebron CRC, Whitby, Ontario; Nelly DePooter, 68, of Port Lambton, Ontario; and Nellie Ann Vlasma, 75, of the Netherlands. Eringa was released with minor injuries, while the others remain in hospital at the time of this writing.

The victims' husbands, John Vanderlaan and John Paul, were witnesses of the accident. "For the two husbands who lost their wives this is like a nightmare, very sad," said Koedoot. "We ask everyone in the CRC community to be in prayer for us."

Koedoot has been biking around the mobile home park—which has about 850 homes—to visit grieving family members.

Rev. Ron Fisher, a former pastor of Hebron CRC in Whitby, Ontario, has been visiting with those who were injured.

"We're all having nightmares about it," Fisher said, but added, "This is a wonderful Christian community. It's wonderful to see all the love pouring out, including to the kids and grandkids that have come because of loved ones lost."

—Roxanne VanFarowe



Margaret Vanderlaan with her youngest grandchild, Cassidy.



Carol Browning



Kathy McGrath

"The contest has brought back the art of psalm song writing," said Greg Scheer, minister of worship at COS. "It challenges contemporary musicians to think about psalms and increases the profile of psalm singing as many are sung in home churches and spread beyond."

The contest began in 2010 in memory of Ben Fackler, a self-taught musician who died at the age of 28. Fackler's aunt, moved by the music at the funeral, gave a gift to the music ministry at COS in Fackler's memory that supports the contest. "The contest marks the anniversary of his death with a brand new song coming to life," Scheer said.

—Noah J. K. Kruijs



Libere Dusabi (third from left) helps bring food and work to people in Burundi through fish farms.

Burundi Refugee Sends Help Back Home

When Libere Dusabe came to Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Cutlerville, Michigan, he wanted to find a way to provide for fellow citizens of Burundi, Africa, who suffered after the civil war. Now he has—with fish.

The Burundian refugee developed Impact Burundi, a nonprofit organization that uses fish farms to bring work, food, and business to his home country.

"I wanted to do more by investing in other peoples' lives," Dusabe said. "I wanted to encourage reconciliation between my countrymen."

After losing his parents and siblings in the war, Dusabe fled Burundi in 2000. He lived in Zambia for four years before he and his wife, Donate, moved to Michigan and began attending Covenant CRC.

Impact Burundi launched as a road repair project in the country's rural areas, but a few years later Libere and his partner switched their focus to fish farming.

"A lot of the soil in Burundi became infertile due to natural disasters," Dusabi explained, "but the land was great for fish ponds."

Dusabi and his partner recruited 118 volunteers and 12 employees to help raise the fish

in the farm's 12 ponds. In exchange for their work, the volunteers become "members" of the farm and receive part of the harvest.

Dusabi says many of the volunteers are developing skills to become independent. "We will train them to raise their own family fish farms," Dusabi said. "Some have already started digging their ponds."

—Brian Clark

Write for The Banner!

The Banner is seeking a news correspondent for the area that includes Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Manitoba, and one for California. If you have a passion for telling stories of how God is at work in the Christian Reformed churches in your area, we'd like to hear from you. We'd especially welcome writers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Please send a resume or letter outlining your news writing experience and some recent samples of your work to Gayla Postma (gpostma@crcna.org).

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. John De Kruyter
1921 – 2013

John De Kruyter, 92, a thoughtful denominational leader and one-time teacher of classical languages, was known for his well-crafted, inspiring sermons. He passed away on December 27 following a period of dementia.

De Kruyter graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1946. Columbia Theological Seminary awarded him the Th.M. degree in 1947. During his career he also did graduate work in Edinburgh, Scotland.

De Kruyter served Christian Reformed congregations in Michigan, Illinois, and Iowa. He retired in 1986.

De Kruyter was known as a strong, intelligent leader, in the congregations he served and the denomination he loved. He served synods and denominational boards as president. His sermons were consistently expository and reflected his warm, pastoral heart.

Always joyful, De Kruyter was a faithful, caring, dedicated, and dignified pastor.

De Kruyter is survived by his wife, Angie, four children and their spouses, and five grandchildren.

MORE ONLINE

—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.

NEWS

Calvin College Announces Spending Priorities

The board of trustees of Calvin College recently approved priorities for spending over the next five years to meet the demands of unanticipated debt load. The priorities also address the challenges facing all institutions of higher learning today.

A priorities and planning document, not being released publicly, lays out some specifics following more than a year of consultations on every aspect of the college's operations.

Reduced spending is necessary to redirect about 10 percent of the annual budget toward debt repayment. Shortly after college president Michael LeRoy arrived on campus in the summer of 2012, a financial review showed an unanticipated debt of \$116 million, with principal and interest payments coming due in 2017 in the amount of \$9 million.

The new plan will reduce the faculty from its current 291 to between 270 and 275 and reduce staff from 426 to 405 by 2017. This follows cuts announced last year of 22 faculty and staff positions, or 3 percent of the college's workforce.

The report identified academic programs that have become unsustainable and will have to be restructured. At the top of the list for restructuring are fine arts programs and foreign languages.

Another idea being considered is differentiating tuition for higher cost programs such as nursing, where low student-faculty ratios are required. Le Roy said no decision on that matter has been made.

Other strategies being considered to reduce costs include decreasing the number of elec-

tives offered, especially those that do not draw many students, moving some of the core courses to interim, and developing larger plenary-type courses for some of the core courses.

Outside the academic division, the college will be looking for non-tuition revenue for non-departmental programs such as the Ecosystem Preserve, the Festival of Faith and Writing, Alumni Choir, Oratorio, and other community engagement activities.

The various initiatives are expected to save nearly \$5 million by 2017.

In addition to program restructuring, the college has committed to raise \$25 million in funds by 2017 to prepay principal on the debt. LeRoy acknowledged that fundraising to pay off debt can be difficult, but he said that the response already has been overwhelmingly positive. "Fundraising was fantastic last year," he said. "People who are donating are those who have supported Calvin a really long time. They are excited to step up and help. I'm really grateful."

The college is also selling off the properties that were bought as part of a failed investment strategy.

LeRoy said proceeds from those sales will be applied to the debt.

LeRoy knows that not everything in the plan will work out. "What I like is that it is comprehensive and covers every part of the college, with clear goals and a clear way to measure," he said. "There will be things that we set out to do that we won't meet. That is important to know and important to talk about why, and figure out how we can do better. [We can] celebrate where we succeed and stop spending money on things not getting results." [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Gayla R. Postma

The Church and the Common Good

What is the common good? Speaker and author Andy Crouch defined it as "the flourishing of the vulnerable in community."

Crouch was speaking at Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario. He urged Christians to move toward building community rather than "tackling poverty."

Many church members don't live in the places for which they advocate, Crouch pointed out. He believes that the only way the vulnerable can flourish is through community with the church: "We need a society that in our moment of vulnerability will come alongside us."

More than 10 denominations and numerous congregations were represented at this event. Katie Karsten of Immanuel CRC enjoyed the time of learning and fellowship. "It would be wonderful if more churches could come together like this to support each other," Karsten said. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

Andy Crouch used the piano to illustrate an analogy of harmony.





Chief Harvey Underwood (center), his wife, Lillian (left), and Pastor David Salverda.

Connecting with First Nations Groups in British Columbia

Several Christian Reformed churches on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, recently used the opportunity provided by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission to reach out to nearby First Nations groups.

Alberni Valley Christian Reformed Church in Port Alberni was one of the first CRCs in Canada to use a new curriculum called "Living the 8th Fire," based on a documentary series produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).

The videos and discussion circles that form the curriculum focus on breaking through stereotypes and learning to see the First Nations side of the story.

The workshop at Alberni Valley was attended by members of the congregation and of other local churches, and by several First Nations elders.

"Reconciliation is a huge work that can transform perceptions and prejudices and build trust where once there was none. Together we opened the road to stronger relationships," said Alberni Valley's pastor Curtis Korver.

Meanwhile, Victoria CRC and Christ Community CRC, also in Victoria, used their joint display of aboriginal art to build personal connections with local First Nations leaders.

Christ Community CRC invited the worship team from the Tsawout First Nations Assemblies of God church, while Victoria CRC hosted a discussion evening with the chief of the same band, Harvey Underwood, and his wife, Lillian, who are Christians. Both events provided an opportunity to hear reflections from their guests about the integration of their Christian faith with their First Nations culture.

Victoria CRC's pastors David and Brittney Salverda agreed that the highlight of the evening was a time of mutual prayer. "They challenged us to view them not as people who need help but [as people who] also have something to contribute," they explained.

—Tracey Yan

Loving Our Neighbors Better

What does it mean to love our neighbors? More than 25 members of various Christian Reformed churches and ministries in Holland, Mich., gathered recently to reflect on this question at the area's first Modular Home Ministry Summit.

They gathered at Maranatha CRC for a conversation about the blessings and unique challenges of ministry in Holland's modular (or manufactured) home communities. Mark Quist, senior pastor at Park CRC and chair of Classis Holland's mission-focused team,

which organized the event, said a key theme of the evening was working alongside people in these neighborhoods "rather than for or to them."

The group included a resident of a mobile home park in nearby West Olive. "It was awesome to get that firsthand perspective," said Jennifer Roudebush of Neighbors Plus, a nonprofit ministry run by Harderwyk Ministries. Neighbors Plus offers an alternative suspension program for local students, many of whom are residents of a modular home community.

Art Van Wyhe, pastor of outreach and missions at VictoryPoint Ministries, enjoyed the chance to hear what others are doing and to share some of what VictoryPoint has learned through trial and error. The church has been building relationships at a local mobile home park through several

avenues, including food distribution, repair projects, social events, and mentoring. The summit was helpful for "connecting and listening to each other," he said. "We need to collaborate. No doubt we'll be working together."

Not every church will have connections with a mobile home community, but Quist believes the summit may stimulate further and perhaps broader conversations about how churches reach out to their neighborhoods. "This may lead to a larger discussion about how we as churches become bet-



SUSAN VANDEN BERG

Modular home communities offer a unique opportunity for ministry.

ter neighbors where the wholeness of the gospel is communicated [in a way] that is built on relationship."

—Susan Vanden Berg

NEWS

Copresidents Departing from Institute for Christian Studies

The board of the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) announced in January that Tom and Dawn Wolthuis are no longer copresidents of the school just one year after taking on the role.

ICS is a Christian graduate school in Toronto, Ontario. It receives ministry share support from Canadian members of the Christian Reformed Church.

The board's announcement gave no reason for the departure. Sources close to ICS said that the presidents did not receive board support as they did necessary staff-cutting that had been approved by the board, and that the management style of the two presidents exacerbated the situation.

Despite receiving a \$4.2 million legacy gift from the estate of Lowell Andreas a few years ago, financial statements in late 2012 indicated that the school could accept students for only two more years unless it cut expenses by reducing faculty and staff and increasing fundraising.

That was when the Wolthuises moved from Iowa to take on the copresidency. Tom had been a professor at Dordt College in Sioux Center and Dawn was a partner in a software company.

Peter Noteboom, a board member who declined to renew his term, said that the copresidents had a nearly impossible task, and "without a healthy relationship between Henriette Thompson, board chair, and the two copresidents the task became

that much more difficult." Noteboom said that in the end, the relationship was evidently broken.

Three other board members have also resigned in the past year.

In a statement, the Wolthuises said they were sorry to be leaving ICS. "We both felt we did some of the best and most challenging work of our careers striving to help raise the visibility of the important mission of ICS while also driving toward a sustainable future," they wrote. "We wish only the best for the students, faculty, and staff who are carrying on the important work."

Asked about the departure, Thompson said in an email, "The departure of ICS copresidents Tom and Dawn Wolthuis is marked by a sadness and pain that inevitably accompanies these partings because they occur within a wider

community of faith where relationships are long-term and precious. The Board of Trustees is grateful to them for the gifts they were able to offer during their time in office, and we pray for them and for the ICS community at this time."

Doug Blomberg, academic dean at ICS, is now acting president. This is the sixth administration change for ICS in the past nine years.

The Wolthuises plan to return to the U.S.

—Gayla R. Postma

Denominational Prayer Summit Inspires Alberta Version

Roads were icy and the temperature hovered around -30C (-22F) on the first Sunday of 2014. Still, hundreds of individuals rose before the sun and made their way to Edmonton's Trinity Christian Reformed Church to attend a full-day Classis Alberta North prayer summit.

"The worship and prayer sessions started at 7 a.m. and ended with the Lord's Supper just before 7 p.m., making it a marathon day of worship on the first Sunday of 2014," said Trinity's pastor, Rich deLange.

DeLange said he felt the Lord urging him to plan a prayer summit for Classis Alberta North while he was attending the denominational prayer summit in California last April.



Two hundred people registered in advance for all or part of the day and about four hundred attended various sessions. People came from more than half of the churches in classis, including many members of the Korean So-

Mang CRC, encouraged by their pastor, David Joo, who had also attended the prayer summit in California.

The following day, one attendee wrote to deLange: "On what may have been the coldest



Participants at the Alberta North prayer summit, including Emily S. (above).

day this winter, we were warmed by the love and hospitality of Trinity CRC, received very good teaching, and were given numerous opportunities to pray and reflect. God surely smiled!"

—Janet A. Greidanus

NOTEWORTHY

For the third time, **Amber Warners** was named Coach of the Year by the American Volleyball Coaches Association. Warners is the head volleyball coach at Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, Mich., where she led the women's team to the NCAA Division III championship last fall.

Connie Nourse—a math and science teacher, principal, and janitor among other things at Crossroads Schools—received the Giving Spark award from the Longmont (Colo.) Community Foundation. The award recognizes people who have done exceptional work in the community.

Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich., was the recent recipient of the City of Holland's Social Justice Award for Education. The church received the award for its after-school tutoring program, STEP (Students and Tutors for Educational Progress).

The King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta, recently received two gifts totaling \$8.5 million, the largest in the school's history. The college announced it will use the money to launch a School of Business in September 2014, making it a leading provider of Christian business education in Western Canada.

—Banner correspondents

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



Calvin College head volleyball coach Amber Warners.



Planting flowers with the Karen Connection group.

Karen People Find Both Challenges and Successes in Alberta

For many years, the Karen people from Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) tried to escape violence and persecution at the hands of the Burmese military by fleeing across the border to refugee camps in Thailand.

In 2007, approximately 100 Karen Christians, many of whom had lived in camps for as many as 10 years, made their way to Edmonton, Alberta. Since then, Maranatha Christian Reformed Church has been the church home for approximately 35 of those families.

The road has not been easy. Learning to speak English is daunting. Learning how to use public transit and do banking is a challenge. "They do not come with degrees, education, and skills that translate very well to Canada," explained Maranatha's pastor, Art Verboon. "Most have picked up janitorial jobs. Many

work at the Edmonton Recycle place; others work as laborers in factories."

Whatever the challenge, Maranatha CRC is committed to helping the Karen people learn and adjust.

Every Tuesday morning and evening, individuals from the Karen community meet at the church with Maranatha volunteers to practice conversational English, make various shopping trips, visit the library, cook "Canadian style" food, participate in beginner English Bible studies, sing from the *Psalter Hymnal*, prepare for Canadian citizenship and driver's license exams, or get help with taxes and the like. "We just started a Homework Club two months ago," said Verboon, "after realizing that kids are struggling with math and reading." Volunteers help guide the Karen with big purchases such as cars and houses.

More and more, the Karen are involved in church life. Every other week, they worship in the sanctuary with the rest of the Maranatha congregation. Other weeks they worship in their own language. Described by Verboon as great singers and musically gifted, several participate in Maranatha's praise and worship teams. One of the Karen, Wah Man, has been ordained an elder. He is entrusted with the task of visiting and serving his fellow Karen.

Brenda Paszek, one of the leaders of the "Karen Connection," said she feels blessed to have this opportunity for outreach, to show God's love. "Through all of these times," she says, "we have forged friendships with these very kind and grateful people."

—Janet Greidanus

NEWS

CHURCH WORLDWIDE

Christians in Middle East Cast Anxious Eye at Religious Freedom

Church leaders in Libya remain hopeful that Christians in the mostly Muslim country will be allowed to practice their faith even as the country appears to be moving toward Shariah law.

In December, Libya's General National Congress voted to make Shariah the source of all legislation and institutions. The vote came amid international concerns over the diminishing Christian populations in North Africa and the Middle East.

Before the revolution, Christians were granted religious freedom in Libya, but now are arbitrarily arrested, attacked, forced by the Islamist groups to convert to Islam, or killed.

In September, two Christians were killed after they refused forced conversion. St. Mark's Coptic Church in Benghazi was attacked twice in 2013, according to a British charity supporting Christians in Muslim-majority countries.

But Rev. Celso Larracas, a priest at St. Francis Catholic Church in Tripoli, said only a small number of Libyans are pushing for Shariah or Islamic law. "They are insisting on it, but I think many Libyans want to coexist with foreigners," Larracas said.

Libya's Christian population is composed mainly of foreigners working in the country. It has a small indigenous Christian community as well. There were about 300,000 Coptic Christians and 80,000 Roman Catholics before the fall of Gadhafi. There are also an unknown number of Anglicans and Pentecostals. Christian groups run hospitals and education centers open to all faiths.

Although Christians face attacks, Libya relies on their professional expertise.

With increasing calls for an Islamic constitution, church leaders have sought the government's assurance of religious freedom for Christians, according to the Rev. Vasihar Eben Baskaran, a priest at Christ the King Anglican Church in Tripoli.

"They have assured us that we shall be free to worship, even with the new law," Baskaran said, explaining that Christians in Libya are free to worship but may not seek converts or evangelize.

Christians here, as in other countries where the Arab Spring swept autocratic governments out of power, had hoped for more freedom, but this has not been the case.

In Egypt, Coptic churches have been burned or bombed. In Tunisia, Christians face harassment and discrimination.

At Islamic University in Uganda, Sheikh Hamid Byamugenzi, a religious studies lecturer, pointed out that it is evident that Christians in these countries are being harassed.

"The groups that have come to power or led the revolution want to see much space given to the practice of Islam," he said. "But I think they need to have discussions, among themselves to agree how to coexist with others."

—Religion News Service



A Catholic priest converses with an Anglican pastor at the Christ the King Anglican Cathedral in Tripoli. The number of Anglicans is reportedly growing in Libya.



SUSAN VANDEN BERG

Marchers make their way to the memorial service.

Right to Life Event Includes Memorial for the Unborn

On a chilly January night two days before the 41st anniversary of Roe v. Wade, a crowd of roughly 170 people marched through downtown Holland, Mich. Some carried handmade signs reading "Choose Life," "Everyone deserves a birthday," and "A person's a person, no matter how small."

The march was organized by Right to Life of Holland Area and was immediately followed by a memorial service for the unborn at Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

Susan Urbytes, a member of Central Ave. CRC, has attended the event with her family for the past 12 years. "It is really encouraging to gather with others... to remember the millions lost to abortion and to show others we oppose the law of the land," she said.

"Despite the positive advances in the pro-life movement, there is no denying the sadness that surrounds the event," Urbytes said about the service. "I left convicted and hopeful that the events of the evening will stir in me a desire to do more." [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Susan Vanden Berg

FAQs

Ethics

Q One of my Christian classmates doesn't believe in the science of evolution and suggests that those of us who do can't be Christian. How do I respond without getting into an argument?

A There is an old saying that goes, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." This may be a helpful way to frame the conversation with your classmate.

First, both of you need to be charitable in how you talk to each other. We should "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). I would not advise trying to change each other's beliefs.

Rather, my goal would be to help both of you become more loving and humble. Labeling someone a non-Christian based simply on one controversial issue is unloving and hurtful. I believe the only real litmus test for being a Christian or not is accepting or rejecting Jesus as Lord (see 1 Cor. 12:3).

Second, we should allow freedom to disagree on topics that are not essential to the Christian faith. This, in my opinion, includes evolution. Many faithful evangelical Christian scientists, including Francis Collins, hold to evolutionary science. Perhaps both of you can share learning resources with each other for continuing conversations. In your case, *biologos.org* is a good site to share.

Third, affirming and identifying essential common ground, such as Christ's saving work in his death and resurrection, will help both of you put evolution in perspective.

Finally, consider praying together as a tangible expression of your unity in Christ.

—*Shaio Chong is a chaplain at York University in Toronto, Ontario.*

We can be charitable to those who disagree with us.

Church

Q Our church has been inconsistent in fulfilling the obligation to contribute denominational ministry shares. Our budget committee claims the average actual payment made by all churches is only 15 percent of synod's yearly assessment. So our council uses this factor to determine our fair share. As a member, should I find this reasoning acceptable?

A Let's do a fact check. For the last complete fiscal year at the time of this writing (2012), the actual contribution made by all churches amounted to 63.5 percent of that year's assessment. Our director of finance and administration, John Bolt, provided this information and suggested that your budget committee might be confusing categories here. There is a significant 15 percent figure, but that is the part of the CRC's total budget that is applied to administration.

Given the high cost of soliciting donations, our denomination's ministry share system remains an incredibly efficient one. Independent charities covet it. Many of us remember the time when the percentage was in the nineties. Some churches would contribute more than 100 percent to cover shortfalls from struggling neighboring churches, just so that the total contributions from their classis would actually amount to what we had decided to do at our synod. Such loyalty to our denominational covenant is waning rapidly. If this "localized autonomy" trend continues, we will see drastic change. The missional and benevolent arms of the CRC will, in effect, become independent charitable organizations. And should missionaries truly have to raise their own funds? Don't they have better things to do?

—*Henry De Moor is professor of church polity emeritus, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich. He's the author of Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary (Faith Alive, 2011).*

Relationships

Q My uncle's apartment is full of stuff he picks up at garage sales and doesn't need. Twice my wife and I have carted away truckloads of stuff, but it doesn't help. We are frustrated and don't know what else we can do. He does not seem to want to help himself.

A Your uncle is most likely suffering from an obsessive compulsive hoarding disorder. Obsessive compulsive disorders (OCDs) can occur among persons who live with extreme loss, stress, family conflict, loneliness, or isolation and who feel incapable of facing (or are unmotivated to face) the reality of their loss or stress.

People sometimes are emotionally so overwhelmed that they can no longer help themselves move beyond the point of grief, anger, guilt, or despair—or all of the above. Instead, those feelings get channeled into a behavior that provides relief and a measure of satisfaction—in your uncle's case, acquiring "stuff."

If his hoarding constitutes a danger to others or to himself, you must intervene. If, for instance, his apartment is a fire or health hazard, enlist the help of your local health department or fire station and ask what services are available. A family doctor can provide a referral to a psychiatrist or therapist specializing in the treatment of OCD.

Essentially, you cannot change your uncle. But that does not mean you should abandon him. All people need community, and the more your uncle is cared for, the more he may be motivated to accept help for his condition. Your uncle belongs too, even when he is sometimes frustrating to be around.

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



REIMAGINING FAITH FORMATION

F THERE'S ONE AREA OF MINISTRY that seems to have risen to the top of our denominational priority list in the last decade, it would be faith formation. The CRC celebrated its 150th anniversary by declaring 2007 the “Year of Faith Formation.” From 2007 to 2013, members of a denominationally appointed faith formation committee crisscrossed the continent, engaging in conversations about the pattern of practices we expect our children to journey through: from the baptismal font to church school to the Lord’s table to profession of faith.

At Synod 2013, the committee wrapped up its work and passed the faith formation baton on to a new initiative that seeks to continue those conversations. Beginning this year, denominational ministry shares formerly directed to supporting Faith Alive Christian Resources are funding a new faith formation line item in the CRCNA budget. Recently, faith formation was one of five “streams” identified as part of the denomination’s new ministry model. Faith formation has become an important part of our collective vocabulary and mission.

Faith Formation in the CRC

But what exactly are we talking about? Although the faith formation committee focused much of its work on engaging issues surrounding children participating in the Lord’s Supper, it’s important to note that faith formation is a *lifelong* process of discipleship whereby we are being “formed, transformed, and conformed to the image of Christ,” as Holly Allen writes in her introduction to the book *Intergenerational Christian Formation*. It is a Spirit-led process that takes place primarily in the context of faith-nurturing relationships—yet it is also a deeply personal process that plays out in many intricate ways from person to person and from congregation to congregation.

The church in North America has tended to view faith formation as a formal process that can be broken down into segments and taught to children in about 18 years. This so-called “schooling” method of using age-specific educational ministry models as the primary means of faith formation has been the dominant paradigm within the Christian Reformed Church, a denomina-

tion that has long taken pride in its intellectual grasp of faith and the Christian life.

By overly stressing the cognitive aspects of faith, we have created an environment in which faith formation has become a matter of the individual's head rather than a holistic engagement of the heads, hearts, and hands of the entire congregation.

Many of these educational models are focused on forming thinkers. But as Jamie Smith notes in his book *Desiring the Kingdom*, we were not made by God to be thinkers, we were created to be lovers—of God and of one another (Matt. 22:37-39). Any faith formation strategies we as a denomination choose to adopt or promote need to find their purpose in forming us into that kind of people.

Embracing the Mystery

A few months ago, after spending the day at denominational meetings strategizing about the future of faith formation in the CRC, I drove over to Calvin College to watch two of my friends participate in *But Now I See*—a play by David Ellens that featured six actors retelling the faith stories of six members of the Calvin community. The stories focused on what it means to seek intimacy with God, especially during times of pain and struggle. As I listened to the characters' stories unfold, I realized that their words were speaking more honestly about faith formation than anything I had heard or shared in our "official" discussions earlier in the day.

The stories spoke about the complexity of life and about how God often moves in the "unscripted" moments of our lives—the tears, questions, and brokenness as well as the hallelujahs, celebrations, and blessings—to accomplish the intricate and powerful work of faith formation. They spoke about the scripted faith formation programs they grew up with, offering similar critiques of the standard progression of church education programs: how they did little to actually prepare the storytellers for the complex realities and hard questions of the world outside of Sunday school, summer camp, or youth group.

As these stories were told, I couldn't help but think that the more we try to package the faith formation process into a series of high-energy events or a checklist of achievements meant to be consumed and performed in isolation from the support and stories of the congregation, the more our efforts turn into a sort of spiritual paint-by-numbers exercise. We could end up with a pretty picture of who God is and of what the Christian life looks like without really showing people the many amazing ways God works through the beautiful, unique, and sometimes confusing and painful experiences of life. We could miss the opportunity to begin to create a picture of faith that speaks of God's amazing love for us and allows us to explore how our own stories intersect with God's story.

It's clear that the Holy Spirit uses all sorts of scripted and unscripted experiences in our everyday lives to form us into disciples of Christ. We can develop all the programs and paradigms we want to catalyze and support discipleship. But in the

end, the work of faith formation is, like so many things about the Christian life, a mystery of faith—a process we will never be able to fully plan for, design a curriculum to support, or build an outreach program to achieve.

Reimagining Faith Formation in Community

Acknowledging this mystery and complexity doesn't suggest that we should get rid of our scripted age-specific Sunday school and catechism classes or our adult Coffee Break or Alpha groups. These have been and will continue to be important avenues of faith formation for many of our churches. However, we need to realize that these paths of discipleship aren't the one-size-fits-all answers we may have once considered them to be.

THE HOLY SPIRIT USES ALL SORTS OF SCRIPTED AND UNSCRIPTED EXPERIENCES IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES TO FORM US INTO DISCIPLES OF CHRIST.

If we are going to continue to make faith formation a priority in our denomination, we'll need to find a way to honor the mysterious and Spirit-led nature of faith formation while intentionally trying to provide the experiences and relationships the Spirit works through to build faith. The CRC has a long history of providing outstanding resources and support for the schooling method of faith formation. How can we build on that foundation while acknowledging the mystery of faith formation to reimagine the discipleship and faith formation efforts in our congregations and institutions?

One of the most powerful ways churches can help build people's faith while exploring the mystery of faith formation is by creating space for real life, with all of its ups and downs, to intersect in meaningful ways with our scripted programs. Our educational ministries can be more than just places of learning; they can be places where we travel alongside each other on the journey of faith. Sunday school classrooms, youth group gatherings, adult Bible studies, and corporate worship can be intentionally fused to and infused with community so that we can hear and learn from each other about what it means to live as followers of Christ. By grounding faith formation in community we can begin to see our stories in the larger story of God's redemptive and restorative plan for the world. »

This communal and relational approach to faith formation shouldn't feel that new to us. It is, after all, something that is in our Reformed DNA. As a covenant community, we promise at each person's baptism to "love, encourage, and support . . . by teaching the gospel of God's love, by being an example of Christian faith and character, and by giving the strong support of God's family in fellowship, prayer, and service." Relational and communal faith formation, whereby we look for ways to invest in each other's lives and live out our faith together, is something we are all called to be involved in. Our lives are constantly being shaped by God, and part of our responsibility as lifelong disciples is to be looking for ways to be means by which the Spirit shapes the lives of our brothers and sisters.

Churches that are starting to take steps toward reimagining what communal and relational faith formation means in their own contexts have also found it helpful to adopt some of the following postures in order to create more space for real life to intersect with their scripted programs.

Being intentionally intergenerational. Learning, worshiping, and serving together can provide opportunities for stories to be shared and relationships to be built between those who are at different places on their lifelong journeys of faith formation. Having the chance to learn from and see the Christian life modeled by those ahead of us (and behind us!) on the path of discipleship is an important part of maturing in faith.

Going deep without being overly intellectual. Yes, being able to recite the Heidelberg Catechism or the Beatitudes from memory is impressive. But it means little if we don't help each other explore how the truths in the text should shape our lives. One of the best ways we can help others explore the complexity of faith is by sharing stories openly and honestly about how the words we read on paper (be they Scripture, creed, or liturgy) shape us throughout our lives.

Digging Deeper

Here are a few resources for further reading about faith formation:

- *Desiring the Kingdom*, James K. A. Smith (Baker, 2009)
- *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*, Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross (IVP Academic, 2012).
- *Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults*, Robert J. Keeley, ed. (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2010).
- *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church*, Gary Parrett and S. Steve Kang (IVP Academic, 2009).

Celebrating the sacraments together. There is nothing more real than the splash of the water of baptism, the smell and texture of the bread, or the taste of the wine. God gives us these sacraments as tangible markers and instruments of the ongoing mysterious work of formation that the Spirit is doing in our lives and in the life of our congregations.

Looking outward. Faith formation is both an inward-facing and an outward-facing process. The call to make disciples isn't just a call to raise our own kids in the faith. It's a call to reach out to our neighbors and those in our community and show them what it means to love God and love one another.

Being open about doubts and struggles. When we fail to leave room for honest reflection about the hard questions, doubts, and other struggles of life, we leave little room for real faith to form. We need to be able to hear from people who have asked those questions and who have had those doubts and struggled to understand so that we can grow in faith together.

Viewing profession of faith as a milestone, not the finish line. Public profession of faith isn't so much a mark of completion as it is a communal celebration of the many ongoing ways God keeps his promises to and through his people. By paving the path to profession with encouraging but honest relationships and opportunities for the professing person to hear about the many intricate ways God has formed the faith of those around him or her, profession can be more than just a public declaration of adherence to doctrine. It can become an acknowledgment that he or she is part of the community on the continuing journey of discipleship, infused with all the ups and downs of real life.

Faith formation, with all its complexity and mystery, is an integral part of the Christian life and of our calling as a Christian community. The CRC has been a leader in analyzing the age-appropriate steps of faith development and building curricula and resources to support churches as they seek to form faithful followers of Christ. As we continue to follow the leading of the Spirit, listen to and share stories from our congregations, and make room for the intricate and mysterious ways the Holy Spirit works in us and through us to form faith, we can begin to share new models and methods of supporting faith formation that help us to be known not just for our ability to think deeply but for our capacity to love deeply as disciples of Christ. ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



Derek Atkins is an associate curriculum developer at Faith Alive Christian Resources.

Where Have They Gone?

I AM A CHRISTIAN. I was born and raised in the Christian Reformed Church and educated in its schools from kindergarten through college. I am also gay. These two characteristics define my life more than anything else: more than my education, career, marital status, or the number of children I may have.

As a gay Christian, I am an oxymoron to many.

I do not easily embrace myself as a gay man. I've only come to do that after many years of wrestling with the Scriptures, with God, with myself. I sought counsel from pastors and Christian therapists, tried ex-gay ministries and every reparative therapy program I could find. I begged God to change me and in despair attempted suicide. I studied every angle of the questions "How do I become 'not gay'?" and "What must I do to be straight?" In my study of Scripture, I wrestled with the passages interpreted to condemn homosexual behavior, with creation order, the nature of sin, and the process of sanctification. And I prayed. My sexual orientation did not change.

Like every other gay person in the CRC, I am mindful of my church's understanding of homosexuality. "Love the sinner, hate the sin" is a cliché implying that I am sin personified. Tony Campolo has observed that Jesus says the opposite: "Love the sinner and hate your own sin. And after you get rid of the sin in your own life, then you can begin talking about the sin in your brother or sister's life."

Meanwhile, where have all the gay sons and daughters of your church gone? Many—I dare say most—have left your churches and your hometowns. Their church home became unsafe when they—like me—learned the pastor's response to people like us.

It may surprise you that there is a deep spiritual longing within my gay friends, a longing and a struggle to reconcile



Like every other gay person in the CRC, I am mindful of my church's understanding of homosexuality.

"Jesus loves me, this I know" with an attribute that many in the church consider an abomination. My friends grew up loving God—that has not changed. But as a result of being rejected, many have given up on the church, and, tragically, on God.

The culture has changed. Same-sex marriage is legal in Canada and in some states. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down part of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). The Boy Scouts of America voted to allow gay youth to participate. Celebrities, athletes, and business leaders are "coming out."

The church seems unprepared to respond to these situations legally and

with moral authority. How do congregations pick up the pieces of shattered families after the failure of mixed-orientation marriages of gay people who enter into a heterosexual marriage, believing that it would make them acceptable to God and the church? How do they welcome gay couples who attend services or who wish to be married in the church?

My understanding of the Scriptures has changed dramatically over the years. If "insanity" is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results, I was going insane seeking "freedom" from being gay. Jesus confronted me with the words "I have come to give life and life abundant" (John 10:10). These words trumped "abomination theology."

Coming out has not been easy—for me or for my family. But it has brought life.

Isn't it time for the church to welcome back its gay sons and daughters, along with their spouses and children? Isn't it time to encourage everyone to know the love of God for each and every one of his children? ■

Name withheld

Mission Possible: Volunteering in the CRC

by Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

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You add.
God multiplies.



What should you do with the days and hours God has given you? For a growing number of people in the Christian Reformed Church, the answer is to spend some time as a volunteer.

“During our marriage, we often mentioned that if we could retire early and were blessed with good health, we would like to volunteer and serve those less fortunate,” said Fred and Mary Visser of Byron Center, Mich.

In the spring of 1988, they read an article in *InterMission* magazine called “Retirees and the Call to Missions” written by Dr. Roger Greenway, who at the time was executive director of Christian Reformed World Ministries.

Greenway encouraged people to forgo a life of leisure in their retirement years and instead be useful and productive servants of God for all the days God gave them health and strength.

“That article inspired us for a life of service,” said Fred. In 1997 they retired from their jobs and signed up as volunteers with World Renew’s Disaster Response Services—a ministry made up of volunteers who give their time and talents to help clear debris, assess needs, and rebuild homes after disasters strike in North America.

The Vissers’ first assignment was to spend two weeks in Modesto, Calif., doing repairs and reconstruction on homes that were damaged by severe flooding. Fred painted and helped carpenters while Mary learned to mud and finish drywall.

“We were hooked,” they recalled about the impact of that first trip. “The camaraderie with the other volunteers as well as helping rebuild homes and lives was a wonderful blessing.”

Over the next 16 years, the Vissers served at disaster sites across the United States as well as in Canada and Puerto Rico. Sometimes, such as on that first

Fred and Mary Visser (center and right) have volunteered with World Renew Disaster Response Services for 16 years, doing everything from construction and painting to project management and networking with local organizations.

trip, they did general construction, framing, and painting. Other times they went door-to-door in disaster-affected communities to talk to survivors and assess unmet needs. They have also served in volunteer leadership roles as on-site managers at construction sites, project managers in New York and Northern New Jersey following the 9/11 attack, and, most recently, as regional managers overseeing disaster response activities in six southeastern states.

“There have been many highlights along the way,” said Mary. “The hugs from survivors after their home has been restored; praying at a kitchen table with a survivor who has just been to visit her husband who was suffering with cancer; visiting a mother with a little girl who received a trailer that World Renew DRS no longer needed and seeing their joy at having a place to live.”

There have also been challenges.

“One of the hardest times for us was following Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast,” said Fred. “The devastation and loss of life was overwhelming.”

But overall, the experience has been overwhelmingly positive.

“God has blessed us so abundantly that we want to pass that blessing on to

those who were affected by a tragedy through no fault of their own. It is our prayer that in some small way we did that through our involvement with World Renew.”

They are not alone. Volunteers play a huge role within the Christian Reformed denomination—both at the denominational level and within local churches.

“Volunteers are what make a church function—no program would exist or ministry happen if it were not for »

Are You Being Called to Serve?

We asked CRC agencies how many volunteers they had in the 2012-2013 ministry year. For more information, visit their websites.

- Back to God Ministries International: 1,655 volunteers. BackToGod.net/get-involved/for-you
- Calvin Theological Seminary: two volunteers, plus people who donate to the food pantry and clothing ministry for students, and those who support international students. calvinseminary.edu
- Chaplaincy and Care Ministry: nine volunteer Advisory Committee members. crcna.org/chaplaincy
- Christian Reformed Home Missions: one home office volunteer and hundreds who serve at the local level on regional teams or at church plants, campus ministries, and local small groups. crhm.org
- Christian Reformed World Missions: 433 volunteers. crwm.org/volunteer or www.crwm.org/serve
- Disability Concerns: 510 volunteers. crcna.org/disabilityconcerns
- Safe Church Ministries: 300 volunteers. crcna.org/safechurch
- ServiceLink: 90 volunteers. crcna.org/servicelink
- World Renew: 3,429 volunteers including 3,151 Disaster Response Services volunteers. worldrenew.net/volunteer



Tony and Jennie DeWeerd (center in dark green) spent two days volunteering with their sons Ken, Kevin, and Colin and their grandsons Chris and Bryan to frame a two-bedroom bungalow for flood survivors in Bracebridge, Ontario.



people willing to commit to serving in some capacity or another,” said Carol Sybenga, program manager for Service-Link, the volunteer services program of the CRCNA.

“There would not be a governing church council or youth programs or nursery attendants to look after young children or people to welcome newcomers, etc. etc.,” Sybenga added.

Prayer Requests

Please pray for

- the thousands of volunteers who make ministry possible within local CRC churches and at the denominational level.
- wisdom, strength, and grace for volunteers serving in difficult or delicate situations (such as Safe Church team members).
- agencies as they recruit new volunteers so that matches can be made between those willing to serve and the needs expressed by the ministries.
- the health and safety of volunteers serving at disaster sites or internationally.
- the graduates of BTGMI Bible study courses and participants in World Renew community programs around the world who now are equipped to be volunteers in their own communities.

“Additionally, any community outreach would not take place without the dedication of people passionate to meet the needs within their communities.”

The same holds true at the denominational level. CRC agencies are supported by many volunteers who love the church and desire to give back because of what Christ has done for them. Volunteers serve on agency boards, help stuff mailings, manage disaster response activities, teach English, and a great deal more. But volunteering is more than just providing free labor to complete tasks.

“Volunteering is a mindset within our church,” said Sybenga. “It’s about serving, about discipleship, about faith development, about leadership development, about being part of the body of Christ.”

A story from Bracebridge, Ontario, provides an example. In the summer of 2013, severe flooding in northern Ontario caused hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage and left some people, including Woody and Theresa Bowers, without a home.

Tony and Jennie DeWeerd are retirees from Caledonia, Ontario, who have served

with World Renew DRS two or three times a year since the 1990s. Currently they serve as regional managers for World Renew DRS in Ontario and were responsible for tracking the storm and flooding last summer.

“Through our discussions with people in the affected area, we got involved with the Bowers family and were asked to help them rebuild their home,” said Tony. “Two of our sons are framers by profession and have their own crews. Our other son, Kevin, also has framing experience. It was a natural fit for our carpentry family to build a house for that couple.”

And that’s just what they did. Tony and Jennie, along with their sons Ken, Kevin, and Colin DeWeerd and their grandsons Chris and Bryan all took two days off work and built a two-bedroom bungalow for the Bowers family.

“Our children know that we always go and volunteer. They appreciate what we do, and this was their chance to serve as well,” Jennie said.

Other volunteers from local churches and communities as far away as Barrie, Ontario, came to give a day or two of

You add.
God multiplies.



Michael deJager, from Surrey, British Columbia, was connected to a volunteer placement in Kenya during the summer of 2013 by ServiceLink.

their time to build decks, attach siding, and shingle the roof. By Thanksgiving, thanks to the time and talents of all of these community members, the Bowers family had the keys to their new home.

“Unless you’ve actually done it and seen the thankfulness in someone’s eyes and heart after you’ve helped them, you can’t understand the reward you get from volunteering,” said Tony. “You’ll get so much satisfaction out of being a blessing to other people. Once you start volunteering, you’ll want to do it more.” ■



Kristen deRoo VanderBerg is communications manager for World Renew.

CRCNA and RCA Create Volunteer ‘Think Tank’

Do short-term volunteers truly benefit the communities in which they serve?

Could the money spent on sending volunteers be better spent if it went directly to those in need?

These and other tough questions often face potential volunteers and the people who support their efforts.

All too often, short-term volunteers are ill-prepared for their experience; they may give offense because of a lack of knowledge about the context in which they volunteer. They may even jeopardize ministries that missionaries have been working on for years.

Others who serve with a pure heart can create long-term dependency by providing Band-Aid solutions instead of working for lasting change.

Despite these downsides to short-term missions, God regularly calls people to serve. Throughout the Bible there are many examples of God asking people to physically “go.” He did not suggest that they simply send money or respond from a distance. How then can Christians respond to those who feel called to a short-term volunteer experience?

These are the types of questions that a newly-formed “Justice and Excellence in Short-Term Missions Think Tank” was designed to address. The think tank is made up of short-term missions staff from the Christian Reformed (CRC) and Reformed (RCA) denominations, who have more than 100 years of combined experience.

“We are a group of people within two denominations who have a passion for engaging volunteers in ministry,” said Carol Sybenga, program manager for ServiceLink, one of the participating agencies.

She added that volunteering is not just about serving the target community. It also impacts the volunteer and the sending church as well as the sending ministry organization.

“Additionally we strive to collaborate with host communities so the focus of ministry always aligns with their long-term strategies and with an eye on justice,” she said.

To help achieve these goals, the various agencies represented in the think tank have signed on to the Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Missions (*soe.org*) and agreed to format their volunteer opportunities with these standards in mind. The standards include such things as God-centeredness, empowering partnerships, mutual design, and appropriate training.

The hope is that as agencies design their volunteer experiences in accordance with these standards, they will be able to respond to people’s God-given call to serve and pair it with meaningful volunteer experiences that benefit everyone. ■

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

‘Help Yourself to It’

Volunteer: *One who offers himself for any service or undertaking.*

For those who call themselves Christians, there’s something missing in that dictionary definition. For those whose identity includes being Reformed, it’s incomplete. A volunteer is not simply someone who offers him- or herself for a service, but someone who does so for a reason—a high and holy reason. The service, whatever it might be, is done for God.

As he begins his conclusion of the monumental sermon we usually call the letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul writes: “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering” (Rom. 12:1, *The Message*).

That is truly what a volunteer is—a Christian volunteer, that is. And so a word to us all—to those who give months of their time to international service or domestic relief work and to those who give moments of their time to incidental service or daily relief work: Let the way you use every tick of the clock be a gift to God.

Over a century ago, a medical doctor in Kansas City was filled with a deep love for Scripture. He studied it avidly and applied it devoutly. But his life seemed devoid of fruit. A visiting missionary asked him once, “What is the Holy Spirit to you?” He gave the textbook answer about the Spirit being the third Person in the Trinity, Teacher, Comforter, Guide.

Repeating the question, the missionary probed further: “But what is the Spirit to *you*?” “I have no personal relationship with him,” the doctor admitted. “I could get along quite well without him.”

Knowing that about himself bothered him greatly. Then one Sunday he heard a sermon on Romans 12:1. The preacher said, “God gives you the privilege and the indescribable honor of presenting your bodies to the Holy Spirit to be his dwelling place on earth.”

At that moment, the doctor said later, he spoke to the Spirit: “Just now I give you this body of mine, from my head to my feet. I give you my hands, my limbs, my eyes and lips, my brain. All that I am I hand over to you for you to live in it the life you please. You may send this body to Africa, or lay it on a bed with cancer. . . . It is your body from this moment on. Help yourself to it.”

I wonder what would happen if more and more of us said to the God of our lives, “Help yourself to it.” While this does not mean volunteering for everything, it suggests a real change in attitude. The next time a position on a committee or a council opens up, we would say of ourselves to God, “Help yourself to it” and see what God does.

The next time an opportunity to help someone arises we would breathe the prayer “Help yourself to me, Lord” and see what God chooses to do. And when disaster strikes and we have the time and the gifts to assist, we would pray, “If you need me, help yourself.” What a difference it would make in the world—and in us!

Each of us, I suppose, has some kind of alter-ego. We act a certain way in one place and a different way in another. God’s call, Paul says, is to develop, with God’s help, a kind of *altar*-ego. We need to place ourselves on the altar, not as an offering to be consumed in smoke but as an offering so consumed by love for God that whatever the cost in money, time, or effort, we say to God, “Help yourself to it.” ■



ISTOCK PHOTO

“Let the way you use every tick of the clock be a gift to God.”



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

God's Word Is Alive

Rev. Sergei Sosedkin and members of his Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) Russian ministry team are successfully partnering with churches to lead evangelistic rallies for young people from unchurched families.

Over the past year, the ministry participated in 30 gatherings, some attended by hundreds, others by a few dozen people.



MIKE EL ZINGA

Russian teens are open to God's Word.

In St. Petersburg, a local congregation invited the ministry team to participate in a gathering for younger teens. BTGMI provided speakers and

media expertise to promote the event.

"At least 250 young people from this community, most of them unchurched, came to

add.
God multiplies.

learn about salvation in Jesus Christ as part of this two-day event," said Sosedkin.

Another opportunity came from a small messianic Christian congregation in the Ukrainian city of Kharkov that asked for help.

Following much prayer and local media promotion, the ministry team held the event, which attracted nearly 200 Jewish people.

After the presentation, the speaker invited participants to commit themselves to Christ. Eighteen people responded and signed on to study the Bible with this local messianic congregation.

Sosedkin believes many young people and nonbelievers are attracted to the events because, even though they are well-connected through social media, they miss human contact.

"If they know the program is going to be good and if some of their friends are coming, they love to participate in events," said Sosedkin.

The team also uses media during the gatherings. Short videos produced by BTGMI are used to jump-start or enliven the discussions. The participants often receive or choose to buy BTGMI audio/video programs for further discipleship.

"Please pray for all the young souls, many of whom are hearing the gospel for the first time in their lives," said Sosedkin. ■

—by Nancy Vander Meer,
Back to God Ministries
International

Finding Fulfillment at the Juice Bar

Anissa Adkins Eddie and her husband, Jermale, were wondering what God's plans were for them when they returned to Grand Rapids after working with a church in Texas.

A Calvin College graduate, Anissa landed a part-time social work position while taking care of sons Malachi and Nehemiah.

Her husband worked for a time at Calvin for the multicultural student development office.

Both of them, however, had the feeling there was something more.

"Jermale saw a coworker drinking something green and got curious," said Anissa. "That conversation led us from one discovery to another."

They now operate the Malamiah Juice Bar on the first floor of the new Downtown Market in Grand Rapids.

"I became energized by the health importance of juices. I concluded that if we

became involved in this we would basically be selling health, not a particular product," said Jermale.

Through local funding and an innovative partnership with the Downtown Market, they opened the now-thriving juice bar.

"Our hope for the business has always been beyond profit," said Anissa. "We want people to be blessed physically and beyond." ■

—by Michael Van Denend,
Calvin College

Anissa Adkins Eddie, her husband, Jermale, and their children.



Churches Face Changes in Refugee Policy

Mary Van Es and her husband, John, had helped their church, Community CRC in Kitchener, Ontario, welcome a family of Eritrean refugees.

But because the Canadian government recently cut some health care funding for privately sponsored refugees, the extensive dental work the three children needed would have to be covered by the church.

“There are times I get upset when we are once again told this family does not qualify because they are privately sponsored,” said Van Es. “But



An Eritrean family sponsored by Community CRC in Kitchener, Ontario.

God was already thinking, “Watch me.”

Privately sponsored refugees are chosen by private sponsors such as individuals or churches and then approved

by the government. They are separate from refugee claimants who arrive at Canada’s borders seeking protection and then apply for protection once in the country.

Soon after learning that the church would be on the hook for expensive dental bills, a dentist approached Van Es at church and eventually offered to do the work for free.

When they arrived at the office, the dentist played on the floor with the children to make them feel comfortable.

“That’s not all—the girls in the office asked the kids to look under the Christmas tree,” said Mary Van Es. “There were several gifts under it: two gifts for each child. Mom received a card with a department store gift card.”

Rose Dekker of World Renew, who had arranged this sponsorship and many others, has been following the changes in refugee policy and the medical profession’s uproar over it.

World Renew, she explained, warns churches about the unexpected expenses the cuts could cause. So far, no churches that she deals with have had to pay large bills, but she is concerned that one day a church could sponsor a refugee who is later diagnosed with a serious disease requiring expensive treatment.

“Canada boasts about our private sponsorship program abroad,” said Dekker, who has lobbied her member of Parliament for changes, “and yet these cuts have not been overturned.”

—by Danielle Rowaan, Canadian Ministries

Center for Excellence in Preaching Marks 10 Years

Now entering its 10th year, the Calvin Center for Excellence in Preaching offers pastors continuing education opportunities and a wealth of preaching resources online.

Scott Hoezee, a veteran preacher and teacher of preaching, has directed the center almost since its inception.

Hoezee says his greatest joy has been making direct contact with pastors and future pastors, “talking about real-life challenges for preaching and then find[ing] ways to address those [issues].”

An average of 400 to 600 pastors use the center’s website each day. In 2013, the site tallied more than 210,000 total visits for the year.

Hoezee says he is gratified that the center’s resources “are

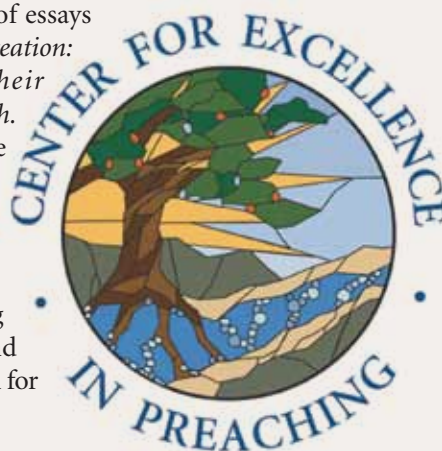
being used in hundreds, if not thousands, of congregations every week. That is a deeply satisfying thing—a source of great gratitude to God.”

From 2009 to 2011, the center used a \$200,000 grant from the John Templeton Foundation to build a website featuring science-for-ministry-related resources, host continuing education events, and publish a book of essays entitled *Delight in Creation: Scientists Share Their Work with the Church*.

More recently, the center received a three-year \$500,000 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to focus on peer learning groups for pastors and homiletical education for M.Div. students.

Especially significant has been the center’s flagship summer seminar “Imaginative Reading for Creative Preaching,” which has attracted more than 200 pastors over the last decade. ■

—by Kristy Manion, Calvin Theological Seminary



You add.
God multiplies.

Dairy Farm Is Catalyst for Transformation

The 20-acre Ebenezer Farm is in rural Uganda, a few miles from Pentecostal Theological College (PTC).

Since 2008, Christian Reformed World Missions and PTC have laid the dairy farm's foundation, dug water lines, and prepared the farm for hands-on training. PTC students have also contributed to making the dream a reality.

Now PTC is launching a Community Transformation Department to expand use of the farm, enabling students to apply their education to all aspects of life.

"We want to develop pastors [who] . . . are called not only to address the spiritual concerns but also the social concerns in their communities," said Patrick Ouke, PTC's president.

Under the program, students will learn about business ethics, stewardship of resources, innovative and sustainable farming, health and sanitation, and caring for God's creatures.

"Our beginning had many challenges," said Mwaya Wa Kitavi, CRWM's East Africa regional leader.



MIKE ELZINGA

The whole community came to celebrate the farm's dedication and take a tour.

"We asked, where would the resources come from? Who will lead the project? But we were faithful."

With the help of supporters from North America, the project is complete and CRWM is ready to hand it over to PTC.

"As a student body, we are so proud of this project," said Moses Kigumba, a PTC student. "It is our prayer that this farm will grow and benefit the entire community." ■

—by Claudia Elzinga,
special to *Christian Reformed World Missions*

Coaching Churches on a Journey of Renewal

Jack Tacoma is sometimes astonished about the journey on which God has led him.

Now a ministry specialist for Christian Reformed Home Missions, he coaches up to 12 churches a year toward renewal and growth.

Tacoma took this path 20 years ago when, at the urging of his wife, he attended a workshop about discovering your spiritual gifts.

It turned out, to his surprise, that being a teacher was his top gift.

"I did not expect to love teaching—but I discovered that I did," he said.

Tacoma, an engineer by training, began teaching churches about spiritual gifts.

Then he realized that it wasn't enough. "So I began training leaders, which led to teaching and coaching about how we renew our churches."

Tacoma now leads churches through "The Journey of Three Lands and Two Rivers," a program that connects a church's progression of renewal to the Hebrews' trek from slavery in Egypt through the wilderness to the land of milk and honey. ■

—by Lorilee Craker,
Christian Reformed Home Missions



Jack Tacoma

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

It's Great to Be a Kid!

Being a kid is awesome! You don't have to worry about doing "grown-up" things like paying bills or finding a job. You get to play with your friends, do fun things in school, play sports, and hang out with your family. What is one

of your favorite things about being a kid? Write your answer below.

God loves kids. Did you know he has a wonderful plan and purpose for your

life right now? You don't have to wait until you're an adult for God to use you in amazing ways. The Bible tells lots of stories of God working through kids just like you. Here are just a few of them.

The Widow's Sons

Like most kids, you've probably helped an adult with a really big project at your house. Maybe you've helped clean the garage, pull weeds in the yard, or sort through old clothing.

Two young boys in the Bible helped their mom with a very interesting project—collecting jars! You can read all about it in 2 Kings 4:1-7. A poor woman whose husband had died owed a lot of money to someone.

Since she did not have the money to pay the person back, her sons were in danger of being sold as slaves. So the widow went to the prophet Elisha to ask for help.

Elisha told the woman to have the boys help her collect empty jars from their neighbors—as many jars as they could find. Elisha then told her to pour the little bit of oil she had left in her cupboard into the jars. And here's the amazing part: God allowed the oil to keep flowing until all the jars were filled! The widow was able to sell all those jars of oil to pay her debt. What a miracle!

That is so cool!
My Mom just collects
BigMart bags.

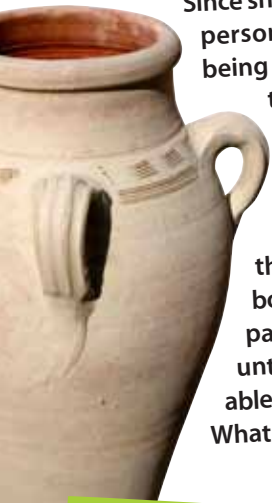


ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

The Jar Project

You can help someone in need with a "Jar Project" of your own. Find an empty jar in your house and rinse it out. Ask your family, friends, neighbors, or church members to add loose change or dollars to the jar. When the jar is filled, use the money to buy food for a needy family. Or send the money to a mission organization that helps children in need. Who knew that you could use a simple jar for such a good purpose!



King Joash

If you're around 7 years old, your most important "job" might be your schoolwork. But God used another kid in the Bible to do something really huge: to be the king of Judah! Joash was only 7 years old when he became king. The Bible says that King Joash grew up and commanded the people in Jerusalem to collect money to repair the temple of the Lord.



“Samuel!”

Ever wonder what God’s voice sounds like? Many times throughout the Bible, God spoke to men and women—and kids too! One of those kids was a boy named Samuel.

When Samuel was a very young child, his mother, Hannah, took him to God’s temple to live and work with a priest named Eli. One night as Samuel was sleeping, he heard someone calling his name. At first he thought it was Eli, but it was really the voice of God! God told Samuel that he would do powerful things for the people of Israel.

How about you? You may not hear actual sounds, but God is always speaking to us. Are you listening? How does God speak to you?



Make a Listening Journal

Try this! Decorate a special journal with markers, construction paper, or whatever you like. Use this “listening journal” to write your prayers, thoughts, and drawings to God. Before you go to bed tonight, read the story of Samuel in your Bible. You’ll find it in 1 Samuel 3:1-21. Play some worship music if you like. During your quiet time with God, write down anything you hear him saying to you in your heart.

More Kids in the Bible

There are so many other great stories of kids in the Bible—check them out!

- Jesus in the temple courts (Luke 2:41-52)
- A boy shares his lunch (John 6:1-15)
- Jesus raises a girl from the dead (Luke 8:49-56)
- Jesus raises a widow’s son from the dead (Luke 7:11-17)

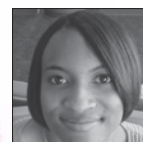
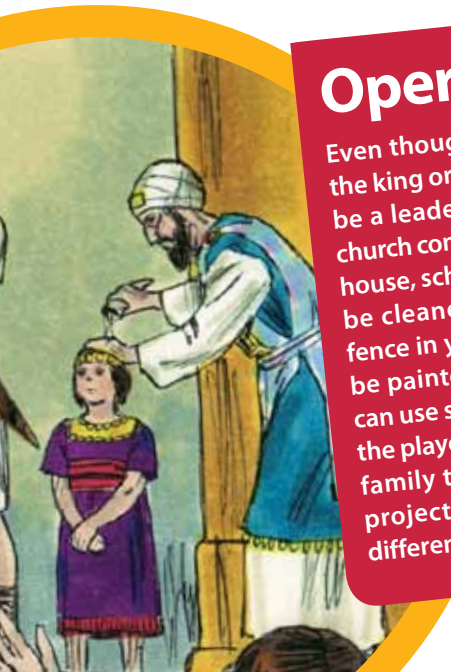
Find Out Your Own Family’s Kid Stories

Ask your parents or grandparents this question: **What is one of your favorite childhood memories?**

Maybe you can even record your conversation. Later on you can play it back and think about the differences between being a kid when they were kids and being a kid today. Or write their story down and share it with them later.

Operation Fix-it

Even though I’m guessing you’re not the king or queen of your city, you can be a leader in your home, school, or church community. Find an area in your house, school, or church that needs to be cleaned up or fixed up. Maybe a fence in your neighborhood needs to be painted or your school custodian can use some help picking up trash on the playground. Rally your friends and family to help you with your “Fix-it” project. Then go ahead and make a difference in your community!



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

GOD'S GARDEN

THE ROLE OF DENOMINATIONS



SOMETIME AGO a friend and I were discussing the merits of TULIP (see sidebar p. 34). While I appreciated his loyal enthusiasm for the acronym, I jokingly said, “But I’m sure God loves roses too.” That led to a discussion of church relationships, or ecumenicity.

TULIP also suggested to me the analogy of the church as a garden. There’s more in Scripture to confirm this than I had first realized. Genesis 2 speaks of God planting a garden, while Psalms 44 and 80 portray God “planting” Israel in the land. Jesus calls himself the true vine and his followers branches (John 15:1); Paul continues the theme by speaking of believers being “grafted” into Christ (Rom. 11:17ff.).

Thinking of the church as a garden gave me a new perspective on how we should view other denominations and confirmed my fear that we too readily

dismiss them. Is it possible that we are so involved in our own “brand” of Christianity that we are ignorant of or indifferent toward other denominations?

Two Extremes

I believe there are at least two extremes we need to avoid. One is being so convinced that “our” church is the one and only true church that we look askance at other denominations. The second is believing that those “other” denominations are the result of sinful motives and thus should be dissolved in order to reorganize as one new church.

Perhaps we need a reminder that Christ, the builder of his church, is also the Creator of all things. The flora and fauna of his created world are an eloquent testimony to the Creator’s love of diversity, which was also evident when Christ began his church by choosing fishermen, tax collectors, zealots, and, belatedly, a scholar—the apostle Paul.

The first extreme, which accepts the validity of only one denomination out of the many, is a kind of monism that fails to capture the kaleidoscopic nature of the Christian faith. If roses could fully portray the beauty of all flowers, why would God make carnations? Christians are called upon to appreciate the beauty and rejoice in the diversity of the “one holy catholic church.”

The second extreme is a monism of another kind: it sees the unity of the church as the result of mechanical forces and administrative actions.

While it may be true that the birth of some denominations involves a sad or sordid story, we must not forget that the builder of the church can make beautiful strokes with our crooked sticks. Millennia ago, Joseph was granted the sanctified vision to see that although his brothers intended him harm, God used their actions to save many people. There’s no hint in Scripture that the brothers were exonerated for their actions, but it was

clear that God is great and good. Similarly, the gospels describe the events of “holy week” as a series of ugly human actions. Yet through God’s grace and power we see in Christ’s death and resurrection the salvation of humankind. It is the only ladder to heaven.

The New Testament gives us an example of something close to “schism.” Paul and Barnabas cannot agree on whether John Mark, who had deserted them earlier, is a worthy companion for their next missionary journey (Acts 15:39ff.). Although the author of Acts makes no judgment as to which party is justified, the result is clear: instead of one missionary team, there are two. The builder of the church works in wonderful and mysterious ways.

Instead of bemoaning a “fractured church,” perhaps we should celebrate the richness of a diversified church.

Does this mean that one denomination is as good as another? Probably not. If you ask a florist, “Which is the best flower?” she’s likely to respond by asking, “For which occasion?” Furthermore, there are circumstances in which tough language must be used; denominations that deny the deity of Jesus have certainly gone astray. Maybe for some reason beyond our comprehension God has permitted weeds in his garden—or else “some enemy has done this.”

A Word of Caution

To those who wish to dissolve the present variety of denominations to create one church under one administration, a word of caution is in order. History has demonstrated that when the church was one, and powerful in administration, it was

TULIP

In the Dutch Calvinist tradition, TULIP is an acronym that refers to the five points of doctrine spelled out in more detail in the Canons of Dort: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints.

If roses could fully portray the beauty of all flowers, why would God make carnations?

also at its ugliest. Even the mention of the word “inquisition” is enough to make further discussion unnecessary.

To those who are certain that their denomination has a corner on “all the truth and nothing but the truth,” a word of caution is also in order. Do not be counted among the arrogant who think that their little thimble can hold God’s ocean. During Jesus’ time on earth, the Pharisees and the Sadducees held tenaciously to their conflicting dogmas. (The Pharisees were convinced that there was an afterlife; the Sadducees were equally convinced that there was no afterlife.) Both groups were so invested in the “truth” of their own position that, tragically, few seemed to recognize the One who is the truth, the way, and the life.

The make-up of Jesus’ band of disciples may also guide us here. What we know of Jewish history in the first century is that there was sharp tension between publicans and zealots. The former were viewed as traitors, the latter as highly patriotic. Jesus chose one of each to follow him. Yet there is no hint of a spat between Matthew the publican and Simon the zealot. I know of no way to explain that other than recognizing that both were in the presence of him who is the Truth.

So let us not allow our self-generated certitudes to function as “truths” that eclipse him who is the Truth sent from God. It takes the guidance of the Spirit to help us discern and appreciate God’s designed diversity from the weeds sown by the enemy. The Spirit works through the Word. As plants nurtured within God’s lovely garden, we do well to listen to Scripture: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8).

We Calvinists are sometimes referred to as adherents to the dourest brand of

Christianity. Usually this is because of our emphasis that the *alpha* and *omega* of salvation is from God. And yet that very emphasis compels us to say that whatever is lovely in and of the church is from God. That perspective allows Calvinists to speak openly of the beauty of God and his church. It leads us to revel in the works of mercy done by Mother Teresa and her organizations. And it compels us to give thanks when an Amish family forgives the murderer of their daughter.

What is not so lovely is when those outside of the church observe that two denominations subscribing to the same doctrinal standards show little or no cordiality to one another. When that happens, how can people come to any other conclusion than that these doctrinal standards are of little value?

On the other hand, how beautiful it is when denominations encourage one another in matters that are “excellent and praiseworthy”! Such behavior encourages “outsiders” to join the “great crowd no one can number” and to put on the beautiful robes of righteousness Christ has prepared for them.

In the meantime, with joyous anticipation of that great day, we can sing the beautiful words of Király Imre von Pécseli’s 17th-century hymn:

*There in God’s garden
stands the Tree of Wisdom,
whose leaves hold forth
the healing of the nations:
Tree of all knowledge,
Tree of all compassion,
Tree of all beauty. ■*



Clarence Vos is a retired minister in the Christian Reformed Church and a professor emeritus of religion and Old Testament

at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Going Green



Hank and John Green

JOHN GREEN IS BEST KNOWN as the prize-winning author of young adult books like *The Fault in Our Stars*. He also has a vast online presence, most notably on the video-sharing website YouTube. Green shares the spotlight with his brother, Hank. The brothers have over half a dozen YouTube channels, including Mental Floss and Crash Course, but their first, VlogBrothers, remains the most popular.

In 2007, YouTube was in its infancy when John and Hank started VlogBrothers. They agreed to post video web blogs to each other for one year. What started as a conversation between two brothers bloomed into over 1,100 “vlogs” and over

500 million views. Fans of VlogBrothers are called Nerdfighters.

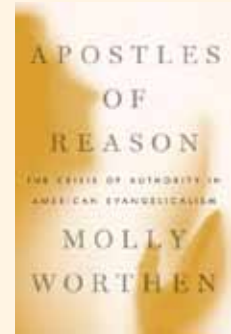
In their vlogs, the brothers discuss a variety of topics: health care, world religion, and John’s dog, Fireball Wilson Roberts. Both brothers use a rapid-fire style of speaking peppered with humor, and their tone ranges from serious to silly. Most vlogs have subtitles to aid listeners who have a difficult time hearing everything.

John is a professed Christian, but neither brother enjoys publicly engaging on the topic, mainly because, in John’s words, “the quality of discussion on this topic on the Internet is atrocious.” The brothers have also created *projectforawesome.com*, which has raised almost a million dollars for charity. Check them out. The Nerdfighter in you will be glad you did. ■



Kathryn Hoffman keeps up with all things young at her job at Living Stones Academy and at Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., where she is a youth group leader.

What started as a conversation between two brothers bloomed into 1,100 “vlogs.”



Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism

by **Molly Worthen**
reviewed by **Robert N. Hosack**

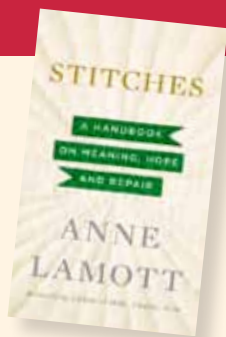
Of the making of books on evangelical navel-gazing there is no end. But newcomer Worthen’s meticulously researched *Apostles of Reason* offers an epic interpretive history of American evangelicalism. The author artfully traces the new evangelicalism through icons like Billy Graham, Carl F. H. Henry, and *Christianity Today*, finding a crisis in authority at the heart of the movement. The tension between the head and the heart is one that could not be escaped. Worthen observes, “Scratch a neo-evangelical and underneath you would likely find a fundamentalist who still preferred the comforts of purity to the risks of free inquiry and collaboration.” This is one of the most important books on evangelicalism in the last 20 years. (Oxford University Press)

Stitches: A Handbook on Meaning, Hope and Repair

by Anne Lamott

reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Anne Lamott is no seamstress, but she knows well the frayed fabrics and broken stitching of human life and our desire for mending and repair. She helps us see how we are “walking each other home” in the communities where we find ourselves. With dignity, strength, and classic Lamott humor, she weaves a picture of how, stitch by often painstaking stitch, we come to a place of hope and newness. “You see a great need, so you thread a needle, you tie a knot in your thread.” You begin. (Riverhead)



Letters from Skye

by Jessica Brockmole

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In 1912, Elspeth, a published poet, is isolated on Scotland’s Isle of Skye when she receives a letter from David, an American fan. As World War I looms on the horizon, they correspond, divulging their dreams, their fears, and eventually their love. They set in motion events that tear Elspeth’s family apart. Their love story explores “how things can change in an instant in wartime” and “how quickly things can be lost.” Brockmole’s realistic characters wrestle with their conscience when making flawed choices in the midst of life’s messiness. (Ballantine)



Philomena

reviewed by Kristy Quist

When Philomena Lee (Judi Dench) was a teen, she became pregnant. Her father sent her to a convent and the child was adopted. Fifty years later, Philomena wants to meet her son and enlists the help of a journalist to find him. This complex film, which includes some profanity and frank talk about sex, initially sets the worldly, atheist reporter against the devout Catholic woman. Philomena’s discoveries push her to do some soul-searching, and it’s not easy to hear Martin question God or his existence. But as he urges Philomena toward anger and revenge, she points him toward grace and forgiveness, even as she struggles to claim that forgiveness for herself. (Weinstein)

The Day the Crayons Quit

by Drew Daywalt

reviewed by Jenny deGroot

What would you do if, like Duncan, you opened a new box of crayons only to find that the crayons have quit their job? Duncan is even more surprised to find letters enclosed from each of the crayons. The letters beg Duncan to listen as each color presents its case for why it feels so undervalued. In the end Duncan finds a way to make all his crayons know their true value, alone and together. A satisfying story and illustration combination. Ages 3 and up. (Philomel)



Flying Colours

by Shad

reviewed by Greg Veltman

Hip-hop artist Shad’s unique Rwandan-Canadian background infuses his flow with insight into the everyday struggle to work for justice and peace. While most hip-hop is still wrapped up in bling and violence, Shad’s lyrics are shaped by his immigration to Canada through the U.K.; he knows only secondhand about the genocide that “ruined his motherland.” He continues to be unapologetically Christian as he gathers a growing audience into conversations about immigration, the breakdown of relationships, oppression, and racism. Rare in rap, the album is a good combination of fun and reflection. (Black Box Recordings)



THE LOWDOWN



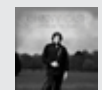
Power Up: Jim

Stump, founder of Stanford University’s Sports Challenge—an athlete mentoring group—shares his wisdom from 40 years of mentoring in the book *The Power of One-on-One*. (Baker)



Catch On: *Catching*

Fire, the second movie installment in the *Hunger Games* trilogy, comes to disc formats this month. Find the *Banner* review at thebanner.org. (Lionsgate)



Cash In: New music

from the late Johnny Cash? It’s true! Due this month, *Out Among the Stars* is original music that was recorded in the early 80s but was lost along the way. (Legacy)



Shelly LeMahieu Dunn has been the director of the Festival of Faith and Writing at

Calvin College for over a decade. A lot has happened in that time! Learn more about Shelly and her history with FFW in our interview at thebanner.org. This year’s festival will be April 10-12 with speakers including Anne Lamott (see the review of her latest on this page), James McBride, and Rachel Held Evans. Go to festival.calvin.edu for more information.

MORE REVIEWS ONLINE

Health Care: A Moral Imperative

THE POLITICAL CULTURE IN NORTH AMERICA is often at odds with our religious faith. Particularly in the United States, our emphasis on rugged individualism at times makes us forget the Old Testament admonitions for justice and the New Testament teachings of Jesus Christ. One of the places where this excessive individualism plays out is in the arena of health care.

Hard-working, middle-class Americans—including a substantial number of *Banner* readers—are but a single illness away from bankruptcy. Those who have lost their jobs, whose hours have been cut to part-time, or who have gone into business for themselves are especially vulnerable. This vulnerability is inconsistent with the values found in Scripture, which seems to suggest access to health care for all people, regardless of income.

Too often our knowledge of health care is based on myths, misconceptions, and partial truths about the American and Canadian systems. These myths include the notion that the U.S. has the finest health care system in the world. In fact, the World Health Organization states that the U.S. is behind 30 other countries in quality of health care.

Another misconception is that change would be too expensive. There is ample evidence that it would, in fact, cost less. Presently the U.S. health care system costs about double that of other industrialized countries, all of whom provide better care. One primary reason for this is administrative costs. Currently over 31 percent of every health care dollar in the U.S. is spent on paperwork and overhead, far more than in other industrialized countries. A national one-payer health care system could save enough on administration costs to ensure access to care for all Americans.

People also express the fear that with national health insurance the government would make people's medical decisions. But experience shows that in a publicly financed health care system, medical decisions are, as they should be, left to the doctor and the patient.

A Moral Imperative

The debate over health care reform has not been treated as the great moral crusade that it is, according to renowned ethicist

Too often our knowledge of health care is based on myths, misconceptions, and partial truths.

David Gushee. A strong case can be made to extend quality health care to 50 million Americans who do not currently have it. Why a moral imperative? In the U.S., an estimated 50,000 people die of treatable diseases each year because they did not have health insurance. Gushee suggests that Jesus' call to love our neighbor as ourselves means we need to care about these people.

And what does the Lord require of us? "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [our] God," says the prophet Micah. In addition, Proverbs 31:8 instructs us to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute." Think how much time Jesus spent healing the sick. Health care reform must rest on a foundation of biblical values that affirms each person's life as a sacred gift from the Creator.

The government's God-given task is to correct and prevent injustice (Ps. 72). It is immoral for the government, the church, or individuals to look the other way when there is injustice. Would God be pleased with us allowing his children to suffer because of an ideological struggle about who has responsibility for caring for the needy?

As Steven Brill reported in *Time* magazine, the system of paying for health care in the U.S. is broken ("Why Medical Bills Are Killing Us," March 4, 2013). Health care costs in the U.S. have grown at a rate five times that of the gross national product (GNP). Sixty-two percent of bankruptcies are caused by or are related to medical bills. Drug prices in the U.S. are, on

average, 50 percent higher than in other developed nations. So we need to control drug costs. The U.S. can lower the qualifying age for Medicare, which is far more efficient than private insurance. We need to insist that hospital managers be paid a more reasonable salary, and that hospitals make a more reasonable profit. The evidence is that a single-payer publicly funded system can provide quality care for all at half the price of private insurance companies.

The Role of the Government

John Calvin freely spoke of the government's obligation to ensure that the basic needs (he called them "rights") of the poor are met, both in terms of basic provisions and in terms of basic health care. Calvin argued that the diaconate of the church should work closely with the civil government in these areas, and he insisted that the government of Geneva should establish a governmentally supported hospital for the poor.

The legislators, the president of the U.S., and the judges who created the Affordable Care Act do not fall under the category of "the principalities and powers of darkness." They are the authorities ordained by God to govern, the ones to whom citizens owe obedience, love, and service. When Christians need to oppose civil authority, we need to do so in obedience to the Word of God, exemplifying the sacrificial service of Christ toward our neighbor in all that we do, and so witnessing in word and deed to the gospel. That does not mean we need to compromise our convictions about what is best for the country we live in with respect to health care or any other issue, nor does it mean we should submit to the government when it commands us to disobey God. But it does suggest that we do these things in a spirit of love and humility, not in a spirit of cultural warfare.

In contrast with the U.S. health care system, the Canadian system is based on the belief that all "necessary hospital and physician services" will be provided to the citizens by the government. The majority of Canadian citizens take out supplementary insurance policies, comparable to persons on Medicare in the U.S. Physicians in Canada are usually reimbursed by the government at a negotiated fee-for-services rate. Canada spends about 12 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on health

care. A 2010 Health Affairs study found that doctors in Ontario spent \$22,000 each year dealing with the single-payer agency, compared to the \$83,000 doctors in the U.S. spent dealing with multiple insurance companies.

Whatever its shortcomings, the Affordable Care Act in the U.S. is an attempt to provide health care to the poor. Those who oppose it should turn their attention to providing an alternative that provides access to health care for all, regardless of income. Meanwhile, the private, for-profit health insurance companies continue to divert funds to drug ads, salespersons, lobbyists, and huge executive salaries. In addition, they distribute more than \$12 billion a year to shareholders. The U.S. General Accounting Office has concluded that a single-payer health care system would save the U.S. about \$400 billion a year. Those funds would cover the cost of providing access to health care for most of the people who are currently uninsured, and thereby save thousands of lives.

There is no doubt that many Christians in the U.S. and Canada obtain superb medical care. The question is, can we have a system in which that superb medical care is available to all? As Christians, we're always called to care about what is best for all people, not just what's best for ourselves. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



Henry Holstege is emeritus professor of sociology at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., and a member of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids.



Bob Ritsema is a member of Eastern Avenue CRC and of the Micah Center, which seeks to be a voice for those without a voice. He taught at Calvin Christian High School and in China.

Rethinking Mission Trips

FLIGHTS ARE BOOKED, bags packed, and vaccinations are in order. You're ready to go!

There's no doubt about it: short-term missions are in.

With participation booming since the 1990s, one might expect the success of short-term missions to be widely evident. All those participants, all that money and time spent should have grown the body of Christ, reduced the global number of "the least of these," and enhanced the passion for mission in our home communities.

Why is the evidence of success so lacking? Could it be that our mission trips are too participant-centered? Perhaps the Great Commission and the call to love our neighbors have become intermingled with our cultural impulse to "do" something for others—bring Bibles, build a church, give away clothing, care for orphans—the type of doing that puts relating, loving, knowing, learning, and worshipping together second.

Short-term missions are a vital part of Christ's church. But maybe it's time to rethink them—starting with a shift away from being participant-centered in favor of being other-centered.

The authentic mission of the church has always been about "the other": people who are far from God, who are poor or sick, who are refugees or widows or orphans. Mission history, beginning with Jesus' ministry and extending through the apostles and many missionaries since, puts "the other" in proper perspective. This focus should also guide our short-term missions.

So before your next mission trip, I invite you to do an honest self-assessment. Consider the following statements and their responses:

1. I want to do something for the poor. Great! Sponsor a refugee family. Volunteer at the food bank. There are



Short-term missions are a vital part of Christ's church. But maybe it's time to rethink them.

poor people in your community too. No need to travel anywhere.

2. I want to take along supplies poor people need, such as used clothes, school supplies, or medicines. Used clothes and free school supplies may put local market vendors out of business. Medicines with English labels may be abused.

3. I want to build a church, a school, a gravity water supply system. There are lots of unemployed tradesmen and unskilled laborers in poor communities. Why take their jobs? They know more about building codes and practices in their communities than you do.

4. I want to tell people about Jesus. In countries such as Honduras, 97 percent of the population is already Christian. Only 72 percent of Canadians are Christian, and only 80 percent of Americans. How about inviting your neighbor to church?

5. I have the money for this trip. If you're planning a two-week mission trip costing \$2,500, consider that the average annual income for 2.1 billion of the world's people is less than \$1,000.

6. The poor invited me to come. They will receive and host me in their home or community.

7. I need to receive, not give. My gifts are respect, humility and gratitude, and a compassionate heart. I will graciously accept hospitality and receive the gifts offered to me.

8. I want to relate. I'll make an effort to learn a few phrases in my hosts' language, even if they laugh and correct me. These people have a lot to teach me about family, community, and worship.

9. I want to let those who are poor minister to me. Through their hospitality, fellowship, and worship, they show me how to cross the divides of race, education, and wealth.

10. This trip is money wisely spent. A mission trip that's focused on "the other" is money wisely spent!

Are you ready for a mission trip that is other-centered? Then book your flight, pack your bags, and get your shots. ■



Harry Spaling teaches geography and environmental studies at The King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta, and is a member of Fellowship CRC. Since 1995, he has helped prepare participants for the annual Honduras water project, sponsored by King's, the Northern Alberta Diaconal Conference, and World Renew.

ADS

Deadlines: April issue is 3/10/14; May issue is 4/7/14. 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.

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

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:

- Reports of standing committees and affiliated youth and educational agencies are due on February 15.
- Reports of agency boards are due ten days after the conclusion of the board meetings, but no later than March 1.
- Overtures and appeals are due no later than March 15.
- 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

Announcement of Candidacy

We are pleased to announce that Bernard Ayoola has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Rev. Joel R. Boot, Executive Director

We are pleased to announce that Suzanne McDonald has now completed her academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Rev. Joel R. Boot, Executive Director

Calls Accepted

CHRIST COMMUNITY CRC of East Islip, NY rejoices in the acceptance of a call extended to Rev. Michael Bentley of Hollandale, MN.

Financial Aid

CLASSICAL STUDENT AID Students from Classis Rocky Mountain preparing for ordained/non-ordained ministry in the CRC are invited to apply for financial aid to the Classical Ministry Leadership Team for the 2014-2015 academic year. For information, contact Bob Westebroek, 18474 E. Columbia Circle, Aurora, CO 80013 or robertwestebroek@comcast.net or (303)400-6723. All requests are to be received by May 31, 2014.

CLASSIS COLUMBIA STUDENT AID: Attention all students in Classis Columbia, considering full-time ministry! Financial Aid is available for students entering seminary in the fall of 2014. Limited Financial Aid is also available for students pursuing Doctoral studies. Contact Rev. Rob Toornstra: artoornstra@comcast.net or at 503-363-5159 for more information.

CLASSIS ZEELAND invites students from our classis who are preparing for ordained/non-ordained ministry in the CRC to apply for financial aid for the 2014-2015 school year. If you are interested please contact Dan Kinnaas at (616) 772-2390 or by email at daniel.kinnaas@thebanner.org. All applications need to be received by April 1, 2014.

Congregational

Church's 125th Anniversary

SHEBOYGAN WEEKEND! Come to First CRC-Sheboygan, Wisconsin for their 125th Anniversary! Friday, April 25: 7pm Praise Bands. Saturday, April 26: 7pm Organ/Hymn Fest. Sunday, April 27: 10am Celebration Service, Noon "Fry". Details & RSVP: 920-458-3112 or 1ccrsheboygan@gmail.com

WEST LEONARD ANNIVERSARY! Please join WLCRC, GR, MI for our 125th Anniversary Celebration May 17-18, 2014. Saturday – banquet for members/former members. Sunday celebration service – 9:30 am with former Pastor David Deters preaching and Mary Vande Guchte leading a member/former member choir. Details and RSVP (for banquet and choir): 616-456-1994 or wleopardcra@gmail.com

Church's 100th Anniversary

1ST DETROIT CELEBRATES 100TH Join the First Christian Reformed Church of Detroit for a 100th anniversary weekend. Reception and reminiscence, Saturday June 7, 5:00 p.m.; Celebration Service Sunday June 8, 10:00 a.m. RSVP, grossepointecrc@gmail.com; 313-824-3511.

100 YEARS OF GOD'S BLESSINGS Third CRC of Zeeland, Michigan will celebrate our 100th anniversary beginning on March 9, 2014. (We were organized on March 12, 1914.) The celebration will continue with various activities culminating on Sunday, September 7, 2014. Check our web site for more details. www.thirdcra.net

Church's 50th Anniversary

YOU ARE INVITED to help Sunnyslope CRC of Salem OR, celebrate our 50th Anniversary on April 26, 2014. For info contact Barb Hansen at 1-503-390-8179.

Church's 25th Anniversary

GOOD NEWS CRC Great is Your Faithfulness! Good News CRC of London ON will be celebrating 25 years of God's faithfulness with a special celebratory 10:30 am Sunday morning service on February 23, 2014. Former members and friends are welcome to join us as we worship and praise the Lord together

Announcements

LK ALFRED MINISTRY: located on Rt. 17/92, Lk Alfred, Fl. Close to Winter Haven & Rt. 27. Services 10:30 A. M., 5:50 P. M. 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

100th Birthday



ALETTA J. (RUS) KUIPERS Born 100 years ago in Holland, Michigan, the daughter of Rev. A. J. and Tena Rus, and wife of the late John W. Kuipers, Aletta will celebrate her birthday on March 8, and is grateful for the long life God has given her. Her children Emma and Carl Butenas, Marvin and Betty Kuipers, Margaret Kuipers Sawyer, John and Laurel Kuipers, and six grandchildren and one great-grandchild are thankful for her cheerful disposition and steadfast faith in Jesus. Aletta resides at 43 Heritage Drive, Whitinsville MA 01588 and attends Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church. Proverbs 3:5-6.



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95th Birthday

ALICE DYK @ 6095 Pleasant St, Manhattan, MT 59741 will celebrate her 95th on March 10. Her 3 children & spouses, 9 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren (1 dcd) thank God for her long life.

90th Birthday

MINNIE (VLIETSTRA) HOLSTEIN will celebrate her 90th birthday on March 4, 2014. Her family gives thanks to God for her life of faith, wisdom and love. Greetings may be sent to 3110 Midas Ct., Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494.

JACOB LUCAS is celebrating his 90th birthday with an open house at South Grandville Chr. Ref. Church on Saturday, March 29 from 2 - 4 p.m.

KAY (WYBENGA) SCHNEIDER of 2121 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 will celebrate her 90th birthday on April 10. Her children, Bill (Bette), Sue (Ken), 6 grandchildren, 1 great grandchild, give thanks for her life of loving service.



MARVIN HUIZINGH of 3539 Whispering Brook, Kentwood, MI, 49508 will celebrate his 90th birthday on March 25, 2014. His family thanks God for his steadfast faith, joyful living, and continued service to others. An open house celebration will be held on Saturday, March 22 from 2-4 p.m. at Seymour Chr. Ref. Church.



DOROTHY (HOVING) RIBBENS celebrated 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



JOHN ROSIER husband of the late Agnes Jean (nee Persenaire) will celebrate his 90th birthday on March 17, 2014. His children, grandchildren and great grandchildren give thanks for his long, loving life. He resides at 12042 S. 69th Ave., Palos Heights, IL 60463.

RUTH SJAARDEMA celebrated her 90th birthday on Feb. 9 with a family cruise. Her 3 children, 10 grandchildren, and 14 great grandchildren are thankful for her Christian example and faithfulness.



GERRIT TIMMER will observe his 90th birthday on March 13, 2014. He and his wife, Fannie, reside at 1919 Boston SE, Apt 218A, Grand Rapids, MI 49506. His wife, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren thank God for his example in love and faith. An Open House to celebrate with family and friends will be held on March 15 from 1pm to 4pm at Providence CRC.

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: Rehoboth Reformed Church, located in Lucas Michigan, is searching for a Lead Pastor with a passion for Winning people for Christ and Equipping them to Serve. This individual should possess a love for music, have a passion for preaching the Word of God through inspiring sermons, and support the task of our current Youth and Education renovation. Any interested applicants should have strong leadership and organizational skills, be a team player, excel in communicating, and be creative in problem-solving and time-management. A church profile is available upon request. Please indicate your interest via email (tom@sh-cpas.com), including your resume, by April 1, 2014. Website: www.rehobothreformed.org

SENIOR PASTOR Westwood CRC, Kalamazoo, MI, is a missionally oriented congregation with an abundance of active ministries. We seek a scripturally grounded, passionate pastor with strengths in preaching and teaching who will also provide leadership of church ministries and staff, and challenge our congregation spiritually. All candidates should direct any inquires and resumes to Steve Veldkamp, spsearchteam@westwoodcrc.org

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@faithcrc.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, 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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We'd like to hear from you. To learn more about Heartland Fellowship and the scope of this ministry opportunity, please contact James Vugteveen (jamer1@telus.net)

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.

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 pacrc-search@sun.stanford.edu.

PASTOR needed by Hope CRC in Thunder Bay, the farming, industrial and transportation hub of North-Western Ontario. Since 1985 we have been seeking ways to concretely serve the Lord, and we need someone to grow and work with us. Contact our interim minister; Pastor John Veenstra, 807 473-0726 email: cnortenwheeler41@gmail.com

PASTOR Bethel CRC, Lynden, WA is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor. For more information, contact Search Committee chair Keith Korthuis at keith@ferndalermg.com

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PASTOR New Life CRC in Grand Jct. CO seeks a Pastor to lead their 100-150 member congregation. inquiries to: pastorsearch@newlifecg.org

LEAD PASTOR Sahali Fellowship, located in Kamloops, in the interior of beautiful British Columbia, is looking for a pastor to become part of our small church family. Join our leadership team and help our church grow in intimacy with God, worship Jesus in every aspect of our lives, and take comfort in the care of the Holy Spirit as we continue to reach out to others. For more information visit www.sahalifellowship.com

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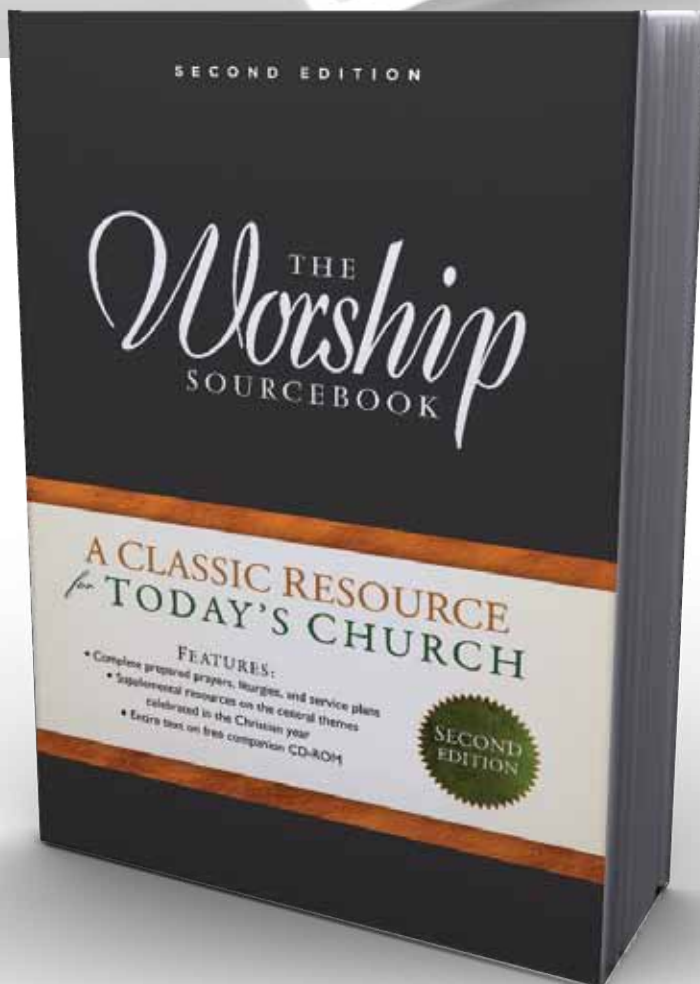
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WENDELL YONKER alias "The Silver Fox," of 12447 S. Natchez, Palos Heights, IL 60463 celebrated his 90th birthday on January 15 in the grateful company of his wife Dorothy, three children and spouses, nine grandchildren and spouses, and 16 great grandchildren. We praise God for his

love and faithfulness, and for this wonderful Christian man.

80th Birthday

ELEANOR J. BAKER Feb 28, PO Box 46, Whitinsville, MA. Daughter of the late Sidney & Jennie Baker. Loved by her extended family, treasured as a very special friend and appreciated for her involvement in her church, the Christian School and her community.

Anniversaries

70th Anniversary



JOLING Ed and Laura will celebrate 70 years of marriage on April 9, two weeks after Laura celebrates her 90th birthday on March 23. Their children Marilyn and Neal Bierling, Dave and Judy Joling, and Judy and John Popp, 8 grandchildren, and 10 great grandchildren are thankful for

their wonderful example of Christian marriage. Address: 1017 Wedgewood, Plainwell, MI 49080.

60th Anniversary



EUWEMA Conrad and Catherine (Jongenotter) of Hudsonville, MI will be celebrating their 60th anniversary on March 3, 2014. Their children: Allen and Agnes Kerkstra, Mike and Grace Bowles, Pete and Cindy Euwema, Ken and Marcia Euwema, and Mike and Danielle Euwema,

13 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren thank God for His love and faithfulness and the many years He has given them.

Obituaries

DE BOER Viola (Brink), age 95, of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on December 29, 2013, at Byron Center Manor. She is lovingly remembered by her daughters, Debra DeBoer Fetter and Sylvia (DeBoer) Fry, four

grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, a sister and brother-in-law, and two sisters-in-law.



BAMFORD Geertje (Gert) van Arragon 12/17/43 -1/14/2014; Geertje passed away peacefully the morning of Jan 14. She is survived by her husband of 43 years, Charles Bamford, four children: Scott Bamford of Austin, Texas; Harmina Mansur (Paul), of San Jose; Matthew Bamford

(Melissa) of San Jose; Rebecca Bamford of Hamilton, ONT. She also is survived by six grandchildren, one great-grandchild and eight siblings.

FABER Larry E., aged 79; January 11 2014; 5310 Naples Cedar Dr. SW, Wyoming, MI 49519; Surviving Larry are his wife of 57 years, Bonnie; children: Dawn Faber of Springfield, MA, Michelle (Mike) DeVries of Rockford, MI and Stacey (Eric) Boender of Grand Rapids, MI; grandchildren: Eric, Heidi, Jonathan and Matthew DeVries and Jake, Banks, Cade and Mace Boender; brothers: Bob (Marie) Faber, Glenn (Bette) Faber and Don (Jennette) Faber and sister: Edna Alles.

HEEMSTRA William Peter "Bill"; aged 74; January 12, 2014; Grand Rapids, MI; He was preceded in death by his wife, Harriet. He is survived by his children: Bob and Sue Krikke, Mike and Missi Heemstra, Terry and Lori Sytsma; grandchildren: Alyssa, Emily, and Nathan Krikke, Eric, Evan, and Will Heemstra, Jeni and Nick Sytsma.

KROMMINGA Joan Bulthuis aged 89; January 29, 2014; 2200 Raybrook SE, #204, Grand Rapids, MI 49546; She was preceded in death by her sister, Gay Flokstra, brother Dirk Jellema, and her first husband Calvin P. Bulthuis. She is survived by her husband: Carl Kromminga, Sr.; She was a loving mother, grandmother and great grandmother to all her children and stepchildren and their families, and she was a loving mom to many seminary students; her children: Leslie and Bill Crothers, Sara and Bart Buettner, Dirk and Char Bulthuis, Paul and Tanya Bulthuis, Mary and Kwan Rhee, Carl Jr. and Sandra Kromminga, David Kromminga and Mary Buteyn; 22 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren.

MAAS Aletha (nee Lefers) was welcomed into her heavenly home on Jan. 21, 2014 at the age of 91. She is survived by her loving husband Ted of 67 years. 5 daughters Jean (Don) McMillan, Delores (John) Keizer, Cheryl (Bill) Bunting, Marilyn (Dan) Derks, Leanne (Chuck) Augustine. 13 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren. Her husband Ted resides at 455 N Dakota Ave, Rm 202, Corsica SD 57328.

MALEFYT Frederick Benjamin; age 87; January 13, 2014; of Grand Rapids, MI; He is survived by Florence (Bos) his wife of 68 years; children: Charles (Raynette) Malefyt, Philip (Ruth) Malefyt, and Mary

(Dale) Dick; 10 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren; brother: David, sister: Elizabeth (Max) Slegers; brothers-in-law: Donald Bos and Kenneth Kobes; and sisters-in-law: Alma Jones and Ann Bos.

SCHEMPER Ann (Boertien), of Ripon, CA entered her heavenly home Friday, January 10, 2014 at the age of 103 years. She was predeceased by her husband of almost 72 years, Leonard, son Robert (Bob), and all her siblings. She is survived by daughter Judy (Harold) Groetsema, daughter-in-law Karen Schemper, son Ward (Yvonne) Schemper, daughter Annette (Mike) Weintz, sisters-in-law Ethel Boertien and Jeanette Meninga, eight grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. Ephesians 2:8 is her testimony: For by grace have ye been saved through faith.

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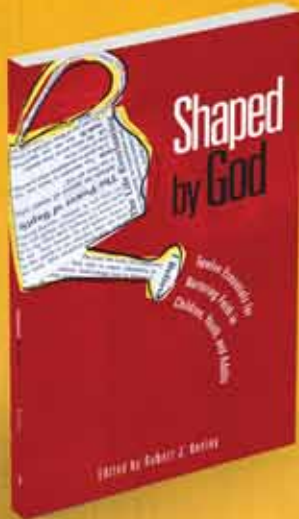
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You're invited to join us at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park on Wednesday, April 16, to listen to our keynote speaker Dr. Richard Mouw, President Emeritus of Fuller Theological Seminary. For more information, please visit www.kuyper.edu/gala2014, contact Teresa Janzen at 877-229-0940 or email events@kuyper.edu.

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It was a cold and wintry day with snowflakes gently falling from a grey sky. On impulse I dropped my lesson plan for the afternoon and taught my grade 4 students how to make a six-sided paper snowflake. We carefully folded and cut white paper into beautiful snowflakes.

One student concentrated very hard on folding and cutting his snowflakes just right. After he had meticulously cut out three of them, he put down his scissors with a sigh and said, very seriously, "Boy, I'm glad I'm not God. Making snowflakes is hard work!"

—Christine de Boer

My parents have a fiber-optic Christmas tree. This initially perplexed my 4-year-old nephew. But after a close study he announced, "Your tree doesn't have lightbulbs . . . but that's OK because the whiskers light up."

—Monique Bos

For two days a husband and wife refused to talk to each other. The second night, the husband went to bed early and left a note on his wife's pillow. The note read: *I have an important meeting early tomorrow. Let me know when it's 6 a.m.*

The next morning he awoke suddenly to the morning light and saw that it was 7:30 a.m. He looked angrily over to her pillow. His note was gone, but another one was there. It read: *It's 6 a.m. Time to get up.*

—Adrian Vander Starre

After the first week of attending their new parochial school, our boys shared how it felt to be the new kids. "I get called 'Isaiah' a lot," Isaac laughed. Joshua observed that his teacher kept calling him "Joseph."

"Just wait until you get called 'Jerusalem,'" younger brother Isaac quipped, "because I've also been called 'Israel!'"

—Eliza J. Anderson

During a Story Hour lesson with 2- and 3-year-olds, I was reviewing the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea:

"When the Israelites escaped from Egypt, Pharaoh and his soldiers started chasing them. The Israelites got to the sea and couldn't go across. What happened to the water?"

Little Jacob answered, "God broke it!"

"That's right. God made a path for them to walk on," I said. "After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, what happened to the water?"

Again Jacob responded, "God fixed it!"

—Janet Vreugdenhil

During the children's message the speaker handed out WWJD bracelets. The children were then asked what they thought the JD stood for. My son, Sam, raised his hand and was

called on. He very confidently spoke into the microphone, "JOHN DEERE!"

—Jen Schoenherr

In a supermarket, a woman was pushing a cart containing a screaming baby. She kept saying soothing things like, "Keep calm, Jenny," and "Don't get upset, Jenny."

Overhearing this, a shopper complimented her parenting skills, saying, "You have remarkable patience with little Jenny!"

"I'm Jenny," the woman said with a sigh.

—Sue Lauritzen

My husband and I are feeling the financial crunch of having two kids in college. Our daughter texted us that she

needed \$400 to pay for her second-semester books. Meanwhile, a relative asked if their college student could board with us for the second semester. We love kids and were happy to oblige. The relative graciously offered to pay rent.

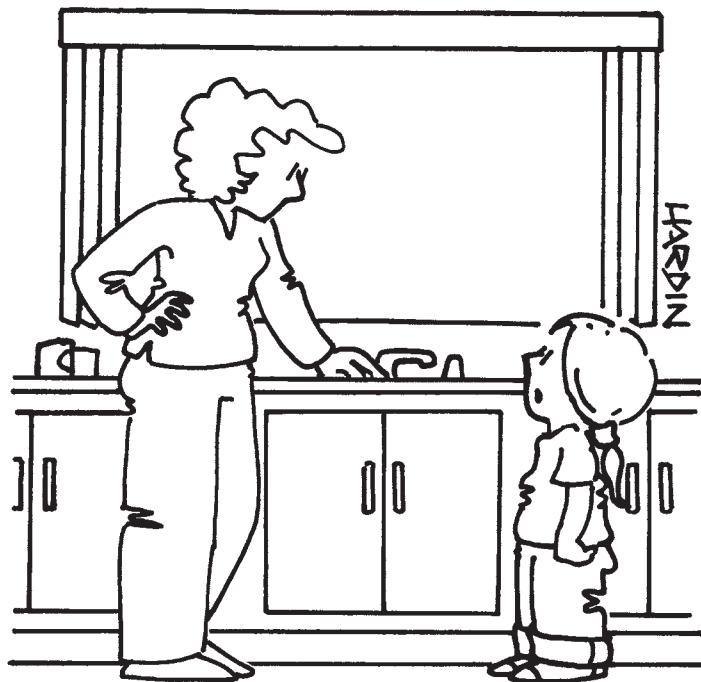
So I texted my husband:

Me: The Lord provided Lisa's exact book amount with our boarder's rent!

Husband: The Lord also takes away: we have \$8.32 in our checking account until tomorrow!

Me: LOL!

—Barb Andreas



"How long did you intern with Grandma before you became a full-fledged mom?"

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