

BANNER

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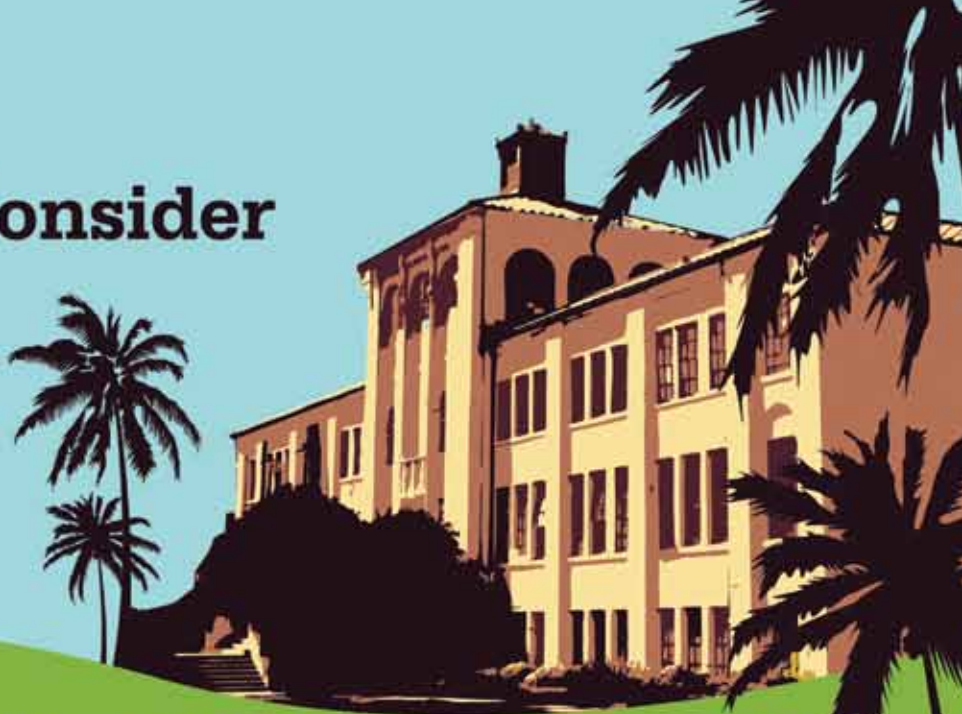


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Healthy Death

Gay DeJong's article "When a Church Closes" (p. 38) filled me with admiration for her and her fellow church members who brought their congregation to a fitting and healthy end. They did the heart-rending work they did not want to do, but they did it in service to God, the kingdom, and the Church universal.

That reminds me of a colleague decades ago who accepted a call to a church that was nearing the end of its lifespan. There were no kids left, no young adults or couples—just old-timers. My colleague had the vision and courage to make it clear that he would accept the call only if he were allowed to lead that congregation out of existence, melding it with another church so that the saints could maintain their connections to one another. He then presided over a wonderful "funeral" in which the congregation celebrated all the years that church had served God's kingdom.

As a gung-ho pastor still wet behind the ears, I learned so much from that.

No doubt, recognizing that a congregation is terminal is difficult. One fights denial. There's no way around the sense of profound loss. One may and must grieve.

Often there is also an accompanying sense of failure. That's something the gospel can remedy if we take it to heart. It reminds us that Jesus walks among those lampstands (Rev. 1:12ff.); he decides the life of churches. We need not blame ourselves for not having done enough or not doing the right things.

Is a congregation a failure and its history meaningless just because it has died? Says who? We're Easter people. Part and parcel of the Good News of our Savior's victory over the grave is that all good life, however ephemeral, is securely bound up in the promise of resurrection.

We, our loved ones, our church's ministries and programs, our congregations, our denominations—all have a limited shelf life and a God-ordained expiry date. But the promise of Easter is that these will be taken up into the eternal life that Jesus won for us on resurrection Sunday. Paul reassures us in a passage rightly read at so many gravesides, "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that *your labor in the Lord is not in vain*" (1 Cor. 15:58).

None of the seven churches addressed by our Lord in John's Revelation exists today. Not one. The Lord extinguished them or let them sputter out. But the Word and Spirit lit thousands more that are spreading their light around the globe.

It's a challenge to start, grow, and maintain a church. It's also a challenge to bring it to a God-glorifying end. I'm excited by a fresh denominational initiative that's brewing. It seeks to develop a ministry for drawing alongside dying churches to lend them encouragement, counsel, and support. Pastors do that for their sheep who are entering the valley of the shadow of death. Providing that kind of support will help dying churches make appropriate bequests, put their affairs in order, mourn their loss, and celebrate what was and will be. It will remind us that Jesus is Victor over each and every kind of death.

He is risen. Hallelujah! ■

All good life,
however
ephemeral,
is securely
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the promise of
resurrection.



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Whole-Grain Spirituality



LUTEN-FREE.

Wheat intolerance. Buzzwords that refer to our culture's increasing difficulties with digesting wheat-related foods. Exploring my own possible allergy to wheat, I find myself drawn to the comparisons between physical and spiritual bread.

Surely Jesus, who called himself the Bread of Life (John 6), knew that our culture would be facing this near epidemic of wheat and gluten intolerance. Jesus and bread were clearly connected in Scripture. So what does this comparison mean for us?

As I try gluten-free versions of favorite recipes to satisfy my craving, I am disappointed: the food crumbles apart in my mouth and leave a bitter aftertaste. And I wonder about those who are leaving their churches feeling misled and unfulfilled, with bitterness in their hearts. Are we offering an unsatisfying version of Christianity to those who are longing for something real? Presenting a gospel that is missing the point?

I'm learning some interesting things about the history and composition of

wheat and why our bodies are beginning to reject it. Gluten—the protein in the wheat kernel that gives bread its elasticity and holds everything together in delicious chewiness—has been modified over the last century to produce fluffier, lighter bread. Unfortunately, this new gluten has an effect on our brains similar to that of crack cocaine—it provides an instant, short-lived burst of high energy but drops our blood sugar quickly, often leading us to consume large amounts of sugars to fill the craving for more. Many people have developed an allergic reaction to this substance our bodies weren't meant to digest.

Have we done the same to Christianity? Have we taken the gospel and stripped it down to only the feel-good elements, modifying them to be so elastic and flexible, so light and fluffy, that people are left longing for more—and then become allergic to it? This is not what Jesus was referring to when he said, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry" (John 6:35).

Many people are turning to whole grains and ancient grains that still hold the original DNA of wheat, including the entire kernel—bran fiber and all. Although bread made of these grains

doesn't rise as high or look as pretty and requires our taste buds to adjust and our digestive systems to work harder, these grains provide lasting nourishment and satisfaction with fewer allergic reactions.

The parallel seems clear. We were created to consume the ancient and whole truth of God. The feel-good gospel might seem more appealing at first, but a watered-down truth soon leaves people longing for more and becomes painfully indigestible.

"Gluten-free" versions of religion are disappointing and unsatisfying. We need both the whole grain of the gospel—including the hard-to-digest truth of our sin and what Christ did to free us from it—and the elastic "gluten" of God's grace that holds us together in community. Both give our faith the flavor and aroma that draws others to consume it and find lasting nourishment for their souls. ■



Monica Kronemeyer deRegt is a stay-at-home mom and former news writer for *The Banner*. She enjoys freelance writing, classical music, and gourmet cooking.

"Every real thing
is a joy,
if only you have
eyes and ears
to relish it,
a nose and tongue
to taste it."

— ROBERT FARRAR CAPON



Reminders of the Gospel

WE need to be reminded of the temple's foundation: Jesus Christ.



RECENT ISSUES of *The Banner* provided for me the impetus to write about a concern that needs to be addressed, in my humble opinion. It relates to the very dominant emphasis on what might be called the human-centeredness of *The Banner's* contents. There is a continued refrain of what *we* have done, what *we* are doing, and what *we* ought to be doing. So much of *we*—and, in comparison, so little of Christ.

Living in a culture that promotes and glorifies human endeavor, we need constant reminders of the free gift of God's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The Reformation is one of those reminders. God used Martin Luther to steer us away from human-centeredness in salvation, stressing that faith is not a human possibility but a radical and free gift of God in Jesus Christ. "By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone" highlights Luther's teaching of God's sovereignty in our salvation. Each "alone" affirms the centrality of Jesus Christ and what he has done for us in his active and passive obedience. To this we daily need to open our eyes as we contemplate God's amazing love for us. It's a source of comfort I have been missing in these pages.

I fully realize that what our churches and denominational ministries are accomplishing is our Lord carrying out his mission through his Word and Spirit. It's wonderful and praiseworthy to observe the mighty redeeming acts of God through his church. We stand in awe as we observe our God building his temple with living stones from every tongue and tribe and nation. *The Banner* does a superb job of tuning us in to God's redeeming symphony in every issue.

But we also need to be reminded of the temple's foundation: Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Featuring God's free gift of salvation through faith in Christ prominently in every issue would set the stage for reporting how the church is, in gratitude, abounding in the work of the Lord. Without this connection we might unintentionally be promoting works-righteousness.

The numerous articles and pictures highlighting the church's ministries could possibly lead people to the unwarranted conclusion that we are not acceptable to God unless we are hard at work for him. *The Banner* can avoid this danger by including in its issues frequent reminders of the gospel of God's full forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ, who died to save us. ■



John Bylisma is a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church.



Missionaries

As an ordinary congregant miles (or kilometers) removed from Grand Rapids, I cannot begin to understand why we are demanding that our God-called, faithful, and dedicated missionaries must now begin to raise 90 percent of their basic costs outside of ministry shares before they become eligible to be approved for the mission field or to stay if they are already abroad ("World Missions Explains the 90 Percent," Jan. 2014). The Lord has called them to be fundraisers first?

Just where is our local families' allocated ministry share of \$14,353 intended to go in 2014?

This decision must not be allowed to stand.

—Ralph L. De Groot
Peterborough, Ontario

The Christian Reformed Church and the gatekeepers of World Missions have failed our missionaries ("World Missions Explains the 90 Percent"). We, as congregations, are not sending in our ministry shares to keep our missionaries financially afloat. Now these people who have sacrificed so much in the name of Christ must raise their own support. Shame on us!

We suggest the World Missions agency (those in the denominational building) go to each congregation and show how

LETTERS

[they should] have a line item in their budget for each missionary they wish to support. That way missionaries know what their budget will be. And if one of our missionaries is falling short, CRWM should find a church to support them.

—*Craig and Elaine Scheirman
Broomfield, Colo.*

Two-in-One

As important as it is to reflect our unified Christian citizenship in Christ's kingdom, it is equally important to contextualize or speak to the specific realities in our respective countries ("Two-in-One for the Three-in-One," Jan. 2014). Binationality suggests that we live in two nations with different civic and social structures and patterns, and hence often specific issues to address.

The type of censorship witnessed recently regarding the necessary specific dialogue of issues of creation and human sexuality will only serve to discourage dialogue of other so-called "partisan" hot-button issues. So much for providing an honest forum for wrestling with issues specific to this decade of the 21st century relevant to our specific families, churches, communities, and nations.

—*Henk Smidstra
Surrey, British Columbia*

To compare our ongoing binationality struggle with Egyptian slavery or with the mystery of the Trinity is far-fetched ("Two-in-One for the Three-in-One"). Decades of tension and quandary have failed [to help us come] to a mutual understanding.

I am grateful for the assistance of people like John Vellinga (field man in Ontario), and a good number of our extended family have graduated from Calvin and Dordt.

In the meantime, we are not the immigrant community of 60 years ago but have

established ourselves as Canadians. The time has come that we should not live in the shadow of our big brother any longer but establish ourselves as equal partners.

—*Evert Wassink
Forest, Ontario*

We clearly see two streams from the same source: Calvinism (Letters, "Promoting Dialogue," Jan. 2014). Immigrants who arrived after WW II were more informed about the neo-Calvinistic Kuyperian biblical worldview embracing God's sovereignty in all aspects of life, daring to dialogue on controversial issues such as creation or human sexuality. The other stream—neo-Puritans—focuses on individual piety and church renewal.

—*George Lieuwen
Langley, British Columbia*

Interfaith Dialogue

I am deeply grateful that the CRC is increasingly recognizing the need for interfaith dialogue ("Christian Identity in a Multi-Faith World," Jan. 2014).

I'd like to add that we need to distinguish between religion and faith. Wearing a hijab, eating fish on Fridays, not eating pork, and many other habits or customs all belong to the realm of religion, [while] the coming of God, caring for the poor, promoting a healthy family life, and many other aspirations belong to the realm of faith. I may have virtually nothing in common from a religious perspective with a Muslim, for example, but from a faith perspective I may have many things in common.

Second, we need to distinguish between biblical and theological language. "Kingdom of God," for example, is primarily biblical, while "Trinity" is theological.

Third, I am only able to teach a Muslim when I am willing to be taught by that person. The process is mutual.

The kingdom is coming more and more every day.

—*Simon Wolfert
Surrey, British Columbia*

Alberta Dinosaur

You allowed an untrue statement in the story of the Alberta dinosaur skeleton ("Alberta Construction Crew Uncovers Dinosaur Skeleton," Jan. 2014). The Bible chronology projects that the earth is about 6,000 years old, not the 68 million years [reported to be the age of the skeleton]. One can read the details of the seven-day creation in Genesis and one can read the scientific facts supporting creation at creation.com.

To deny a seven-day creation is to deny the Bible.

—*Dick Van Veldhuisen
Brockville, Ontario*

Copresidents Leaving

The article gives the impression of ICS as a rudderless ship that is crashing into the rocks ("Copresidents Departing from Institute of Christian Studies," March 2014). To the contrary, at a programmatic level the ICS has never been more robust. The current cohort of students is excellent, as evidenced by the fact that nine currently enrolled students are sharing their work at academic conferences or in publications this year. Our excellent faculty continues to publish in the best academic presses and journals, and their courses remain exciting, challenging, and innovative.

—*Ronald A. Kuipers, Director, Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics; Dr. Douglas Blomberg, Acting President; Henriette Thompson, Chair, Board of Trustees*

[MORE ONLINE](#)

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Timmermans Nominated to Be CRC's Executive Director



Dr. Steven Timmermans, college president, licensed psychologist, doctor of philosophy, and professor of education, is the nominee to be the next executive director of the Christian Reformed Church.

In a wide-ranging interview with the denomination's Board of Trustees, Timmermans, 56, said he sees a lot of change ahead for the CRC. "I see us [being] considerably different in terms of organizational structure, organized in new ways to address ministry that appears to be the most apparent in today's society," he said. "But we are Reformed Christians. We've embraced this theology that we are change agents."

Timmermans has been a member of the Board of Trustees for the past two years, so he is aware of the work of the Strategic Planning and Adaptive Change Team, the Task Force to Review Structure and Culture, and staff realignment

within the denominational offices under a three-year period of interim leadership by Rev. Joel Boot and Rev. Peter Borgdorff.

"What I've noticed," he said, "is that in this unexpected and longer-than-hoped for search [for a new leader], a lot of good things have been done, thinking about how we do church together. The Lord has used the interim period to further that change."

Timmermans readily admitted he has a lot of learning to do, particularly in the area of binationality. "I truly need to understand more from a Canadian perspective what the different agendas are that we find all in one denomination," he said. He expressed appreciation for how Canada has dealt with plurality in a way the U.S. has just begun to think about.

Timmermans is currently president of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill., a position

he has held since 2003. Prior to that, he was at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., where he was a professor of education, a dean for instruction, and executive associate to the president.

Timmermans is not an ordained minister. However, Synod 2013 ruled that an exception could be made to nominate a non-clergy candidate. According to the six-member search committee, he fits within the exception category allowed by synod because of his extensive experience in denominational and congregational activities.

He said he knows that some people will think having an educator instead of a pastor as the executive director is not the way it is supposed to be. However, he said, the denomination has a whole host of members, the great majority of whom are pew sitters. "There is something good about this too," he said, "about all the

or



GAYLA R. POSTMA

gifts we gather together for the good of the church.”

Timmermans and his wife, Barb, have been married for 36 years. They have seven children ages 15 to 30. Three of their children are adopted from Ethiopia, and one of their biological children has Down syndrome. “There are differences that are cultural, and those are real and they have to be respected and addressed but cloaked in unity,” he said. “What I’ve learned is how to take a step back and try to understand, how not to jump to conclusions.”

Asked what his greatest fears are for this job, he said, “I’m more fearful of all the things that are reverberating around the denomination, how to step into those things trusting and respecting people I do not yet know.”

Timmermans and his family are members of Loop Christian Reformed Church in Chicago, where Timmermans has been a

worship planner, youth leader, and catechism teacher. He is also a member of the Chicago area Disability Concerns committee.

Timmermans will be interviewed by Synod 2014, the annual leadership meeting of the Christian Reformed Church, before his appointment is approved.

—Gayla R. Postma

Disability Concerns Gets Broadened Mandate

At its February 2014 meeting, the Christian Reformed Church’s Board of Trustees adopted a broadened mandate for the Disability Concerns ministry of the church.

The old mandate focused on specific tasks of the office, including gathering and disseminating information, increasing awareness in the church of special needs of people with disabilities, and helping churches eliminate barriers to full participation of those persons.

The new mandate reads as follows:

The Office of Disability Concerns strives to promote and foster relationships, communities, and societies where everybody belongs and everybody serves by assisting churches, agencies, institutions, and leadership within the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

“The old mandate, approved in 2000, specified various ways that we are to work, much of it in programmatic language,” said Disability Concerns director Mark Stephenson. “By not defining specific programming, the new mandate is both shorter and clearer.”

[MORE ONLINE](#)

—Gayla R. Postma

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Peter Van Egmond

1931 – 2013

Peter Van Egmond, 82, friend of God, was linguistically gifted and given to gentle humor. A diligent pastor, he died of cardiac arrest on December 14, 2013.

Born in the Netherlands, Van Egmond immigrated to Canada, graduated from Calvin College and Seminary, and entered the ministry of the Word in the Christian Reformed Church.

He served congregations in Alberta, Ontario, and British Columbia, also serving as a chaplain at Holland Christian Homes. He retired in 2007 after 50 years of active ministry.

Van Egmond was compassionate and industrious, a voracious reader, and a fine writer. For 20 years he wrote a weekly column for *De Nederlandse Courant*, a biweekly printed in Ontario. His heart ached for the persecuted church.

Van Egmond was a passionate walker, runner, mountain climber, cross-country skier, and swimmer.

Van Egmond is survived by his wife, Jenny, four children and their spouses, 23 grandchildren, and 12 great-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.

Michigan Youth Taste Life in the Persecuted Church

A tunnel under a highway overpass, a haymow accessed through a trap door, an old barn, and a cabin deep in the woods aren't exactly typical spots for youth groups to meet. But recently the youth group leaders of Second Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Mich., chose those spots as meeting sites for their group.



Susan B. goes through a trap door to find her meeting place.

The impact? "I can definitely say I was moved by what we talked about that night," youth group member Ben V. reflected.

What they talked about was the persecuted church. As the young people met in dark, hidden places that night, Vlietstra recounted how youth pastor Fred De Young and the other leaders "hit us with a very real subject," exposing teens to a taste of what life is like for Christians around the world who are persecuted for their faith and have to meet in secret.

The teens were divided into four groups; each was taken to one of the "secret" sites. By the light of candles and flashlights, the leaders presented actual stories of bitter persecution faced by early believers and by many Christians still today. They talked about Christians freezing to death or being shot with AK-47s while at worship. Vlietstra added, "It was a very cold

night, and it helped make the experience more real."

Speaking for fellow youth group members as well, he noted how thankful they all were to return to a warm, safe place, but also how thankful they are for the freedom to worship openly in heated and air conditioned churches. The things they learned that night "won't be easy to forget," he said, and asked fellow believers to take some time to pray for persecuted Christians.

—Anita Ensing Beem

Second CRC, Kalamazoo, youth group members met "secretly" in an old haymow.



News from the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church met in Grand Rapids, Mich., on February 27-28, 2014. Here is a round-up of some of the conversations at that meeting:

The board heard reports from the Diversity in Leadership Planning Group Implementation Team, the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture, and the Strategic Planning and Adaptive Change Team.

The board tabled a request from the Safe Church Ministry (SCM) advisory committee for a change in the SCM director's position description to include a requirement that the director report directly to the executive committee of the Board of Trustees if she or he believes an instance of sexual abuse by an employee of the CRC was improperly handled.

The board extended the deadline for the synodically appointed Doctrine of Discovery Task Force (until Synod 2016), and increased its budget by \$35,000 over two years.

The board heard that a proposed change to the budgeting process that would see 10 percent of ministry shares set aside for a strategic response fund (see *Banner*, Nov. 2013, p. 12) is no longer under consideration.

—Gayla R. Postma

CRC Leads Ecumenical Discussion on Role of Confessions

In late January, the Christian Reformed Church hosted representatives from several Reformed churches that are part of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) to talk about the role of doctrinal confessions in the life of the church and as a witness in the world.

The consultation grew out of the actions of Synod 2012 (the annual leadership meeting of the CRC). That was the year synod was asked to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the CRC. The CRC currently has three confessions: The Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort, along with a contemporary testimony, "Our World Belongs to God."

Synod 2012 adopted the Belhar but not as a full confession. Rather, it created a new category called Ecumenical Faith Declarations. However, it did not define the criteria or process by which other documents might be adopted into that category. It

asked the denomination's Ecumenical and Interchurch Relations Committee (EIRC) to work on that definition.

As part of that work, the CRC convened the meeting to talk about the role of confessions and whether a category like Ecumenical Faith Declarations would be useful. In the end, participants expressed appreciation for the consultation but did not endorse such a category.

Rev. William Koopmans is the CRC's Canadian ecumenical officer and also serves as advisor to the executive of the WCRC. "It was a very engaging conversation," he said of the meeting.

However, Koopmans said, for a variety of reasons the participants at the consultation were not enthusiastic about the creation of a new category.

"If the CRC wishes to continue with the Ecumenical Faith Declaration category, criteria still needs to be developed," he said.

—Gayla R. Postma

NOTEWORTHY

Students at **Redeemer University College** in Ancaster, Ontario, are now eligible to receive the 30 percent off Ontario Tuition Grant through the province's student assistance program. The grant was previously only available to those attending public post-secondary institutions. President Hubert Krygsmann noted that this not only lowers tuition costs for many students but also shows increased recognition of Redeemer University College's status as a post-secondary institution in Ontario.

Ruth Van't Land-Parkes of CrossPoint Christian Reformed Church in Ontario, Calif., has been inducted into Cal Poly Pomona University's hall of fame in recognition of her soccer achievements. While attending Cal Poly Pomona from 1997-2000, Van't Land-Parkes was honored twice as athlete of the year by the California Collegiate Athletic Association and also selected as the D-II Player of the Year by the National Soccer Coaches Association of America.

Michael van den Ham, member of First Christian Reformed Church of Brandon, Manitoba, cycled his way to top Canadian honors at the World Cyclo-cross Championship in Hoogeheide, the Netherlands. Cyclo-cross racing is a mix of mountain and road biking. Van den Ham is in his fourth year at The King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta.

—Banner correspondents

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

[Michael van den Ham](#)



IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Alvin Hoksbergen

1928 – 2014

Alvin Hoksbergen, 85, was a prophetic voice in matters of public justice and a compassionate advocate for those who are weak and vulnerable. He passed away on January 11 following a stroke.

Born in Pella, Iowa, he worked in the family's greenhouses and served two years in the military in Korea before entering the ministry.

Hoksbergen served congregations in Michigan and spent time in campus ministry. He retired in 1994.

Hoksbergen fearlessly addressed issues of justice, fairness, and compassion. He had a sharp mind and a delightful sense of humor, read voraciously, and was a compassionate pastor.

Two of his experiences in Korea stand out. His participation in peace talks instilled in him a deep interest in the issue of war and peace and the suffering war brings. The second was observing a child scavenging for food. This filled his heart with compassion and became a factor in his decision to study for the ministry.

Hoksbergen is survived by his wife, Shirley, three children and their spouses, nine grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

[MORE ONLINE](#)

—Louis M. Tamminga

Edmonton Teen Sleeps in Tent to Spotlight Homelessness

While his family and classmates slept in the comfort of their warm homes all winter, Collin Messelink slept outside, burrowed inside his sleeping bag in a small tent. The 17-year-old student from Edmonton, Alberta, did it to raise awareness of homelessness and to raise funds for Mosaic Centre in north-east Edmonton.

Even when the temperature dropped to -40C (-40F), Messelink's mother, Juliet, said there was no talking her son out of his idea. "He's the most determined person I know."

Messelink, a member of First Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, said, "People do not understand why I will put myself through this unneeded discomfort, night in, night out," he said. "If I could sum it up in one sentence, it would be that I sleep



[Collin Messelink spent the winter sleeping in a tent to raise awareness of homelessness.](#)

outside so other people don't have to."

Donations for Mosaic Centre were few and slow in coming until a photo and story about Messelink appeared on the front page of the *Edmonton Journal*. Since then,

complete strangers have donated and given Collin words of encouragement. "It has been overwhelming," his mother said. "We give thanks to God for every one of them!" [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Janet Greidanus



Mark Rice

Rice Moving to Baker Publishing Group

Mark Rice, director of Faith Alive Christian Resources since 2008, is headed to Baker Books and Bibles as executive director of marketing and publicity. Faith Alive was dissolved in 2013 as a separate agency of the Christian Reformed Church. The publishing and curriculum functions of Faith Alive continue.

Rice said the biggest challenge he faced during those five years at Faith Alive was long-term financial stability and revenue growth, and the hardest thing he had to do was lay off staff. "I was blessed to work with an amazing staff who care deeply for the church and for Faith Alive," he said. "Coming to work was so much more than a job. It was family."

He said he will miss the denomination and its ministry, but "this is a good opportunity, and I'm looking forward to it. I get to stay in publishing and use my core marketing gifts in the Christian publishing arena."

—Gayla R. Postma

New Mandate for *Banner* Council

At its February 2014 meeting, the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church adopted a beefed-up mandate for the *Banner* advisory council. *The Banner* is the official publication of the CRC.

Last fall, the board spent hours dealing with the fallout of controversial articles that were printed in *The Banner*, including bringing in *The Banner's* editor, Rev. Bob De Moor, to explain his rationale for printing them. De Moor apologized for the way the articles were presented, and the board accepted that apology. (See "Board of Trustees Expresses Disappointment, Keeps De Moor as Editor of *The Banner*," Nov. 2013, p. 10.)

The board also appointed a subcommittee to review the mandate of *The Banner's* editorial council. The council was made up of three members of the board and three members of the board of what had been the Faith Alive agency where *The Banner* was housed administratively.

The council advised *The Banner's* staff on editorial content and also had a role of adjudication, were a situation to arise that *The Banner's* editor and the executive director could not come to agreement on whether or not to publish an article. That adjudicatory process has never been invoked.

However, after the controversy last fall, the board decided to review and recommend ways to beef up that council's mandate.

Now called the *Banner* advisory council, it is made up of three members of the board and three at-large members chosen from a

slate of names agreed upon by both the *Banner* editor and the executive director.

Under the new mandate, the council, in addition to its previous role, may also advise the editor on matters the council believes affect the publishing of a denominational magazine. The scope of "sensitive" articles was enlarged to include articles not necessarily about denominational leadership. The council will also continue to serve in a conflict resolution role.

Some trustees were not entirely happy with the new mandate, noting that it lacked as much power as they'd hoped. Trustee Darren Roorda said that his recollection of the discussion last fall was that the board was looking to strengthen the role of the advisory council. "I'm wondering if there is another piece to come to push in that direction," he said. Trustee Gary Sytsma agreed. "I too was left with the impression that [the new mandate] would not put us in the same position again as September."

Trustee Ken Baker, who was on the subcommittee, pointed out that what had happened in September was an aberration, that the system that had been in place for nearly a decade had functioned well. "We sought to strengthen the mandate while respecting the understood editorial freedom of *The Banner*," he said. "It was a very delicate walk over the past five months. I think we addressed the narrow mandate we had."

For his part, *The Banner's* editor is happy with the new mandate. "I believe the new mandate appro-



Rev. Bob De Moor

propriately responds to the new situation where the magazine is no longer accountable to a church board. The council will continue to allow church representatives to speak into the direction and operation of *The Banner* and hold it accountable. That direct relationship with folks from the pew is indispensable," De Moor said. "The mandate also continues to maintain the important balance between the values of editorial freedom and appropriate participation of denominational leadership."

—Gayla R. Postma

Three CRC Women Bring Their Faith to Washington D.C.'s Political World

Moving to the U.S. capital for work is thrilling. Three Christian Reformed women working in Washington, D.C., are bringing more than just expertise to their vocations. They're also bringing their faith.

For Rachel Bouman, an attorney, understanding God's role in her job wasn't always easy. Bouman was hired as a litigator by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) in 2006. On her eighth day on the job, Bouman was assigned a case that made her a target for attacks and allegations. She kept working despite being slandered on the Internet and dealing with a difficult plaintiff.

In 2008, Bouman, by this time a mother and active member of Silver Spring (Md.) Christian Reformed Church, was given another assignment—this one dealing with a retired ATF agent who had infiltrated the gang Hells Angels. The plaintiff was deceptive and used intimidation to try to persuade Bouman in the case.

These cases were the biggest in ATF's history, and Bouman managed them with little support. It took a toll on her. "I tried to make sense of where God was in it all and why I was there," she said.

Psalms 37:7 became her foundation while she worked at ATF. Bouman, who is known both in the private and public sectors for her work ethic, decided to do the best she could as a witness, all the while knowing that "this is God's battle to fight. Not mine."

Christy Berghoef graduated from Calvin College with a political science degree. Moving to D.C. seemed like a natural next step. But, she explained, "I became frustrated with partisan warfare and the way money corrupted democracy." She left, but 12 years later came back to live and work in the District, this time with her husband, Bryan, and their four children.

In addition to planting a church, Berghoef found a job at

other holds the political view they do."

This kind of work is perfect for Berghoef, who is politically independent and wants politicians in D.C. to practice the art of compromise. "Christians have an opportunity to stand out as the embodiment of the Spirit of Jesus," she says. "I hope I can be used as a small part of bringing that about."

Michelle Bekkering believes that being a Christian "means

in benefits for women in their society. . . . We are trying to help women break through the barriers that often obstruct them from realizing their goals."

Bekkering, a member of Washington, D.C. CRC, harkens to Micah 6:8 when she discusses her work and faith: "I feel very strongly that through my job, I can help bring about justice and show mercy to women in every country."

—Callie Feyen



Rachel Bouman



Christy Berghoef



Michelle Bekkering

Faith and Politics Institute, a nonprofit where she uses her political and seminary degrees.

Berghoef's work consists of bringing together a group of people with politically diverse ideologies. "For example, you might have the president of the Southern Baptist Convention and the president of The United Church of Christ sit together in conversation and discuss gun violence. The idea is to learn to listen, and to come to understand why the

being involved in government so that our voices are helping shape the legislation that governs our lives."

Bekkering has worked in the capital since 2005. Currently she is in Jakarta, Indonesia, conducting a "Winning with Women in 2014" campaign. She is working to increase women's political participation in the country. "There is a lot of evidence that shows a direct correlation between the number of women elected to office and the increase



Rev. Raymond Graves
1924 – 2013

Raymond Graves, 89, a humble servant of Jesus, was deeply concerned about the salvation of people and restlessly busy in his ministerial calling. He passed away peacefully on December 29, 2013.

Prior to ministry, Graves served in the military during World War II; afterward he was stationed in Nuremberg, Germany, as part of the units connected with the trials of SS war criminals.

Graves served Christian Reformed congregations in Iowa, Michigan, and Minnesota. He retired in 1988.

Graves loved the congregations he served. He was gifted in keeping harmony in his congregations and was often called upon to resolve discord.

In three of his seven churches, he was involved in major building projects. He served the denomination on some of its boards and was a delegate to several synods.

Graves found replenishment in fishing, camping, playing horseshoes, and bowling. Following retirement, he served six congregations on an interim basis.

Graves is survived by his wife, Johanna, five children and their spouses, 13 grandchildren, and 21 great-grandchildren. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Louis M. Tamminga

Kinder Kidz children singing at the City Kidz Saturday program.



Hamilton Children's Program Receives Sea to Sea Grant

As Sharon Davis-Payton cycled the Sea to Sea 2013 bicycle tour raising funds to eliminate poverty, she had City Kidz Hamilton on her mind. Davis-Payton, a member of Ancaster (Ontario) Christian Reformed Church, had been volunteering for the program since 2008. "The City Kidz program is so aligned with the objectives of Sea to Sea," Davis-Payton said, "and it gave me a visual to bike for during the 2013 tour."

Sea to Sea recently announced grant recipients of the 2013

cycling tour, including City Kidz Hamilton, which will receive \$9,600.

City Kidz Hamilton is an outreach program for children ages 3 to 15 who live in a high level of poverty. Each week over 2,400 Hamilton children and young people receive a personal home visit and attend a fun-filled worship service at a local theater, a Kinder Kidz story and sing-along program, or a youth leadership program. City Kidz eliminates two main barriers to participation—

transportation and finances. The program is free to attendees; buses travel 28 routes in Hamilton to pick up and drop off children.

"[The funds] will allow us to invest in a brand new neighborhood, the last targeted neighborhood where children are living in a higher level of poverty," explained City Kidz founder and executive director, Rev. Todd Bender, whose mission is to reach out to every child in Hamilton.

—Krista Dam-Vandekuyt

Highlights from 2014 Winter Classis Meetings

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, a regional grouping of churches. Delegates at those meetings review and make decisions about their shared ministries and practice mutual accountability for their congregations' individual ministries. Here are the highlights of the most recent classis meetings:

Several people were **welcomed into ministry** in the Christian Reformed Church, including **seminary graduates** Michael Altena, Josiah Chung, Ken DeBoer, Timothy DeVries, Gina Dick, Sam Gutierrez, Shannon Jamal-Hollemans, Dirk Koetje, Jose Rayas, Benjamin Ribbens, Micah Schuurman, Marc Van Berkum, and Adam Van Gelder.

Transferred in from other denominations were the following: SangHee Han, Gary Roosma, and KuGuong Koh.

Rev. Wonsuk Song was **loaned to another denomination**.

Rev. Dan Ackerman was **released from his congregation**. Jung Suh, Jesus Liza, and Margaret Hummelman **were released from ministry in the CRC**.

Center Grove Presbyterian Church (Greenwood, Ind.) **joined** Classis Chicago South.

One in Christ church plant in Iowa City, Iowa, and The Lord's Church in San Diego, Calif. were **closed**.

Classis Georgetown will now **allow seating of female delegates**. Classis Grand Rapids East has appointed a committee **to study biblical teaching regarding homosexual orientation and practice**, since synod has declined to do so.

Classes Minnkota and Illiana have overtured (requested) that Synod 2014 **remove Rev. Bob De Moor as editor of The Banner**. Classis Columbia asked Synod 2014 to **require that The Banner's editorial council include three pastors and three elders**. Classis Eastern Canada sent a communication to Synod 2014 **expressing appreciation for The Banner, its staff, and its mandate**.

Classes British Columbia North-west and Grand Rapids East overtured Synod 2014 regarding **the missionary funding model of Christian Reformed World Missions**.

Classis Holland asked Synod 2014 to change the Church Order **to allow CRCs to affiliate with churches from other denominations that are in ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRC**.

The full text of overtures will be in the *Agenda for Synod 2014*, available in early April in print and online at crcna.org. Synod meets in Pella, Iowa, in June. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Banner Staff

FAQs

Justice

Q Do harsh penalties reduce crime?

A Getting tough on crime sounds like a good thing to many people who are concerned about justice. It also wins votes. The premise behind the movement toward longer prison sentences for more convicts is that harsh penalties will lead to less crime.

Experience questions that assumption. States that adopted “tough on crime” policies are dealing with large increases in prison populations without a reduction in crime rates. Costs for police and prisons have increased dramatically without improvements in the rehabilitation of inmates. These costs are often accompanied by cuts in crime prevention programs because they are viewed as “soft” on crime. In reality, no one is safer as a result of these policies.

Restorative justice, the approach endorsed by the Christian Reformed Church, takes an entirely different approach. Offenders are held accountable for harm done, but the focus is on restoring both victim and offender so they can live in society again. Putting this into practice is hard work. It is more difficult than throwing people in jail for a long time. But where it is practiced, the results show more promise than long jail time, measured by reductions in repeat crime rates and by restored community life.

Changing the direction of criminal justice systems is a reformation challenge. It starts with asking different questions. All of us can reject “tough on crime” appeals for our vote and advocate for a strong response to crime—one that reflects restorative justice principles.

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

Putting restorative justice into practice is hard work.

Faith Formation

Q Two of our adult children are no longer walking with the Lord. I find myself facing a triple-headed monster: I grieve over their faith life, I feel guilty wondering what I did wrong, and I am ashamed to discuss their lives with others at church. How might such a “monster” be dealt with?

A I’m sure you know that you are not the only parent who faces this monster, but that in itself is not very comforting. I find it helpful to distinguish between *primary* responses and *secondary* responses.

Your grief is a primary response to this difficult situation. Your feelings of guilt and shame are secondary responses, that is, they are specific ways of processing your grief before the face of God and the Christian community. Your specific secondary responses tend to paralyze your grief and block the healing graces of our Lord.

The good news of the gospel is that you are free, bit by bit, to surrender that guilt and shame; you are free to remember that there are no perfect parents, no perfect children, and no perfect families. You are free to seek graciously safe places where you can be honest about this triple-headed monster and receive godly encouragement from others. You are free to lament in a way that offers your feelings of guilt and shame to the Lord as a sacrifice of praise.

In so doing, you are also free to grow into that strange peace of the Lord that passes understanding, and from that place of peace to love each of your children, allowing the light of Christ to shine through you into their lives as you prayerfully entrust them to the Lord. It’s a complicated and long road, but the Lord walks ahead of us on it.

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

Outreach

Q I heard a friend denounce “progressive Christians” as being wish-washy and lacking spine. Is “progressive” Christianity a bad thing?

A Such labeling is sometimes used to categorize someone or something without having to really think about the underlying issues. The assumption is that someone who is “progressive” has cast off the traditional stances of a “Bible-believing Christian.” I think this is a bit of a mischaracterization. Let me explain.

Folks I know who proudly wear the label “progressive Christian”—and I count myself as one—say that they care deeply about biblical values such as justice, caring for the poor, release for captives by changing our current mass incarceration practices, care for the planet, freedom from addictions, peaceful responses to conflict, and so on. While there may be theological diversity about some doctrines among such folks, they long to imitate Jesus’ sacrificial life, his concern for the marginalized, his extravagant grace for sinners, and his prophetic critique of religious and political power abuses. It would be wonderful if we refused to immediately discount fellow brothers and sisters in Christ because of diversity of emphasis in social values or varying doctrinal beliefs.

A larger concern is how such beliefs and values express themselves in our lives. Tired of theological controversy, an increasing number of Christians are interested in seeing our world “progress” to the point where it more and more reflects the kingdom Jesus came to announce and embody.

Let’s be sure to give people the benefit of the doubt before we denigrate them. That itself would be a good reflection to our watching world.

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



Facing Our Fears

IN OCTOBER 2012 THE PEW RESEARCH GROUP revealed the results of a study of religious affiliation: young people are more likely now than ever before to identify their religious beliefs as “nothing in particular.” “The rise of the nones,” as this trend was quickly dubbed, garnered media attention in national outlets from *Time* magazine and *The Huffington Post* to the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post*.

More important, it seized upon latent uneasiness in the Christian community. The Internet lit up with articles written by pastors and prominent bloggers, by anyone who’s ever left a church—and even by that guy who once went to church with a friend and who now has opinions about it. Everyone wanted a chance to define and redefine the problem so that they could take a stab at outlining the solution: “10 Ways the Church Has It Wrong”; “5 Ways to Keep Your Kids from Leaving Church”;

“8 Ways to Win Them Back”; “How to Succeed in Church by Really, Really Trying.”

Articles like these get passed around as e-mail forwards and as Facebook links. Focus on the Family has an opinion. *Sojourners* has an opinion. Everybody has their say. The rise of the “nones” has become our chance to spread the news, just like Chicken Little: “The church is falling! The church is falling!”

Fearful Faith

As these concerns permeate North American Christianity as well as our denomination and our congregations, we feel the destructive forces of fear and anxiety preying on us.

The older members of our congregations are lamenting their real pain. Their daily prayers rehearse the disappointment of the seemingly unrealized baptismal vows they made on

behalf of their own sons and daughters. The middle generation looks toward churches that are growing numerically; they wonder if subwoofers and fog machines might do the trick in their sanctuary too. Their proactivity flows out of a deep-seated anxiety that they haven't done enough and that their kids may be the next ones to step outside the church doors.

Young adults who have left the church report how their lives no longer fit into the perfect pews. Friends who practice other religions make the exclusive claims of Christ uncomfortable, to say the least. Later ages for starting a family and the new reality that marriage is no longer a given make the chastity pledges of their teenage years seem quaint, not nearly adequate to real life. They share stories of hypocrisy and abuse—and stories of a genuine, simple childhood faith that now seems obsolete to the grad student who is asking big questions that are no longer satisfied by the answers provided by formerly cherished Sunday school teachers.

The fears of parents and grandparents are real, as are the anxious struggles of 20- and 30-somethings. In fact, all of this heightened inquiry about the “nones” is a symptom of our fearful faith. Before treating those who have left the church as a sociological category, before making generalizations, the church would be wise to recognize and treat this “dis-ease” for what it really is: the painful expression of disappointed hearts. The stories we hear are as unique as the individuals who tell them. Make no mistake, faith—for those who have it and for those who are alarmed to discover they don't, or who might not have the “right” kind—is the fearful reality of discipleship. It always has been.

Fearful Faith: The Prequel

On Thursday night the disciples entered the garden of Gethsemane with Jesus to pray. Although they tried to keep Jesus company, they couldn't help nodding off. In that moment, though, as eyelids drooped, chins landed gently on chests, and snores sounded through the olive grove, all was right with the world—at least from the disciples' perspective.

Until suddenly they awoke to the metallic clang of armor, the bobbing flames of torches winding their way through the garden, the voices of uninvited guests. Then Judas, one of their own, emerged from the sinister gang. And Jesus, who seemed to expect it all, was betrayed, arrested, and led away. Dread rushed into the soul space created by Jesus' absence.

Peter heard the twisted testimony before the Sanhedrin and shook with the injustice of it. Abandoned at the fire pit, Peter stood and denied knowing his friend—and then wept for the shame of his denial. Returning to a handful of the others, the disciples hid away in their locked upper room. In confusion they pored over the events of the last 24 hours, perhaps even the past three years, searching for clues. Could this have been part of the plan all along? It certainly wasn't the salvation they had expected. Throughout the night they played out different scenarios, alternating between revolt and further retreat.

On Friday, awash with dread and disappointment, fearful that their years of faithfulness had been a miscalculation, the disciples saw Jesus, beaten and bearing the strain of the wooden beam, marching toward the hill of criminal execution. They followed him to the cross in stunned silence. And at the end of the day, after Jesus had died, they slunk back to their rented room.

That night, the previous evening's strategy session was replaced by silent grief. All the disciples' hopes of a new kingdom, their visions of salvation, their dreams of God finally making good on his Messianic promises and choosing them to lead the charge—all these dreams were as dead as Jesus, buried with him in a hastily borrowed tomb.

The disciples' faith—weak and waning further—was the fearful reality of their discipleship.



God calls us to the crazy hope of resurrection, otherwise known as faith.



Jesus Is Risen!

Sunday came, and with it the women's task of preparing the body. Creeping away from the other disciples, they came to do their part—honoring Jesus in the ordinary way they knew. They brought their spices for anointing and mentally prepared themselves for the scene that awaited, steeling their hearts against the great pain of death. Surely this was not their first trip to a tomb. Not their first experience of honoring their beloved dead.

But as the women approached the tomb, they heard the angel's pronouncement: “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him’” (Matt. 28:5-7).

So the women ran from the tomb. The text says they hurried away from the tomb, “afraid yet filled with joy.” At the empty tomb, the women did not shed their fear entirely. Instead, God replaced one fear—that the rest of their lives would only ever be the despair of crucifixion and disappointed hopes—with another. This new fear was of a different sort, a crazy hope that there might yet be something new ahead. Something beyond their imagination, something worth living for. The crazy hope »



that death is not forever. The hope that disappointment and anxiety and fears might yet be overcome by peace, purpose, and the hope of new life. Resurrection hope propelled them forward. The joyful dawning of life caused them to run, and in chasing their wild, jubilant hope, they found Jesus. They discovered Jesus along the way.

The Joyful Gamble of Faith

It is easy to define resurrection by stories of obvious growth—in numbers, in younger members, in new programs and new churches. It's understandable that we want to know the results—or at least a reliable estimate that all of our effort is going to be worth it—before we begin. But the first evangelists, the women at the tomb, started out on a gamble: a fearful gamble on a crazy hope. In other words, they had faith, and they discovered Jesus along the way.

In December 2011, Parchment Christian Reformed Church, located just northeast of Kalamazoo, Mich., took a similar step of faith. They were a small congregation and growing smaller. They had every reason to fear. The congregation faithfully made and executed plans to reach their neighborhood and took every opportunity to accommodate new members. But new members didn't come—and in this regard, their story is not unique.

Most American churches are small. They are filled with faithful disciples, yet their ministry goes uncelebrated. As these churches grow smaller, committed members and loving pastors read everything they can about why the church is failing and how they might change.

We fight to keep things the way they've always been because that's the way we've seen God show up before. We fight to change everything because, well, obviously, nothing is working. We fight to avoid the worst-case scenario: our churches may fail. In this we resemble nothing so much as disciples in a locked upper room on Good Friday, shaking our heads clear and trying to figure out how God came to let us down so badly.

Facing down their fear, Parchment CRC discovered a crazy hope that maybe life is born of death. In December 2011, this church of faithful saints voted to close their doors. They grieved, they wept. They were full of fear. Pastor Kevin Heeres walked with them through the valley of the shadow of death, reminding them in his final sermon, "When God does a new thing—when he brings about resurrection—it is never comfortable for us. Grace is not giving us what we want. Grace is about giving us what we need." Psalm 23 tells us ever so clearly that following God is just as likely to lead to valleys of the shadow of death as it is to quiet waters and abundantly apportioned tables. The trouble with our fear—exacerbated by the fuss surrounding the "nones"—is that it gives us permission to linger in valleys while the Shepherd beckons us toward green pastures.

As they crept out of the upper room to confront the hard work of death, the faithful disciples at Parchment Christian Reformed Church were given life. Rather than gobbling up their financial assets to keep themselves afloat, they began to wonder

what the sale of those assets could accomplish for the kingdom. They brainstormed and they dreamed and they looked around them for signs of life. In the end, they donated more than a quarter million dollars to missionaries, to local organizations reaching out to at-risk youth, to the gospel mission, and to local Christian social service organizations. They gave funds to Christian education in their community and internationally. They gave donations to partially fund two different church planting endeavors. And, just for fun, they sent a group of 25 Christian school teachers on a 10-day tour of the Holy Land.

Expecting death, they heard the call of life at the tomb. They heard the angel's words: *Do not be afraid*. "God's way to bring about resurrection was not only to bless other ministries, but also to send us out into both familiar and new places," said Pastor Heeres. "We became what church was always meant to be. We just didn't get there on the road we dreamed of." They were what the church was always meant to be, proclaiming, like the women at the tomb, "Jesus is risen! Jesus is risen!"

Jesus Is Risen!

The trap set for us by "the rise of the nones" and every doomsday prophecy that ever was and ever will be is that we might come to underestimate the power of resurrection. To predict the end of the church—with horror or with glee—gives us tacit permission to set up housekeeping in the locked upper room of our own fear and doubts. To predict the end of the church undercuts the courage it takes to join the women on their way to the tomb. The courage it takes to confront death and be surprised by life.

It's easy to measure resurrection by the obvious—numerical growth, excitement, or new programs. But resurrection will not be categorized in base measurements. Rather, resurrection shapes us whether we are seated in a crowded sanctuary or locking the church doors behind us for the last time. Resurrection is there in the pews, in the world, and in the life of every believer, because dying and rising are the given pattern of Christian living.

Resurrection calls us, like the women seeking Jesus at the tomb, to "hurry away, afraid yet filled with joy." Leaving the shelter of our locked upper rooms, God calls us to leave behind our fear of an unknown future. God calls us to the crazy hope of resurrection, otherwise known as faith. God calls us out to go and tell and to find Jesus along the way. Whether it's the story of Easter morning or the story of a dying church living on or our own discovery of life springing from death, resurrection is our chance to spread the good news: Jesus is risen! Jesus is risen! ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



Meg Jenista is pastor at The Washington, DC Christian Reformed Church.

Raising Successful Kids

OVER THE YEARS, my 92-year-old-mom has often remarked regretfully that she wished she had known more about child development when she raised my three siblings and me. (Always makes me wonder where she thinks she went wrong with me!)

But now that I'm a mom of three and a "gram" of 10, I can identify. Loving parents—especially those who follow Christ—pray earnestly for their children's development and well-being. And, yes, we try our hardest to help our kids to grow into happy, faith-full, and successful adults ready to be transforming agents in our communities.

Perhaps that's why I immediately read the recent *New York Times* bestseller *How Children Succeed* after receiving a copy from my son. Try Googling "raising successful children" and you'll find an endless list of titles on the subject, each with its own definition of success and holding out the promise of a helpful answer—often in five or six easy steps. But the subtitle of this book by Paul Tough, a respected writer about education, child development, and poverty, made me want to read more: *Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*.

In addition to caring about my own children, my work as an early childhood educator has given me a soft heart for kids who grow up in settings that fail to encourage growth or offer quality education. Reflecting on my early teaching days (before I had kids of my own!) when I spent a great deal of time with parents and preschoolers from inner-city Ypsilanti, Mich., I remember being deeply impressed by the sense of commitment and earnest desire on the part of those parents that their kids become successful adults. Achieving academically became their dream—despite the poor track record public schools have in helping kids break the cycle of poverty.

Based on current research into the question "Why do some kids succeed



We are our children's models, their mentors, their shapers, their shepherds.

while others fail?" Tough's book refutes the common assumption that success in life equates to cognitive achievement. Rather, after carefully examining several studies and listening to many stories of children who "made it" despite the odds against them, he says that success has far more to do with non-cognitive skills and traits like self-control, curiosity, persistence, gratitude, and sheer grit.

What a freeing thought for parents—freeing but challenging too. Though we have neither the control over the IQs we pass along to our children nor, in many cases, the financial means to send them to expensive preschools or prep schools, we *do* have the means (and the biblical mandate) to foster in our children those non-cognitive traits that will lay a foundation for becoming successful adults.

From the moment they're born, we are our children's models, their mentors, their shapers, their shepherds. We pray them through the ups and downs of childhood and the teen years—and we inten-

tionally influence their unfolding personalities and character.

Interestingly, Tough suggests that kids growing up in poverty often have the advantage over children in affluent families in this regard because they learn to grow from failure rather than being rescued from it by their "hovering" parents.

Knowing we have such influence over our kids' character makes me feel hopeful for my own children who have turned into parents. And for caring parents everywhere, both poor and affluent, who seek to raise successful children. And for the church, where our children and teens learn from people of faith what it means to live, grow, and serve.

Now I'm going to lend Tough's book to my mom! ■



Patricia Nederveld loves kids, advocates for kids, and has served as a children's curriculum editor at Faith Alive. She attends Grace Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

A Change of Course

by Lorilee Craker

Coming from a Wesleyan background with a great gusto for evangelism, Rev. Nicholas Hopkins wanted to share his zest for Christ with his first church: Shawnee Park Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Soon after arriving, he went door-to-door, talking to residents, and helped coordinate an outreach gathering for neighbors. But Hopkins, ordained as Shawnee Park's pastor in September 2012, encountered a surprising challenge.

He learned that many people living in Shawnee's neighborhood, on the southeast side of Grand Rapids near Calvin College, already attended one of the several churches in the area.

Given Hopkins's desire to build a congregation that reaches out to others



Shawnee celebrates the 4th of July with East Grand Rapids neighbors.

Nicholas Hopkins, Shawnee Park CRC



Shawnee Park CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., is looking for new ways to reach out to its community. Rather than reaching out to its highly church neighborhood, Rev. Nicholas Hopkins and the congregation at Shawnee Park have

been focusing on bringing the gospel to people they know from work, school, sports, and hobbies.

Prayer Requests

- That the community at Shawnee Park would be praying and prepared to share the gospel.
- That the conversations sparked by those at Shawnee Park would bear fruit.

“North America is rapidly becoming one of the largest mission fields in the world.”
—Moses Chung

who have no church home, he realized he needed to change course.

“We had to find a way to reach out to people, for us to become a more missional community,” said Hopkins, who had been considering work as a church planter before accepting the call to an established church.

“The focus became the people we were friends with in our jobs, schools, sports, and hobbies. Who’s in the cubicle next to you? Who is your next-door neighbor with whom you share a lawn mower?”

Over the last year, Hopkins and his congregants began using a Christian Reformed Home Missions tool—Top Ten



Church neighbors gathered with Shawnee families at the Fall Festival.

Most Wanted cards—to become more mission-oriented.

The cards give guidance on how to pray for others to come to Christ, to ask

God to open doors of conversation and opportunity, and to summon wisdom and sensitivity. Users are invited to list the top 10 people they would most like to come to know Jesus Christ.

In some ways, this was difficult for members of Shawnee Park, since they didn't know many non-Christians. But making the list got them thinking.

In the end, said Hopkins, "this Home Missions resource has been quite helpful."

The cards are one of a number of resources that Home Missions makes available in the effort to expand and renew existing churches, plant new churches, encourage faith formation, and provide ministry to students on college campuses.

Engaging and partnering with churches in various ways is an essential part of Home Missions' vision of collaboration and partnership. Although that has been its vision for many years, the agency is tackling this effort with renewed energy, said Moses Chung, director of Home Missions.

Chung said that Home Missions is becoming increasingly adaptable in finding creative ways to share God's message as the agency faces the challenges confronting many churches in the 21st century.

The "top ten" list is one of those ways. »

Michael Fallon, McMaster University

McMaster Christian Reformed Campus Ministry takes an "all of Scripture" approach to campus ministry. At the heart of this campus ministry is the conviction that Christ is in the process of reconciling all things to himself and that we are called to join him as coworkers in his kingdom.

Prayer Requests

- That God will continue to open students' hearts.
- That God will draw all students involved in campus ministries closer to him.

Developing Disciples and Leaders

Campus ministry is a vital part of Home Missions that also supports the work of starting and strengthening churches.

As a voice within the academic communities in North America, Home Missions is able to identify, equip, and send disciples and leaders into all walks of life.

Local bodies of believers are the best tools for developing leaders who join God's mission to transform lives and communities worldwide.

Home Missions works on the campuses of Christian colleges where many students have a faith background.

But faith is also an important aspect of life at such publicly funded schools as McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

At first glance, McMaster's motto "All things cohere in Christ," seems out of character for a secular university. But the school's founder, William McMaster, was a devout Christian.

Michael Fallon, who leads the campus ministry at McMaster, says the motto dovetails perfectly with the campus ministry as well as with Reformed theology.

"Our CRC fellowship . . . called 'All Things' from Colossians 1:15-20 . . . in a nutshell says that all things were created in Christ for Christ, [that] all things fell, and that Christ has come to reconcile all things back to himself," said Fallon, who also leads a campus ministry at nearby Mohawk College.

"Christ has come to save human souls, but also all of material existence. It's a cosmic restoration."

Fallon encourages students, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to be "agents of re-creation."

He also listens for such prompts from the Holy Spirit himself as he proclaims Christ on a campus with sky-high academic standards. Several of the alumni and staff are Nobel laureates.

Fallon tells the story of Chung, a Chinese graduate student and medical doctor, whom he met in the line at a Tim Hortons coffee shop one day.

They became good friends, and Fallon learned that Chung came from a long line of surgeons and physicians.

One day the two discussed the symbol for medicine: a snake winding around a staff. Chung cherished the emblem as "his family's symbol."

He was fascinated when Fallon told him that whereas most think the symbol's origin springs from the Greek story of Asclepius, there is a scriptural account of God telling Moses to display a bronze serpent on his staff as a means of healing the Israelites who had been bitten by snakes, prefiguring "Jesus Christ, who brings healing to the world."

Eventually, Chung and his wife came to believe. "Most students don't relate their studies to faith. I connected those things for him," said Fallon. —Lorilee Craker



Michael Fallon (far right) and the campus ministry team at McMaster University.



Inmates pray before service at Cornerstone CRC.

Cornerstone Prison Church— Worship Inside the Walls

In following God's mission, Home Missions has expanded the model of what makes up a CRC congregation.

Take Cornerstone Prison Church, for example.

The members of this church, which has been supported and encouraged by Home Missions, are free while they're "on the inside" to worship, grow, and serve as leaders in their church, formally organized as an established congregation in September 2013 by Classis Iakota.

The church has nine council members, six from inside and three from outside the prison.

"We are here long-term to help these guys grow in their faith, to take them beyond the milk of the gospel to the meat," said Rev. Steve Moerman.

The seed for Cornerstone was planted almost 18 years ago when the Moermans were invited to attend a Prison Fellowship weekend.

Afterward, they began to visit inmates and engage in Bible studies with prisoners. Then, at the age of 40, Steve enrolled in seminary and began planting Cornerstone Prison Church in June 2005.

Through Bible studies, prayer groups, worship, and fellowship, Cornerstone's members are developing as disciples while forming bonds within God's family. Often lonely and forsaken by their biological families, the inmates create family ties with one another.

The facility holds people who have been imprisoned for murder, armed robbery, sex crimes, and other serious offences. But there is power for change in the gospel.

Every week, God's imagebearers come to their own place of worship inside prison walls, ready to receive grace. "We all come to the cross absolutely empty-handed," said Moerman. "What these guys once were, they no longer are." ■

—Lorilee Craker

» "The value in [using the cards] is in creating an intentional prayer list," said Hopkins. "We asked members of the congregation to put 10 people on the list who they know are unbelievers and pray that they open up and become receptive to the gospel."

As part of the effort, church members have shared who they are praying for with the broader church. Although the people on the lists are not prayed for by name, they are included every Sunday in the congregational prayer.

Shawnee Park is not doing this to specifically build its membership, although Hopkins is grateful to see that some of those who have been on the prayer lists have visited the church, and a few have stayed.

"We have been very clear that we are praying for people to come to a belief in Christ. We want to get people into the kingdom of heaven," said Hopkins.

Steve Moerman

Rev. Steve Moerman and his wife, Diane, have a vision to share Christ with the community at the South Dakota State Penitentiary, helping prisoners to develop into faithful disciples of Jesus Christ both inside and outside of the institution.

Prayer Requests

- For those in prison to grow in faith.
- For those leaving prison to find a church, a home, and a job.

Steve Moerman and his wife, Diane, work in prison ministry.



You add.
God multiplies.

Hopkins said he is pleased to see how church members have embraced their mission. He has been at events where church members come up to him and quietly identify another person as someone on their “top ten” list.

“Our congregants are owning this process; they are having conversations with and praying for people,” he said.

Praying intentionally is important. But so is reaching out person-to-person with others as a way to build the church of God, especially an established church, said Hopkins.

“It can be terrifying to witness to someone, especially if you don’t know them. Or maybe it’s scarier if you do,” said Hopkins.

By placing someone on a prayer list, you are placing the person in God’s hands and

then asking God to help you, when the time comes, “to be faithful witnesses in their lives. The ‘top ten’ has given us a common experience and framework to do just that.”

Together in Mission

Home Missions director Chung said he is glad his agency can help established churches such as Shawnee Park adapt to current circumstances.

“That’s always an indication that God is up to something. Home Missions is working to address our challenges in new ways. We are approaching our work with renewed energy and focus—developing experiments, cultivating partnerships, and setting out on the next phase of our journey with the CRC,” he said.

There is a feeling out there—at Christian Reformed churches, within Christian Reformed communities, and even from the outside looking in—that the denomination is facing a crisis, said Chung.

In reality, he said, the denomination is facing its greatest opportunity yet: North America is rapidly becoming one of the largest mission fields in the world.

“God is on the move in our churches, our neighborhoods, and our communities,” he said.



Lorilee Craker is a freelance writer.

Andrew Vis, Orangeville CRC



Andrew Vis, Orangeville CRC.

Orangeville CRC in southern Ontario is one of several in the province currently involved in the Ridder Church Renewal process. These churches and their pastors will meet at

retreats over 30 months to discern what God wants for their congregations and communities.

Prayer Requests

- For a deeper understanding of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ.
- For diligence in practicing the spiritual disciplines.
- For the courage to be authentic with each other and with others about our struggles and our growth.
- For a strong desire to share the gospel in our daily lives.
- For the Holy Spirit to create opportunities for the congregation to impact the town of Orangeville in Jesus’ name.

Church Renewal

Orangeville CRC is, in many ways, a fairly typical southern Ontario congregation. But this spring, as part of an ongoing desire for renewal, the leadership of the church, which is pastored by Rev. Andrew Vis, connected with Ridder Church Renewal.

Home Missions works to come alongside established churches like Orangeville and several others in Ontario and across the U.S. and Canada to discern what God’s plan is for each church and its community. Sometimes this involves helping the church in the process of renewal.

Ridder, described as “a process, not a program,” is based at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Mich. Vis and five other leaders from the church have made a 30-month commitment to faith renewal for themselves and their church members.

Change starts by challenging time-honored assumptions about what makes a congregation healthy and vital. “Often our assumption is that we want to make good church members,” Vis said. “But at Ridder, the goal is to make disciples and live missionally.”

Participants attend five retreats over the course of 30 months. They learn from facilitators and then commit to practicing their learning in their own community.

“The missional piece is the willingness to live out the gospel in our neighborhoods,” Vis pointed out. “The question we ask is, how do we want our community to be different in 10 years?”

Vis has seen changes within himself.

“I’m practicing missional living by making intentional efforts to get to know my neighbors,” he stated. “Usually when I get home I want to go straight into my house; I don’t want to talk to anyone. But now I’m engaging with my neighbors as often as I can.” ■

—Lorilee Craker

In Good Hands

He's successful. He's famous. He's highly regarded. And not just in the eyes of his family and friends, not just by himself, but by someone whose opinion really matters: his boss.

This man is a decorated army commander who has victory after victory in the record book. His boss is none other than the king himself.

What this man does not know (but we do if we've read 2 Kings 5) is that those victories and the medals on his chest and the estimation in which he is held are all gifts "because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram" (v. 1). In that glimpse behind the scenes is a message for us all: God is in control.

Read the rest of 2 Kings 5. You'll meet a young girl who had been snatched from her Israelite family by a band of raiders from Aram. Surely she and her family did not see God's hand in those circumstances. Yet she is the one who tells her mistress about the prophet who can put them in touch with the God who is in control—not only of conflict but of health.

Think about it. How often do we consider our achievements to be personal accomplishments when, in reality, they are gifts? How often do we consider illness to be a burden—maybe even a curse—when it could be a doorway for God?

How often do we still think of tragedy and disaster as evidence of the absence of God, when it just might be the occasion for God to come closer?

We live in a world a lot like Naaman's. Power is still coveted and treasured. Pain and suffering, disruption and loss still tend to obscure the evidence of God's presence.

“We live in a chaotic world where things are often not what they seem to be.”

Like that unnamed young girl whose life was catastrophically interrupted and disassembled, we live in a chaotic world where things are often not what they seem to be.

We are not prophets, at least not in the same sense as Elisha. We don't see precisely what the hands of God are doing most of the time. We just know the hands are there. Giving. Holding us up. Controlling. Ordering. Restoring. Comforting. Reassuring.

That is a message this world needs to hear as much as Aram did. Your neighbor needs to hear it as much as that young girl's mistress did. The high and mighty need to hear it as much as the king and his general did. Our nation needs to hear it as much as Israel did.

It is a message you and I know and trust—a message we can communicate as effectively as that young girl who knew in whom she believed and shared that knowledge with people who needed the good news. She did so without special training or advance notice—equipped by faith and inspired by the Spirit.

There's a lot for us to learn in the opening verses of 2 Kings 5. Each of us reading those words knows someone in great need of hearing that our God reigns.

On the other side of this story, we hear Naaman declare, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except your God!"

That was the goal all along. The God whose love we know best and most fully in Christ, his Son, wants as many as possible to know and love and follow him. He uses all things and all believers—little girls, prophets, and the likes of us—to get that word out.

That is what Christian Reformed Home Missions is all about. And that is also what we all are all about. Let's put our hands in the good hands of God, by faith, and urge everyone we meet to do the same. ■



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

Zafir's Change of Heart

Zafir, a Muslim in North Africa, had many questions about Christianity. But in his part of the world, looking for answers is risky.

Thanks to Back to God Ministries International's Arabic media outreach, in partnership with the Middle East Reformed Fellowship and Words of Hope, God's Word is getting out.

One way the ministry reaches people in North Africa and the Middle East is through an Arabic Facebook page that shares daily quotes from Jesus. Most Muslims consider Jesus a great prophet

and are open to hearing his words.

Facebook also offers an opportunity for Muslims to talk about the Christian faith with mentors who invite them to send their questions via text message.

Through text messages, mentors also encourage seekers to read specific Bible passages available on the BTGMI website.

Each day, BTGMI's Arabic ministry receives an average of 12 first-time responses from Muslims.

"As a Muslim," Zafir testified, "I had many questions and doubts about Jesus the



For residents of North Africa, seeking answers about Christianity is risky.

Christ and the holy gospel. I am truly grateful for the loving spirit of those who have guided me and others to the true ways."

—Nancy Vander Meer,
Back to God Ministries
International

Grace-Filled Living

When Maxine and Harvey Brink, graduates of Calvin College, researched the possibility of opening an adult family home in Washington state a few years ago, they didn't realize just how rewarding their new life would be.

The homes are regular houses located in residential neighborhoods. Residents are seniors who enjoy a family environment and benefit from having live-in care providers.

Maxine Brink thought about doing this because her 98-year-old mother had "aged so gracefully," which in turn made her think about her own needs as she aged.

Then their son suggested they look into opening a home in Washington, where, Maxine said, "there's a lot of need for this residential service."

It turns out that Washington has 3,000 adult family homes, which offer senior citizens an option other than a nursing home.

Six years ago, the Brinks decided to buy a house. "My mother asked me why I was doing this," said Maxine. "For me it was about stewardship: when you have the energy and ability, you can't just go sit."

The Brinks became licensed caregivers, sharing their home, which they call "Adagio"—a musical term for moderate tempo—with up to six seniors in their late 80s or early 90s. They specialize in the care of seniors with dementia. Maxine became a certified instructor in dementia and mental health.

The Brinks cook, supervise caregivers, and enjoy day-to-day living with the residents.

"They are like our family," said Maxine, who was busy trying out one of the residents' French toast recipes as she spoke. "She and I are working on a cookbook that will include family stories about the recipes; it's going to be a gift to her grandchildren."

Reminiscing together is very important, said Maxine. "We hear the same stories over and over again, but we just laugh and tell them what a great story it is."

Over time, the Brinks have learned a lot about dementia. "Creativity is a big part of it," she said. "Just because something worked once, that doesn't mean it's going to work again. You have to stop and think of alternatives."

Maxine Brink is also a poet. Her collection of poems, *Finishing Touches: Living with Dementia*, explores aspects of the disease present in Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and vascular dementia. She also reads for senior centers, church groups, and libraries. ■

—Lynn Rosendale, Calvin College

Church's Switch to Faith Promise Boosts Support

Missions advocates at Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Brighton, Ontario, decided to help out after learning last year that their Christian Reformed World Missions missionary needed to raise additional support.

The advocates had heard of a program called Faith Promise that can be used to help a church boost its missions budget.

With Faith Promise, individual church members consider how much God would have them give and pledge. Members

Fellowship Christian Reformed Church



submit an unsigned card stating their pledge and take home a signed copy to remember their commitment.

All ages can participate—even with just a dollar a month, the advocates say.

Having seen Faith Promise work before, the advocates approached church leaders, who approved its use for the missions budget.

They then presented Faith Promise during a missions-focused service at which the pastor expanded on the program, and copies of CRWM's "Faith Promise" brochure were distributed.

A few weeks later, the church hosted a simple intergenerational dinner with missions-related activities.

Church members filled out their Faith Promise cards in December. They were grateful to learn that the final pledge almost doubled the church's typical missions budget. ■

—by Sarah Lin, Christian Reformed World Missions

Cassava Flour Feeds Hopes for Farmers' Future

Transporting farm produce from most rural villages to larger markets in Tanzania is expensive. And by the time the produce arrives, it usually has started to perish.

That is changing in Kijuka, a village in northern Tanzania where World Renew's partner, the Sengerema Informal Sector Association (SISA), is teaching a group of 82 men and women how to process cassava into flour that can be transported longer distances for greater profit.

Cassava has been a staple crop in the Kijuka community for many years. Tanzanians grind cassava into flour and mix it with water to make a porridge-like meal that is eaten with beans, vegetables, or meat.

But drying the cassava and processing it into flour is a labor-intensive process, taking 10 days using traditional methods.

With SISA's training and some processing machines the group bought collectively, that process has now been cut to six hours, said Chris Enns, World Renew's program consultant in Tanzania.

Thanks to SISA training, members of the group harvest cassava roots by hand, peel them, and use a processor powered by a diesel engine to grate them into a paste.



Milling cassava in a Tanzanian village.

The paste is put into a press that squeezes out excess fluid. Next, the paste is sun-dried and hand-sorted to remove bits of woody core.

The remaining product is then run through a milling machine that turns it into high-quality flour that can be stored for up to one year.

"The money we earn from selling the flour pays our children's school fees," said Mrs. Margaret Lung'wecha, a group member. ■

—by Kristen Vanderberg, World Renew

You add.
God multiplies.



Walking in the Steps of Paul

“I’m a first-century guy” is Jeff Weima’s simple claim, but he’s also a 21st-century scholar and professor of New Testament studies at Calvin Theological Seminary.

So when he led seminary students and other adult learners in a biblical studies tour of Turkey and Greece in January, they got the best of both “Weima worlds.”

Weima has a passion for helping seminarians understand the cultural, political, and religious contexts of the earliest years of the Christian church, especially as Paul and other apostles carried the gospel to the Gentiles.

As a teacher of Greek with a keen interest in archaeological studies, Weima reminded the seminarians that all biblical translation of the early text involves interpretation, and

interpretation must be informed by the context of the day.

Ancient New Testament cities came alive as students walked the excavated ruins of many formerly- or still-thriving cities. At each ancient site, Weima led the group on “show and tell” walks, including a few heart-thumping hikes.

Students stood below the perch of the Parthenon, perhaps the very place where Paul addressed the Areopagus (Acts 17) and taught them about the one true God.

They sat in the theater at Ephesus where a riotous crowd, infuriated with Paul’s preaching against idols, had shouted for hours “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (Acts 19). And they walked the main streets of Laodicea and Smyrna.

At each new site, the challenge was to imagine the city

Calvin seminarians and other adult students stand near the ruin of the Aphrodisias.

in the first century A.D.—in all its splendor and success—including the temptations these cultural centers posed to the earliest churches.

The faith of first-century Christians was countercultural to their times. Paul pastored them with truth and love so that fledgling Christians would mature, growing up in Christ and bearing fruit, said Wiema.

Lectures on the buses or back at the nightly hotel site solidified the learning and kept students occupied from early morning until a late dinner, but no one complained.

There is no doubt they will draw deeply from this trip, led by that “first century guy” from Calvin Seminary.

It was not lost on the traveling seminarians that 21st-century faith also needs to be countercultural; their calling is to be like Paul, equipping and encouraging the flocks God entrusts to them. ■

—by Jinny De Jong,
Calvin Theological Seminary

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

Robin Watch

It's spring! Have you seen a robin yet? All through North America, the arrival of robins is a sure sign of spring. Check your outside thermometer and your yard. If daytime temperatures are above freezing, you should see your first robin soon.

Arrival

Males always arrive first. Don't worry if you have a few days of ice and snow after the robins come. Male robins can live through spring storms. Female robins can't survive for long in freezing weather because their bodies are working to produce eggs. That's why the males always arrive first.

Each male robin looks for a good spot to build a nest and raise young. He claims that territory and defends it against all the other males who are looking for a place to call home.

Keep your eyes open for single robins checking out your yard. You'll see them poking around here and there. You may even see robins pushing each other around. Those are males sorting out their territories.

Keep your ears open too—males sing to claim their territories. To find out what robin songs sound like, visit www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/robin/Vocalizations.html



Did You Know?

The color **robin egg blue** is an official Crayola color. In the early 1990s, the crayon was originally included in Crayola boxes without a name. Purchasers were asked to submit ideas for the color's name.



ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

Leaving Home . . . Sort Of

For about two weeks, the chicks grow rapidly and the nest becomes crowded. Then it's time for them to leave. Then comes the fun part.

You'll see the chicks, one at a time, teeter on the edge of the nest and take off. Look for a parent on the ground nearby offering encouragement.

A chick's first flight isn't perfect—it's a bumbling, rolling, wing-flapping practice run. Chicks need lots of practice to fly!

The parents aren't finished caring for the chicks after they hit the ground. That's the stage where you can do some of your best watching.

The young one will follow the adult, begging for food by flapping its wings. The adult feeds it on the ground for a while. But eventually the chick has to learn to fend for itself. After a while the adult will refuse to feed the chick even when it begs. Then the chick will begin catch its own food. It's now an adult!

Pretty cool, right? Robins are just one small part of God's amazing creation. But they tell you a lot about the Creator. Pay attention this spring—go out and watch some robins!



Delicate Eggs

If you watch closely, you'll know when the female has laid her eggs—usually no more than three or four. You'll see one of the adults on the nest almost all the time. Here's what the eggs need in order to hatch:

- a very constant temperature
- high humidity
- a gentle turn every day

If any one of these three conditions is missing, the eggs won't hatch. Adult robins do just the right things to make sure the eggs hatch. They sit on the eggs just long enough and gently roll each egg every day.



Nesting

Has a robin claimed your yard as its territory? Has he found a mate?

Robins have two basic requirements when they're on the lookout for just the right spot to build a nest. First, it should provide a solid support for the nest—a tree branch, a rafter, or even a window box meant for flowers. Second, it must be a slightly sunny spot. Robin chicks require a little bit of sun every day so that their bodies can make Vitamin D.

Once the robin parents find the perfect spot to build a nest, you'll see them flying around with twigs in their beaks. If you watch closely, you might even see them gathering mud from a puddle to keep the nest together.

As the robins fly back and forth building the nest, they learn the area. You should never move their nest—they might not be able to find it. Think of it this way: If someone moved your house to a different part of the city, how would you know where to find it?



Tending the Chicks

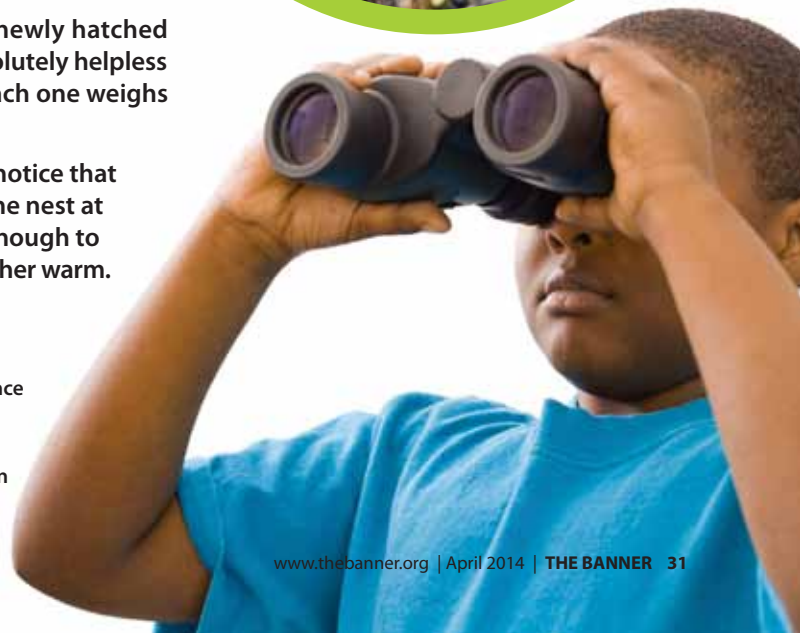
After the eggs have hatched, watch carefully. You'll see the adults do three different things:

- 1. Bring food to the nest constantly**—mostly worms. But chicks need a precise combination of vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. So the adults supplement the chicks' diet with insects, spiders, and even fruit. Watch closely to see what they feed their young!
- 2. Clean the nest.** After an adult puts food into a chick's mouth, it checks the nest for little sacs of chick poop. You'll see the adult drop a little "something" as it flies away from the nest.
- 3. Stay on or near the nest.** That's because newly hatched chicks have no warm feathers and are absolutely helpless and very weak. They're so small that each one weighs less than a quarter!

After about a week, you should notice that an adult doesn't always sleep on the nest at night. By then the chicks are big enough to snuggle together and keep each other warm.



Joanne De Jonge is a freelance writer and a former U.S. National Park Ranger. She attends West Valley Christian Fellowship in Phoenix, Ariz.



The Idolatry of Experience

I**N 1973**, one of the best-selling Christian books was J. I. Packer's *Knowing God*. Twenty years later, in 1993, Henry T. Blackaby's *Experiencing God* was published and itself became a bestseller. From knowing to experiencing: the difference in these two titles captures the growing shift in our culture from favoring intellectual knowledge to favoring authentic experience.

It is probably true that Western Christianity has had a history of idolizing the

intellect. However, have we now overcorrected to the other extreme? From ecstatic religious experiences to hands-on experiential learning, are we now in danger of turning experience into an idol?

Let's be clear—we should not overemphasize the role of human reason in our faith. Our intellect is an essential but limited part of our spiritual walk with God. And so are our experiences. Faith includes our experience and our intellect but is deeper than both of them.

Experiences come in various forms. We have emotional experiences, for example, when we have deep feelings of God's pres-

ence in our lives. Other experiences come by way of past results or best practices. All of these different kinds of experiences can become idols if we are not careful.

Idols are not simply made of stone or wood—they can be anything good in creation that we come to trust or love more than God. Any time we worship and serve created things rather than the Creator, we are practicing idolatry (see Rom. 1:25). Even the good things that God uses to help us can become idols: the bronze snake God told Moses to make saved the Israelites who were bitten by poisonous snakes (Num. 21:4-9). But

when the Israelites worshiped the snake, it became an idol that King Hezekiah had to destroy generations later (2 Kings 18:4).

Similarly, our experience is an essential and beneficial gift from God to help us in our Christian walk. Powerful emotional experiences can help seal our intellectually informed faith. Experiences can also help us make decisions with respect to what works and what does not. And precisely because our experiences are so good, so important and helpful, we are tempted to place more faith in them than we ought, making them into an idol that replaces God's centrality in our lives.

How can we recognize when experience has become an idol? I believe there are two telltale signs.

First, instead of being a means to an end such as a deeper faith in Christ, the experience becomes an end in itself. We may end up trusting our religious experiences—as good as they are—more than we trust God's truth, promises, and message. Like the apostle Thomas, we might start demanding an experience of God's truth before we can trust it. Thomas refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he could experience firsthand—see for himself—the risen Christ with his nail marks. Later, when he appeared to Thomas, Jesus said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). Would we trust God even if we did not have any experience to back up our trust?

This is a very subtle difference, which is why we often fail to recognize it. In his book *My Utmost for His Highest*, well-known Christian writer Oswald Chambers warned, "Be ruthless with yourself if you are given to talking about the experiences you have had. Faith that is sure of itself is not faith; faith that is sure of God is the only faith there is." It's like loving the experience of marriage more than the person you actually married. You cannot have one without the other,

obviously, but where does your love ultimately reside?

The second warning sign that an experience might be turning into an idol is when we use it as an end to justify questionable means or actions. When we start rationalizing disobedience to God with our experience, then we have turned experience into an idol. When it becomes our final authority on what is right, or on our decision-making in general, our experience has become an idol. For instance, if we were to choose to join a

enclave by their addictions, we end up as slaves to our idols as we increasingly come to rely on them. Unlike God, who gives us life, idols drain the life from us.

Wonderful spiritual experiences—even best-practice experiences—are helpful, but we cannot idealize them. Are we turning uplifting emotional worship into a sacred cow? Is the need to maintain and create powerful worship experiences draining our congregations' energies and resources away from other important duties and callings that are less emotion-

Even the good things that God uses to help us can become idols.

church simply because it has an uplifting worship service that makes us feel good even though it has unbiblical teachings and practices, then we have turned our experience into an idol.

Perhaps you're asking yourself *Is that really so bad?* Besides the obvious insult to God, let me mention a couple of other reasons to avoid such idolatry. First, idols shape us. Those who make and trust in idols, says the psalmist, will become like them (Ps. 115:8). We become like what we worship. If we worship Christ, we will become Christ-like. If we worship rationality or the intellect, we start imagining a logical, emotionless being like *Star Trek's* Mr. Spock as the ideal human. On the other hand, if we worship experience, we're likely to favor the empathic and telepathic Counselor Deanna Troi from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Either way, idealizing one-dimensional versions of humanity harms us, as it ends up suppressing essential parts of who we are.

Second, idols eventually enslave us. Think of addiction. Like drugs, idols of experience might initially do us a lot of good, which is why we start having faith in them. But over time, like junkies

ally rousing? Are we turning experiential results into the only measurement of ministry success?

When experience becomes an idol, we need to repent—that is, we need to turn away from the path we are traveling and turn toward God. This is not easy. Often it requires changing default modes that are deeply entrenched. In order to change, we need prophets from within the community or wise friends to point out our own or our community's idolatry. We may not welcome such wake-up calls, but we need to learn to heed them.

Repentance requires us to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves and humble enough to admit our faults. But it is Christ who forgives us and who gives us the power to change. So we also need the support and encouragement of a Christ-centered community. Together, as part of the whole Christian community, we can turn our idols of experience back into what they were intended to be: God's good gifts. ■



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

Getting to Know the Great Cloud of Witnesses



EVERY NOW AND THEN, our worship services give us a glimpse of the long tradition we've inherited. We recite an ancient creed or sing a hymn with a melody rooted in medieval plainsong. By and large, though, I'd contend that we have a fairly thin conception of church history. We've inherited a sense that our tradition's trajectory goes something like this: Jesus, then the apostles, then a load of heretics, and then Martin Luther and John Calvin. It wasn't until the Reformation that we got things sorted out, theologically speaking.

It's risky to be content with that story. On a basic level, it's just not true. But more important, that story can impoverish us. C.S. Lewis once remarked that every age has its own outlook, and if we don't supplement our contemporary diet with ideas from another era, we run the risk of being spiritually malnourished.

Meet our ancient brothers and sisters in their own words.

Here are some books that could help balance our diet. They focus on the writers, thinkers, and theologians from the early centuries of the tradition, the folks we typically refer to as "patristic" or, more colloquially, as "church fathers" (though there are some vital church mothers too).

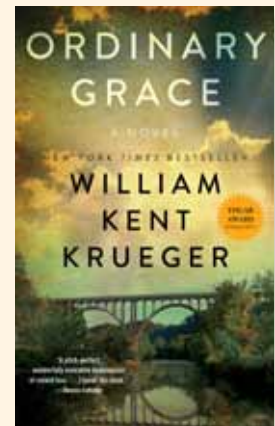
First, a few recent survey texts. Bryan Liftin's *Getting to Know the Church Fathers* (Brazos) is approachable, generous, and a great place to start. So too is Paul Foster's *Early Christian Thinkers* (InterVarsity), which has a more scholarly bent and will point to more great resources. I'm also a fan of Pope Benedict XVI's *Church Fathers* (Ignatius), a collection of public addresses he gave in 2007 and 2008. Each of these works will give you a marvelous introduction to folks like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Polycarp, and Origen, urging you on in your exploring.

Meet our ancient brothers and sisters in their own words too. An easy way is to check out the marvelous "Popular Patristics Series" from St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. Each slim work in the series is concise and translated into accessible English. Start with a classic of classics, Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, and work your way to the prophetic challenge of John Chrysostom's sermons in *On Wealth and Poverty*. If poetry is your thing, Ephrem of Syria's *Hymns on Paradise* will set your soul alight. If you'd really like to delve into an area of theology we give short shrift in our tradition, you could read Theodore the Studite's *On the Holy Icons*.

And on and on. The recommendations could keep coming, because the patristic writers have left us a tremendous treasure. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who, even centuries on, are worthy companions on our journey. ■



Brian Bork is the CRC campus minister at the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. He is a member of Waterloo CRC.



Ordinary Grace

by **William Kent Krueger**
reviewed by **Kristy Quist**

In 1961, a small town in Minnesota suffers a series of disturbing events. Frank Drum is 13 when things begin to go horribly wrong, leading to a mystery that has the whole town talking. His father, the Methodist minister, no longer has all the answers. Krueger's eloquent prose brings the time and place to life, introducing readers to a town populated by wounded, flawed, and fallible people. As Frank seeks to find his footing in the new world of adulthood, we discover that this novel is anything but ordinary. (Atria)





The Book Thief

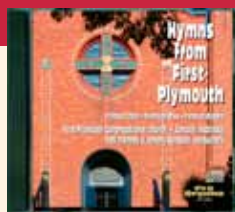
reviewed by **Sandy Swartzentruber**

On the eve of World War II, Liesel Meminger goes to live with the Hubermanns, her new foster parents. Illiterate and heartsick, Liesel gradually thaws to her changed life as she comes to know the power of books. But the Hubermanns have a secret: they are hiding the son of a Jewish man who saved Mr. Hubermann's life. Hauntingly filmed and beautifully acted by all, this film is a tribute to everyday people committed to loving their neighbor in the midst of impossible circumstances. On disc now. (20th Century Fox)

Consider the Birds

by **Debbie Blue**
reviewed by **Phil Christman Jr.**

In the five years since the book *From Stone to Living Word*, Blue's prose has only grown richer, wiser, and weirder. This book takes up an unlikely subject—bird imagery in the Bible—and works it into a meditation on virtually everything: marriage, ecology, cockfighting, militarism, the human need for an enemy, and the late-Victorian vogue for ostrich-feather hats. Blue is incapable of being boring, and she sends you back to both the Bible and your backyard with a more careful, more attentive, more loving gaze. (Abingdon)



Hymns from First-Plymouth

by **First-Plymouth Congregation Church**
reviewed by **Randall Engle**

First-Plymouth Congregational Church of Lincoln, Neb., shows what an ambitious church music program can produce. The entire album is devoted to giving new voice to beloved hymns, and that it does. Amazingly, attention is first and naturally drawn to the texts rather than the magnificent Schoenstein organ, the choir, brass ensemble, or handbell choir. This CD is sure to start a stampede of worshipers running back to their hymnals, demanding more. (Pro Organo; order at proorgano.com)

Johnny Cash: The Life

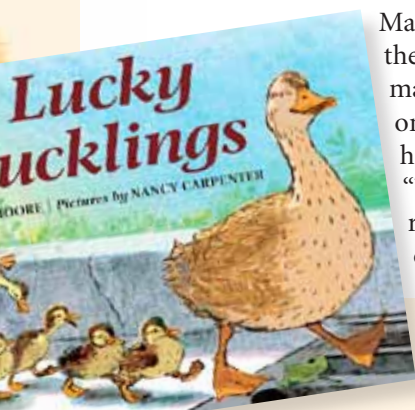
by **Robert Hilburn**
reviewed by **Robert J. Keeley**

This carefully researched and well-written book shows a deeply flawed man who hung on to the grace of God with all he had. Hilburn's work helps us understand how the man who wrote "I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die" in "Folsom Prison Blues" could also sing and speak at dozens of Billy Graham crusades. He lets us see a man who was addicted to amphetamines but who also wanted, more than anything, to bring lost souls to Jesus. A rich and thoughtful look at a groundbreaking artist and a complex man. (Little, Brown)



Lucky Ducklings

by **Eva Moore**
reviewed by **Jenny de Groot**



Mama Duck leads her five ducklings away from the pond and the green, green park where they were born. They follow their mama as she leads them through the streets of their small town, only to disappear one by one down a storm grate. That could have been the end of the story if not for Mama Duck's loud "Whack! Whack!"—which attracts a team of rescuers. The retro illustrations are a good match for this timeless story based on a real duckling rescue. Ages 4 and up. (Orchard)

THE LOWDOWN



Take a Breather: *Rivers in the Wasteland*, the newest album from Christian rockers NEED-TOBREATHE, is due out on April 15. (Atlantic)



Smarten Up: Dave Ramsey and his daughter Rachel Cruze share tips for teaching kids how to handle money in their new book *Smart Money Smart Kids*, coming out the end of this month. (Thomas Nelson)



For Real! The best-selling book *Heaven Is for Real* is coming soon to a movie theater near you, starring Greg Kinnear. (Sony)



Game On: Creative and popular indie

video game FEZ is being released for PlayStation 3 and 4 platforms; the level of difficulty makes this best for older children.

MORE REVIEWS ONLINE

The Complexities of Health Care

BEFORE SKETCHING THE COMPLEXITY OF THE MORAL and biblical issues surrounding health care today, it is important to highlight a non-negotiable imperative of our faith: it's our responsibility to care for our neighbor, particularly our neighbor's physical needs. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that the commandment against murder includes our responsibility to protect our neighbors "from harm as much as we can" (Q&A 107). We Christians are called not only to avoid being instruments of harm but also to be instruments of preventing and ameliorating harm.

Our goal in the provision of health care should be to promote health and prevent sickness for everyone to as great an extent as possible. The debate about the provision of health care does not lie, therefore, at the level of first principle. What Christians from a variety of contexts and perspectives do disagree about has to do with prudence. How can we best meet the needs of those who are ill? How should we, both individually and as a society, approach the question of protecting our neighbors from harm?

There is no single Christian position on health care beyond the general principle just stated. And there is no single biblical system of providing health care that applies in the same way to all people in all places at all times. What the Bible does provide is a set of responsibilities and rights to be accounted for and reckoned with in particular concrete contexts and cultures. But there is no simple way to move from these biblical principles to a particular and universally valid system of health care provision. The requirements of justice in a particular society have much to do with the cultural, economic, political, and historical contexts of that society.

The Role of Business, Church, Family, Government

Just as there is no single biblical model for government or economic order that applies everywhere, there is no single institution or organization that bears absolute responsibility for providing health care. What we have instead is a model of responsibility that covers a variety of institutions and forms of human relationship, including businesses, churches, families, and governments. The solutions surrounding the challenges of providing health care are not simply to be met either in the

**How should we,
both individually
and as a society,
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neighbors from harm?**

political arena or in the marketplace but in and through a variety of institutions.

Businesses have a duty to compensate workers fairly. As the apostle Paul puts it, "The worker deserves his wages" (1 Tim. 5:18). Over the last half-century it has become commonplace in the United States that this compensation includes not just remuneration in the form of money but also benefits, often including health care insurance. But the connection of health care insurance with employment is not a divine mandate. It is, rather, the result of particular developments unique to the labor dynamics of the U.S. What is sacrosanct is the right of workers to a fair wage, a wage that, accounting for particular factors and circumstances, provides for the basic needs of their families—including health services.

Churches too have a responsibility to care for the material welfare of people. We see this not only in the sixth commandment but also in other biblical texts that exhort us, "as we have opportunity" to "do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). Since we live in a fallen world, there will be instances where compensation in the marketplace is not sufficient to meet the needs of those who are ill. Tragedy will strike that has not been adequately prepared for through insurance or savings.

Explaining Galatians 6:10 in a rather different context, the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that “the church has an unconditional obligation toward the victims of any societal order, even if they do not belong to the Christian community.” Historically Christians have a rich institutional legacy of such responsible action, notably in the formation of hospitals as well as through the diaconal work of individual congregations. The sovereignty of this Christian legacy ought to be respected and celebrated in any political health care reform efforts.

Families too have a role to play in providing care for others. Mothers and fathers treat sicknesses in children on a daily basis. This is a mundane testimony to the concrete bonds of love and obligation that bind us together in families. And even though we are born anew through the Spirit and placed into relationship with other Christians in the church, we still have obligations to care for our natural kin. The apostle Paul warns that “anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). We see Christians fulfilling these responsibilities as they offer spiritual support to those who are sick, help to pay the medical bills for ailing family members, or provide in-home health care for elderly parents.

Individual Christians are also called to provide for those in need. The Good Samaritan, who took action to care for the stricken victim, provides a model for effective Christian compassion. Doctors, nurses, and health care professionals embody this kind of sacrificial service every day in their individual callings. We are also called to form organizations and groups to provide for one another on a more regular and ongoing basis. Mutual aid societies, co-ops, health care sharing ministries, and other charitable endeavors attest to this Christian obligation.

Finally, government has a responsibility to protect the welfare of its people. Addressing the problem of material welfare, Abraham Kuyper once said, “The holy art of ‘giving for Jesus’ sake’ ought to be much more strongly developed among us Christians. Never forget that all state relief for the poor is a blot on the honour of your Saviour.” Here Kuyper strongly affirms the priority of social obligations in the rich variety of relationships just described.

But he also affirms that where those obligations remain unmet, and where we fail to do justice to those obligations in various ways, the government has a role to intervene. This intervention, says Kuyper, is always to be done “quickly and sufficiently” to redress the injustice and to restore the relationships that have been broken, so that the requirements of love and justice can be fulfilled in their proper spheres. The need for government action is thus not primarily a mark of justice but rather is a sign of injustices perpetuated in other institutions.

Christians are called to properly balance and relate spiritual and material welfare. As the Puritan pastor Richard Baxter wrote in his treatment of Galatians 6:10, Christians must always keep the eternal and spiritual things of God in view, a perspective all too often lost in public debates. Human beings are more than just physical realities, and there is a deep connection between the health of the body and the flourishing of the soul. “Do as much good as you are able to men’s bodies, in order to the greater good of souls,” advised Baxter. These words provide a sound basis for judging the prudential arguments about the best ways to address the challenges of health care in the world today and for making sure that Christians faithfully seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



Jordan J. Ballor earned a doctorate in theology from the University of Zurich and is a research fellow at the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion & Liberty. He is a member of Brookside Christian Reformed Church in Kentwood, Mich.

When a Church Closes

The solemn yet resolute group of church members gathered in a small meeting room in the basement of their church. They were prepared to cast their votes for what might be the final ballot item in their church's history. The gravity of the moment was not lost on anyone. A council member presented the facts. It was time to vote on the dissolution of their church. A motion was made. Someone seconded it. Ballots were cast.

All but one member voted for closing the doors of their church. There were no hard feelings against the one hold-out member. Enough finger pointing and tongue wagging had occurred throughout the past months. The group was beyond the "Have you tried this?" and "Maybe if we hadn't done that" discussions. They were prepared to stand united. It was time to do what had to be done.

If anyone had told me that I would be one of those folks who voted for the dissolution of a church, I would have vehemently protested. Yet there I was, casting a vote for the very thing that I believed should never happen. Despite years of struggle, dedication, and commitment, my church was going to stop existing. The signage would come down. The website would be disabled. Services would be phased out. Members would be forced to find new church homes. Not a pretty picture. Not a pleasant task. But it was the task we were called to finish.

Our church plant had struggled for 15 years through good and bad times. Many of us had volunteered in multiple positions throughout the years—praise team singer, Bible study leader, sound system operator, council member, nursery helper, worship planner, custodian, secretary—and yet we felt that we had not done enough to keep our doors open.

It was easy to feel disheartened and discouraged as we struggled with multiple challenges: a leaky roof during one



God was calling us to complete one more difficult job: close the church.

of the wettest years on record, an air conditioner that went out shortly after we purchased our first real church building, the economy sinking, pledges unmet. It became difficult to attract and keep new members as our numbers dwindled.

And yet God was calling us to complete one more difficult job: to close the church. Our beleaguered little group leaned on each other. And as the strength of God flowed through each of us, we waited for his leading. God, in his infinite wisdom, knew exactly who was needed to meet this final challenge. The very characteristics that may have seemed inadequate in another context were just what we needed now to get the job done. The sale of the building was orchestrated. Final services were planned. The building was reorganized for new owners, and lots of coffee was consumed as we muddled our way through desperate times.

Our final service was held on a beautiful October day. We called it a "Celebra-

tion of Ministry," and we were ready to praise God one more time together. There were tears of sadness, grief, penitence, and thankfulness as we reflected on our journey together in ministry. The Spirit of God was a soothing balm to our souls.

Despite the pain of losing a church, there were unexpected blessings as well. The sale of our building enabled us to contribute to other ministries in our community and around the world.

It's good to remember that our place in the kingdom of God is just a speck in the flow of eternity. And whether we are starting a church, closing a church, or maintaining a church, to God be the glory. ■

Gay DeJong is a middle school science teacher for the Sioux Falls School District. She and her husband are seeking a new church home after being members of Heartland Community Church from its launch until its closing.

ADS

Deadlines: May issue is 4/7/14; June issue is 5/5/14. 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

Announcement of Candidacy

We are pleased to announce that **Douglas De Groot** 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 **Jose Rayas** 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

Available for Call

THE COUNCIL OF CALVIN CRC of Oak Lawn, IL declares Rev. Richard De Vries who recently completed a term call, available for call. He can be contacted at 402-320-1640.

General

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER (U. S.) In May 1988 the President of the United States signed into law a bill establishing the first Thursday of May as a National Day of Prayer. This year the National Day of Prayer falls on Thursday, May 1. The synod of the CRC has urged churches in the United States "to observe faithfully any national day of prayer which the United States President publicizes to the nation" (Acts of Synod 1969). "Our churches must be open to our congregations and our fellow countrymen on such occasions, when God in his providence leads those in civil authority to call our citizenry to pray. We must pray for and with our country" (Acts of Synod 1958).

Joel R. Boot, Executive Director

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 ZEELAND will meet on Thursday, May 15, 2014, 4PM, at the Borculo CRC. Agenda deadline is April 3.

Congregational

Church's 125th Anniversary

SHEBOYGAN WEEKEND! Come to First CRC-Sheboygan, Wisconsin for their 125th Anniversary! Friday, April 25: 7 pm Praise Bands. Saturday, April 26: 7 pm Organ/Hymn Fest. Sunday, April 27: 10 am Celebration Service, Noon "Fry". Details & RSVP: 920-458-3112 or 1crrsheboygan@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 wleonardcrrc@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, grossepoincrrc@gmail.com; 313-824-3511.

Church's 75th Anniversary

SEYMOUR CRC of Grand Rapids MI, will celebrate 75 years of God's faithfulness with a dinner, June 13, and worship service, June 15. We invite all friends, former members and pastors, to join us in giving thanks and praise. Please contact the church at info@seymourchurch.org or 616-245-8726.

Church's 50th Anniversary

MESSIAH CRC TURNS 50! Thanks be to God! Messiah CRC, Hudsonville MI, will celebrate our 50th Anniversary at our 9:30am service on May 4. All friends and former members invited!

Announcements

ANNOUNCEMENT Transcona Christian Reformed church in Winnipeg Manitoba gives thanks for answered prayers with the acceptance of a call to Rev Brian Bolkema

RETIREMENT With gratitude to God for 37 years of service in the CRC, we are pleased to announce the retirement of our pastor, Dr. Warren H Lammers and his faithful wife Jobje. They have served churches in Ellsworth, Dutton, Blyth (ON), Platte (SD), and Kalamazoo. Farewell service on April 27. For more info, call 269-344-7128, or email: office@secondcrrc.com

VALLEY CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS, Cerritos, CA is please to announce the appointment of Mr. Ron Taylor as Superintendent of Valley Christian Schools. Mr. Taylor is currently the Superintendent at Bellevue Christian Schools, near Seattle, WA and will assume the position of Superintendent at Valley Christian Schools beginning July 1, 2014. For more information, visit our website at www.vcschools.org.

Birthdays

100th Birthday



GERALDINE (GERRI) FONGERS is turning 100! Come celebrate with the whole Fongers family on Saturday, April 5 from 2-4 in the Friendship Room of Raybrook Manor.

95th Birthday

CAROLINE KUIPER, wife of the late Henry Bode and Tony Kuiper, celebrates her 95th birthday on April 28. Her children are: Ron & Ruth Bode and Dennis & Cathy Bode, Al & Jan Kuiper, Les & Marlene Kuiper, and Brad & Marcia Kuiper. She has been blessed with 16 grandchildren and 40 great-grandchildren, (1 deceased). With a long career as a Christian-school teacher she has had a positive and lasting influence in the lives of scores of students. We thank God for her long life and steadfast faith in her Savior. She resides at Prairie View, 610 N. Eastern St. #W9, Sanborn, IA., 51248

90th Birthday

DOROTHY DE HAAN VANDERZEE of 3266 Piccadilly Cir. SE, Kentwood, MI 49512, beloved wife of the late Rev. Nelson (2001) turns 90 on April 15. Her children - Carol (Phil) De Jonge, Mary (Eldon) Pals, Paul (Betty), Sue Martin, Mark (Julie), and Tom (Paula) - her 22 grandchildren & 21 great grandchildren thank God for her long and healthy life in service to the church.

STELLA (SMITH) VAN THOLEN, wife of the late John Van Tholen, will be 90 on April 14, 2014. Stella will celebrate her birthday with an Open House on Saturday, April 12 from 2-4pm at Faith CRC in Elmhurst, IL. Her children are Janet (deceased), Mick & Joyce Boomsma, John & Judy Veldsema, John & Brenda Van Tholen, Jim (deceased) & Rachel (Van Niekerk). She has 7 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren (18 in June). Her family is thankful that God has blessed her with many healthy years. Stella resides at Providence Healthcare, 3450 Saratoga Ave., Downers Grove, IL 60515

Anniversaries

60th Anniversary

RIETEMA CONGRATULATIONS to Neil and Willie (Salomons) Rietema on celebrating 60 years of marriage on April 14, 2014. Praising God for His faithfulness to you, and wishing you much joy as you celebrate with your children and 17 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren. New address: #5 5034 53St. Lacombe AB T4L 2K7

VANDER AA Art and Grace (DeRuiter) of 2511 NC 45N, Pantego, NC 27860 will celebrate 60 years of married love on April 9. Their loving children are Cyndie (Alan) Van Dyke, the late Art, Jr. (Terry), Jen (Dave) Febus and Pam (Barry) Kirkman. They have 9 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. Thank you, God for family, love and your faithfulness throughout the generations.



Bethesda Christian Association is currently accepting applications for the position of **Executive Director**

The successful applicant will assume leadership responsibility for Bethesda's faith-based ministry of supporting individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in communities throughout British Columbia, Canada.

Candidates will have relevant credentials and will have the Christian perspective, vision, flexibility and commitment to excellence which complement proven management knowledge and experience in the social service field. University Masters Degree or course work of appropriate academic standing is required. Five or more years of experience in a non-profit/charitable Christian organization is an asset.

Please see the full advertisement at www.BethesdaBC.com and apply in writing by April 30, 2014, with a letter outlining your personal vision for leadership, accompanied by a resume together with a minimum of three references.

Send to: Sylvia Terpstra, Board of Directors
Bethesda Christian Association
105, 2975 Gladwin Road, Abbotsford, BC, V2T 5T4
E-mail: EDSearch@BethesdaBC.com

50th Anniversary



DE ROO Jack and Henny (Pleysier) Holland, Mi, were married 50 yrs. ago on Dec. 21, 1963, in the Knollcrest Seminary Chapel. Their children are John De Roo and Mark and Nicole De Roo. They have been blessed with two grandchildren. Great is God's faithfulness!

VISSCHER Howard and Carol (Eichhorn) of 1400 Main Street Nichols, New York 13812 (formerly of the greater Paterson, N. J. area) will celebrate their 50 years of marriage on April 11. Children H. William (Leona), Matthew (Tracey), Christine (Tom) La Fave, Hope (Matthew) Carter, ten grand children, and one great grand child. Praise God from whom all blessings flow

Church Position Announcements

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@tacomaccrc.org.

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: ncortenwheeler41@gmail.com

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

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH: Prairie Edge CRC of Portage, MI is seeking a full-time Director of Youth to oversee our Middle School, High School, and Post-High ministries. Candidates should have a degree in Youth Ministry or commensurate experience. Job description available upon request; call 269-327-1570 or email pecoffice@charter.net.

PREACH AT THE BEACH Ocean View CRC in Norfolk, VA seeks a full-time pastor with strong leadership, preaching and teaching skills, with success in outreach and/or missions. We are a committed, conservative congregation with a desire to grow. We are located within one mile of the world's largest naval base and only one block from the Chesapeake Bay. Our fellowship is warm and our beaches are fabulous. See www.OceanViewCRC.org or contact pastorsearch.OVCRC@cox.net for more info. 757-588-2077

THREE POSITIONS AVAILABLE Fleetwood CRC is a multi-generational, large congregation in beautiful Surrey, BC. We value our roots as we continually seek new ways to show God's love to a growing area. We are seeking people to join us in these roles: **Co-Pastor:** an energetic, creative, team player will share in all aspects of ministry as well as take a clearly-defined leadership role in the four priorities we've set as a church. This is an ordained, full time position. **Campus Chaplain:** New Position of a chaplaincy at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Surrey. The half-time chaplain will work with the Multi-faith Centre on campus. **Worship Director:** a creative servant leader to help plan and lead worship services. This could be up to a half-time position. Job descriptions: www.fleetwoodcrc.org. Email info@fleetwoodcrc.org

MINISTER OF WORSHIP Calvary CRC of Pella, IA is seeking a full-time pastor who is called to faithfully preach from Scripture, share a passion for the Gospel, and lovingly serve as lead pastor of the ministry team. Contact us at search@calvary-crc.org.

PASTOR: Lakeside Church serves a small, diverse population in Ludington, MI. Our vision is to be joyful followers of Jesus through worship, service and play and to offer "church" to those for whom

Obituaries

BROUWER Jack R. age 88, of Grand Rapids, MI, went to his heavenly home on January 9, 2014. He is survived by his loving wife, Ruth of 66 years. Children: Linda (Donald) Sloat, Rev. Dr. Douglas (Susan), Wendy (James) Mersman and five grandchildren. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Phil. 1:21

DE BOER Sandra, nee Vellenga, went to be with her LORD, February 10th, 2014, 18 Tartan Ridge Rd, Burr Ridge, IL, 60522. Beloved wife of Jacob "Jack"; loving mother of Tricia (James) Koning and Trent (Kristen) De Boer; devoted grandmother of Emma, Jacob, and Samuel De Boer; fond sister of James (Jeanette) Vellenga and Laurel (Lester) Regnerus.

church may not have worked in the past. We are seeking a full-time pastor: a spiritually-gifted teacher to connect biblical truth to daily life and a shepherd to love and encourage children, youth and adults. Our fellowship is warm and our beaches are fabulous! Contact brendajmassie@gmail.com

PART TIME WORSHIP DIRECTOR Hillcrest CRC of Hudsonville MI is seeking a part-time person to help us in our efforts to further develop our blended worship in line with our mission to be a disciple-making congregation. 616-669-6556 or office@hillcrestcrc.org

PART TIME PASTOR: Leighton CRC, a small, rural, conservative congregation in south central Iowa is seeking a part time pastor to lead us in ministry. Interested parties are invited to contact the search committee at LeightonCRC@gmail.com or call Leroy Nugteren, chairman, at 641-626-3704.

DIR YOUTH & FAMILY MINISTRIES River Terrace Church, in East Lansing, MI, is seeking candidates for Director of Youth and Family Ministries. This full-time director will facilitate the growth of students to be formed in Christ and maintain their faith and church involvement into adulthood. For a job description, please visit riverterrace.org

EXECUTIVE PASTOR Gateway Community Christian Reformed Church in Abbotsford, British Columbia is searching for an Executive Pastor whom God has chosen to lead us into the future. Having recently moved into our brand new 1200 seat Worship Centre and completed a comprehensive Strategic Plan, we are a multi-generational congregation of approximately 650 members seeking to faithfully impact our city and surrounding area with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The successful candidate will be primarily responsible for the management of all church operations including the leadership and training of staff and volunteers, the supervision of care groups and enfolding ministries, and the implementation of the strategic plan. Although ordination is not a requirement of this position, there may be occasional opportunities for preaching. Abbotsford is located one hour east of Vancouver and three hours north of Seattle. The city has a population of one hundred and forty thousand people and is experiencing continuing growth in both numbers and cultural diversity. For more information about this opportunity and how to apply, please follow this link to our website: <http://www.gatewaycrc.org/employmentopportunities.cfm>. Deadline for receipt of resumes is May 15, 2014.

CALLED TO YOUTH MINISTRY? Maple Ridge CRC, located outside of Vancouver BC, is seeking a half-time youth pastor who is a follower of Christ, is passionate about forming and nurturing relationships with youth, is highly relational in leadership and ministry style, and who shares in the vision of MRCRC. For more info visit www.mapleridgecrc.com/jobs.cfm

JOIN OUR MINISTRY TEAM Third CRC of Kalamazoo has an opening for a fulltime Minister of Community Life and Witness. If you have strengths and passions that can help us more effectively enfold new members and grow our missional witness in the community, we would love to hear from you. M. Div. or other seminary degree required. Contact us at office@3rdc.org.

GRACE DE YOUNG aged 88; February 18, 2014; Grand Rapids, MI; She was preceded in death by her husband Gordon, brothers William and Albert, sister Ethel, and grandson Christopher. She is survived by her sisters: Mary Byl, Clara Nyhoff, and Dorothy (Gerrit) VerSteege; sons: Glen and Faith (Ebberts), Gary and Mary (Vos), and Galen and Heather (Francis); grandchildren: Jennifer (Michael) Bolling, Elizabeth, Philip, Rachelle, Andrew, Jared, Gabriel, and Elise; and great grandchild Christopher Bolling.

HANNINK George; age 89, entered his heavenly rest on Jan. 24, 2014. He is survived by his wife of 59 years, Sylvia (Kramer) Hannink, sons Bruce (Joanne), Russell (Jen), Mark, Grant (Sue), Jim (Keiko), John (Julie), brother Lloyd (Jan), sisters Gert and Alma (John) Overweg, 14 grandchildren, 3 great-grandchildren, sisters-in-law Carol, Lois and Verla Hannink. He was predeceased by brothers Gerrit, Harm, Ernest, Alfred and Ted, sister-in-law Lavon Hannink, brother-in-law Neil Viss and by his beloved grandson David George Hannink.



HOOGSTEEN Mrs. Ann, in memoriam, March 29, 1932 to March 29, 2013 From our happy home and circle God has taken one we love; Borne away from sin and sorrow to her Heavenly home above. ~Love from your husband Wiebe Hoogsteen and family

MEYER Emmett went to be with his LORD, February 7th, 2014, 12641 S. 71st Ct, Palos Heights, IL, 60463. Beloved husband of Betty Ann, nee Bielema; loving father of Dan, David (Linda) Meyer devoted grandfather of Benjamin (Melinda), Joshua, Matthew and Samuel Meyer; great grand-father of Callan; Fond brother of Geneva (the late Andy) Van Kampen, Carol (Bob) Bruinius, the late Clarence (Vi) and the late Henry (Lyda) Meyer.

OOSTERMAN David Lee, 29 Dec 2013, London UK. Loved and missed by Marilyn (Mrs Gordon) Oosterman, Oxford PA; Tim Oosterman, Bethel AK; Daniel and Mary E. Armistead, Las Cruces NM; William Oosterman Oxford, PA; nephews and nieces. "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation".

SCHRIPSEMA Herman, age 97, of Kentwood, MI, went home to be with his Lord on Wednesday, March 5, 2014. Survivors: Wife of 69 years, Frances (Faber); Children, Herm & Nancy, Linda & Henry Visscher, Faye Walburg; Grandchildren: Jeff & Kara Schripsema, Kris & Erron Boes; 5 great grandchildren.

STRIKWERDAL Madge Jessie aged 89; February 10, 2014; Grand Rapids, MI; She was preceded in death by her parents: Charles and Jessie (Kroon); brothers: Earl and Betty (Van Dellen) Strikwerda, Alfred and Bernice (Bouwens) Strikwerda. She is survived by her brother: James and Dolly (Hofman) Strikwerda; 5 nieces, 6 nephews and 25 great-nieces and nephews.

TAZELAAR Florian Mark passed into glory February 5th, 2014, 504 E. Adams, Elmhurst, IL, 60126. Beloved husband of Lenore "Lee", nee Potter; loving father of Ellen, Gerry, Bill, Denise, Mark, and Barb; devoted grandfather of Billy, Lisa, Jamie, Jeff, Kimmy, Chris, Mark, Jon, Katie, Carlye, Daniel, and Tom; great-grandfather of Abby, Owen, Izzy, Reagan, and Zoey; fond brother of Annette "Sis" (the late Robert), Calvin (Karen), the late Marvin (Sylvia) and the late Everett Jr.

TEN HOVE Eb, aged 82, of Lacombe, Alberta, passed away peacefully at home with his family at his side. His faith in his Lord and Savior never wavered, and he modeled giving thanks in all circumstances. Beloved husband of Femmie (VandenBrink) for 56 years; loving father of Herb & Julie, Joyce & Ray, Cindi & Mike, Bernie & Teresa, and Ed; 13 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren; brother to Dick & Erylce, Betty & George (Weenink), and John Buit. Eb was preceded in death by his parents HarmJan & Jelske Ten Hove; infant daughter Ruby; and sister Jean (Buit). Eb was a charter member of Woodynook CRC of Lacombe, AB. His life was defined by his passions: faith, family, and farming.

WALCOTT Elmer, age 88; of Muskegon, MI; passed away peacefully on February 19, 2014. Survived by his wife of 64 years, June (Heardt), and children, Barbara (Ken) Schemper, Dan (Kathy), Tom (Jaci), John (Katch), Rick - deceased (Deb and Steve Howe), 18 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren. We are thankful for his many years of faithful service to his Lord.

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VANDERLAAN Margaret (Kaldeway) Age 72; Port Lambton, Ontario; was tragically taken from us on February 2, 2014 in Sugar Creek Resort, Bradenton Florida. Marg is survived by her husband John; children Corinne(Rick)Dykstra, Elsa(Clarence) Koopmans, John(Wendy)Vanderlaan,

Lauren(Trish)Vanderlaan. Grandchildren: Zachary, Andrea(fiancé Eric Bos), Kristen, Megan, John, Chantal, Reilly, Adam, Spencer, Ethan, Craig, Jillian, Joshua, Samantha, Cassidy. Marg was also a beloved sister and sister-in-law and be forever missed and never forgotten.

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NEEDED at Mississippi Christian Family Services in Rolling Fork, MS, volunteers to work in the Lighthouse Variety Store for summer months. A warm, loving place to serve the Lord. Housing provided, air conditioned store and housing. A minimum of 2 weeks is requested. Call Betty 662-873-9055 or Helengene Doornbos 616-453-1984 or email huddyd@gmail.com for more info

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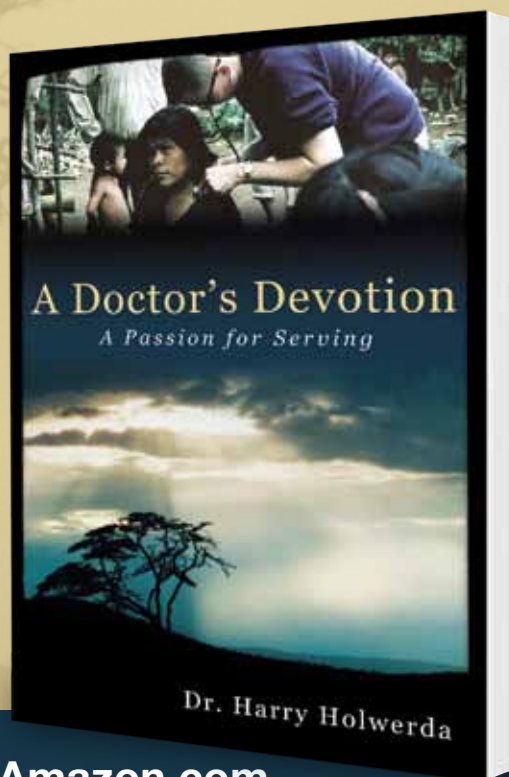
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Punch Lines

What has made *you* smile lately? Got a joke or funny incident you'd care to share with your wider church family? Please send it to *The Banner* at 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407; or email it to editorial@thebanner.org. Thanks!

My dentist had just finished putting caps on each one of my teeth. As I left his office I noticed a sign posted near the exit. It said, "No one is ever entirely worthless; he can always serve as an example."

—Conn Witt

One day the pastor's sermon focused on how God knows which of us grows best in sunlight and which of us needs shade.

"For example," he said, "roses must be planted in the sun, but fuchsias thrive in the shade."

After the sermon a woman approached him, her face beaming. "Your sermon did me so much good," she said.

Before he had time to gloat too much, she added, "I always wondered what was wrong with my fuchsias!"

—Dicky Joad

During family devotions about Jesus' death and burial, I was trying to prompt our 6-year-old to answer a question about Nicodemus.

When I prompted her with "Nico . . ." she shouted, ". . . ragua!"

—Rebecca VanderMolen

At our church library, overdue notices were sometimes ignored. I thought perhaps people might pay more attention if we added some words from Scripture.

Now our overdue notices include the powerful words of 2 Kings 22:8: "Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, 'I have found the book! . . .'"

And from Psalm 126:6: "He . . . will return with songs of joy."

—Beth Hoekstra

My oldest and youngest sons like to challenge each other's intellect with vocabulary words and sample questions from the SAT exams (a widely used college admission test). The older one put an American history question to the younger: "What is the Bay of Pigs?"

The younger thought it was a bonus Bible question and confidently answered, "Oh, that's where Jesus sent the demons that he cast out of the possessed man!"

—Verlan Van Ee

My dog licked the crumbs out of my computer keyboard and earned an online college degree.

—Dick Bylsma

A woman rushing into a church for something she had forgotten the previous Sunday was stopped by a huge sign the janitor had placed in front of the floor he had just washed:

"PLEASE DON'T WALK ON WATER!"

—Sue Lauritzen

Three-year-old TJ was intently watching me apply my makeup. As I applied mascara to my lashes, he asked, "Grandma, why are you putting that on?"

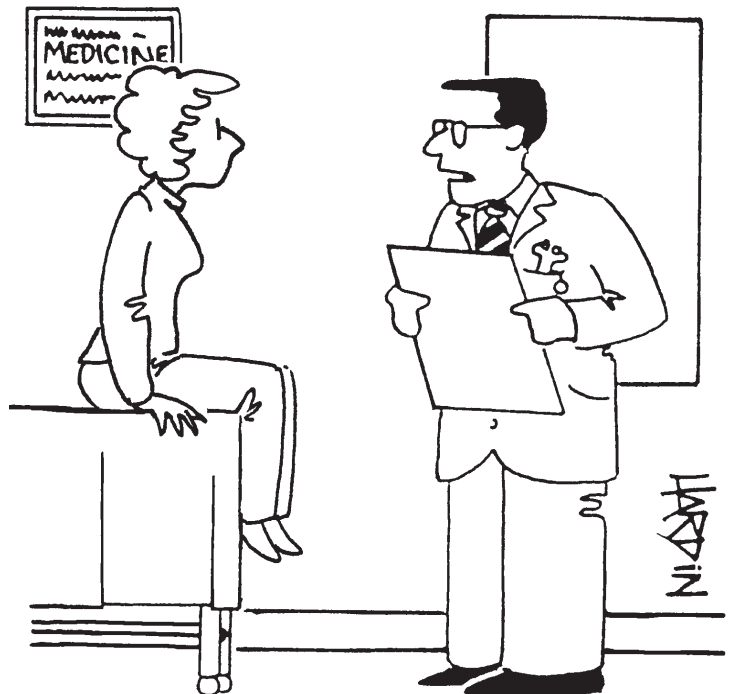
"I'm making myself beautiful for Grandpa," I told him.

"Well, don't make yourself too beautiful," he warned, "or Grandpa won't recognize you."

—Simon and Sharon Hilbrand

People want the front of the bus, the back of the church, and the center of attention.

—Margaret Rupke



"Remember: medical insurance is like a hospital gown—you're never covered as much as you think you are."

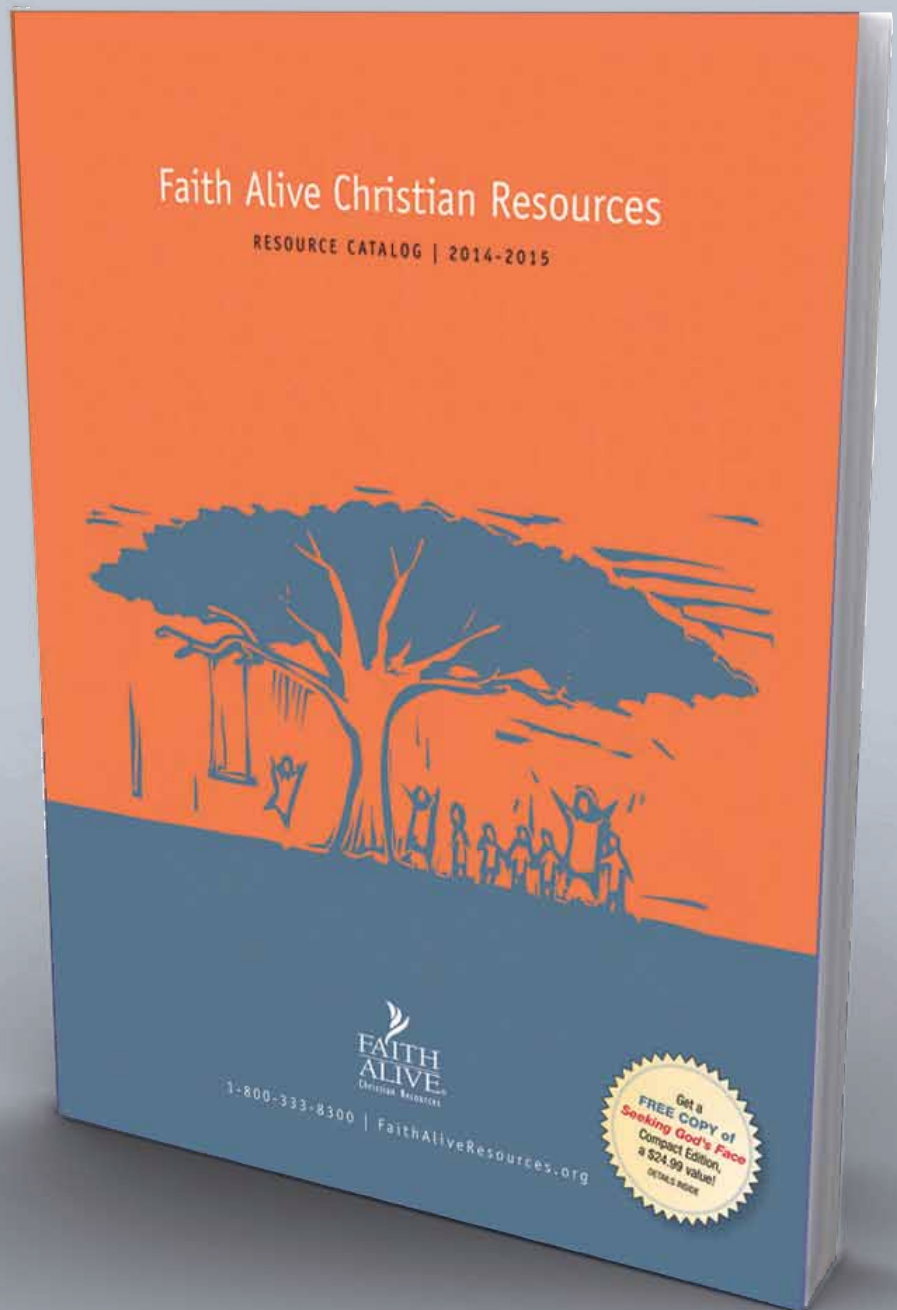
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