

BANNER

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BANNER

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Cover: The Dome of the Rock is visible over the Israeli separation wall dividing occupied Palestinian territory in the community of Abu Dis, east of Jerusalem.

PHOTO BY ISTOCKPHOTO

The Three-Legged Stool

MATTHEW BIEMERS MAKES A COMPELLING CASE FOR CHRISTIAN DAY SCHOOLS

(p. 18). But frankly, I don't need convincing. I've reaped the benefits of Christian schools from first grade back in the Netherlands right through Calvin Theological Seminary. My kids have also been well-equipped to be contributing kingdom citizens through their Christian schooling. Margo and I are deeply grateful for the blessing of Christian schools. We've found them well worth the money and the significant sacrifices they demanded.

It's sad to see so many miss out on this deeply formative influence in their lives. Increasingly the only Christian schools that are viable are those that attract mostly students outside of our denomination. Just as so many other Christians are catching the vision for Christian schooling, it seems that CRC parents are losing it. The reasons are diverse—and some are certainly understandable.

Christian day schools are very expensive and therefore require a great deal of sacrifice on behalf of many families.

Another consideration is that not all Christian schools are well equipped to offer what some of our children actually need. That problem is compounded by governments that provide necessary support services only through the public system.

Also, many of our folks live out of reach of established Christian schools. Maybe not every high school kid can be expected to spend three hours a day on public transit like yours truly did—though it did me no harm: I read lots and got a good jump on my homework.

However, Christian school education has *always* been expensive, not all students readily accommodated, and distance a challenge. So what explains the serious decline in numbers? Could it be an erosion of those Christian values that once inspired us and spurred us on to make those difficult sacrifices? In many cases our commitment to a full-orbed biblical lifestyle and a fully integrated Christian community appears to be heading south. It seems that the dominant culture in which we live is making a definitive impact on the way we choose to live and how we raise our kids. That's scary.

Christian schools and Reformed churches have served each other well, mutually supporting each other in proclaiming, celebrating, teaching, and living out the lordship of Jesus Christ inside and outside of church. We cannot afford to lose that.

Not to say for one minute that every kid must attend Christian day school—or that the public system and Reformed Christian teachers and students within those systems don't make significant contributions!

But the fact remains that it takes a community to raise a kid in Christ's ways, especially in a world as profoundly intertwined with secular culture as ours. We need to keep the three-legged stool of home, church, *and* Christian school as our default option.

Biemers gives us good reasons to do so. I hope you agree—also with your wallet. It shouldn't just be parents who make those financial sacrifices. We all need to step up and make good on the promises we make right along with the parents at each and every infant baptism. ■

Christian day schooling is an effective way to develop kingdom citizens.



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

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In God's Hands

I**N THE FALL OF 2012** a close pastor friend sent me a photograph of a cloud formation in the sky. The clouds looked like two hands that were open to grab hold of something. This picture was a reminder for me that our awesome God is still guiding and directing my path.

At the time, I was wondering where God was leading me within my ministry and in this denomination. This picture was an answer to my prayers to keep trusting in him. His plans were not to harm me but to help me be successful in following his path.

As I served on the CRCNA's Board of Trustees, there were many raveled edges of directions, including diversity in leadership and planning, structure and culture, and finding the next executive director. I had just finished being on the diversity planning committee, was feeling hopeless, and then was appointed to the executive director search team.

Process takes time and demands much prayer and searching for God's direction.

After getting all the preliminary materials together, the nominations, the short list, and then the interviews, we wrestled as a team to seek the best candidate. Finally we came to a decision, asking God for confirmation. The process was thorough and intense.

But God had other plans for this season of the Christian Reformed Church. Our initial candidate withdrew. Having another year to search for a candidate to be the next executive director solidified the team even more and gave us a deeper desire to hear God's direction. At the same time, God gave me the opportunity—and honor—to be the chair of the Board of Trustees. God was allowing me to use my gifts of leadership; his direction was to follow his lead and to keep leaning on his everlasting arms.

Our awesome God allowed us to struggle—only to see his hand lead us to the designation of a new executive director, progression in diversity leadership, and a new direction for our denomination to thrive for the future as

we reorganize the structure and culture of the CRCNA.

We still have a long way to go, and finding our way forward will not be easy. I am reminded that God's outstretched hands are reaching out for all of us. He wants to transform our lives to truly be the "unified family of God." We will then be able to show and tell the world our God is real and alive today. ■



Rev. Sheila Holmes is the pastor of Northside Community Christian Reformed Church in Paterson, NJ, and was chair of the CRCNA Board of Trustees. Sheila has three daughters, two sons-in-law, and eight grandchildren.



“What you see and what you hear depends a great deal on where you are standing.”

— C . S . LEWIS

Safe Churches for All

OPINION



It's time to make our churches safe for all members of the CRC.

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH has a wonderful ministry called Safe Church. Its mandate is to provide leadership for churches on abuse awareness, prevention, and response. To date, the mandate has focused on keeping children and youth in our churches safe from abuse by church leaders. But are they the only ones subject to abuse?

I believe it's time to acknowledge that anyone in our churches could become a victim of abuse, *including pastors or other church leaders*. Abuse can happen to anyone. And so we need policies and procedures developed by experts in the field to help us deal with such devastating situations, no matter who they happen to.

Abuse may be physical, emotional, sexual, and/or psychological. It may take the form of harassment or stalking. In this day and age of instant communication, abuse may come in the form of unwanted emails or texts.

Now that all of our church offices are open to both men and women—who may be married or single—the risk increases. This is especially true for female and single leaders or pastors.

Persons with mental illness can pose challenges for leaders and councils, espe-

cially if there is lack of understanding about how mental illness affects persons who suffer from it. Are the staff offices in our churches designed and located for the safety of the staff who use them? Do we encourage communication about potential abuse situations and offer support—including professional support—when needed?

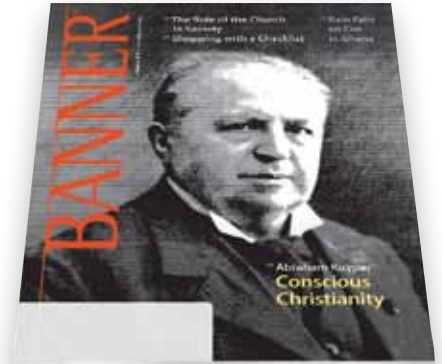
It's time to make our churches safe for *all* members of the CRC. Let's not sweep these issues under the rug any more, as if they are a rarity. Even one case of abuse is one too many. Instead, let's start discussions and develop policies and procedures that will help protect children and youth as well as pastors and leaders. Let's learn how to deal with the reality of abuse in a loving and reconciliatory manner, as Jesus would have us do.

A good start may be to make Safe Church Ministry's Listening Panel available to all members, including leaders who feel they have been abused. Policies and procedures will also need to be developed to help churches deal with cases where abuse has been determined to have occurred.

Safe Church Ministry is the ideal group to oversee these discussions and to develop those policies and procedures. Only with their help can we have the assurance that our churches will be safe for all members. ■



Elly VanAlten is a retired registered nurse; a regional advocate for Disability Concerns, Classis Alberta North; and a member of the Safe Church Committee at her church, Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta.



Lost in the Lone Star State

As a long-time resident of Texas, I read with interest the story “Churches Growing in South Texas” (Together Doing More, June 2014). Ironically, *The Banner* seems to have scant understanding of the Lone Star state. To natives, El Paso is far west, Austin is in the central region, and Spring is east, just north of Houston. None of these places is considered to be in the southern part of the state.

I'm confident most Texans will be forgiving since many of them would likewise fail to identify places within the state of Michigan.

—Frank Calsbeek
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Old Testament God

I find the article stimulating (“The Scandal of the Old Testament God,” May 2014) but the title disrespectful. We don't slander people to catch attention—why do it to God?

Reformers honor the Old and New Testaments as the revelation of the one true God through inspired writers. Although God's self-revelation was a work in progress, there were no contradictions between earlier and later revelation. Perceived discrepancies between God's self-

TTERS

revelation in the Old and New Testament may result from ignorance or skepticism.

—*Jacob M. Van Zyl
Lethbridge, Alberta*

Benckhuysen could have gone further in addressing the tensions between the Old and New Testaments (“The Scandal of the Old Testament God”) by drawing attention to the hope announced by the prophets of the new covenant founded on the divine favor accorded to David, Israel’s ideal king, whose heir would fulfill God’s ultimate purposes for his people, and through them, for the entire world. This authority of this coming king will grow continually, with the result that there will be endless peace (Isa. 9:6). When he is “prince among them” God will make with them a “covenant of peace” (Ezek. 34:15).

In Jesus Christ, the New Testament and the early church saw the fulfillment of these prophecies. Here is the promised Messiah, the Son of David, through whom God has established a new covenant and has brought—and will bring—peace and salvation.

Passages like these are indispensable to our seeing the relationship between the two major divisions of our Bible according to a scheme of promise and fulfillment.

—*Christopher Dorn
Holland, Mich.*

Time to Move On?

I like your editorial “Time to Move On” (May 2014). A contract should be written for three to five years. If the “marriage” is good, the pastor can stay a little longer; if it doesn’t work out, he or she can depart in peace.

—*Andy A. Renema
Duncan, British Columbia*

Retirement

The respondent to a “Frequently Asked Question” (May 2014) regarding the appropriate age for retirement did not consider others who have a stake in the decision—namely, younger workers.

Many younger workers cannot get into or move upward in their careers because the top layer of their field is capped by older workers. This occurs in every area, from the pastorate to the construction site. The aspirations, financial goals, and vocational desires of younger generations are stymied by the decisions of seniors to postpone retirement.

If the effect on these stakeholders is taken into consideration, conscientious seniors may be moved to retire sooner rather than later.

—*Kent Van Til
Holland, Mich.*

I agree that after a life of service to God pursuing a career it is good to allow ourselves some relaxation (FAQ, May 2014). But I don’t think we should sit back and think about ourselves. An additional calling should be to become more of a servant as Christ calls us to be.

There are numerous opportunities to volunteer even if you are physically unable to go out into the community. What a satisfying feeling it is to be able to help others by spending some of your newfound time using the gifts, talents, and resources God has given you.

—*Bob Theule
Grand Rapids, Mich.*

Grace Mic’d

Congratulations on Victor Ko’s inspiring article “Grace Mic’d” (May 2014). Prayer is the best evangelism tool for introducing people to the grace of Jesus. We don’t just pray for people who need Jesus; we pray with them. That’s when God shows up.

When we honor the prayers and testimonies of non-Christians and encourage them to intercede with God for whatever they need, Jesus answers. When we honor the prayers and testimonies of children ages 4 to 14, they are the most likely to respond to the Good News, are often the first to experience answered prayer, and are the world’s greatest evangelists.

God will surely keep blessing the beautiful sounds of grace in mosaicHouse.

—*Dave Stravers, Mission India
Grand Rapids, Mich.*

Indifference

“The Profanity of Indifference” (May 2014) bristles with wisdom. The opposite of love is not hate but indifference. Love and hate are never far apart and may be directed at the same person, but love cannot take hold in the presence of indifference. Our culture is profanity-laced, and we should not be proud of it, but its real sin is indifference. Now *that* is something to be angry about.

—*Nick Loenen
Richmond, British Columbia*

Modesty

The author writes, “We practice modesty because we love” (“On Modesty,” May 2014). Should we not practice modesty because we want to please God rather than ourselves and others? As Christian women and girls, modesty is our responsibility. It is also our responsibility if we cause someone to sin because of how we dress or act. As parents we have the responsibility to train and discipline our sons and daughters how to dress and act appropriately.

—*Hilda Clark
Grand Rapids, Mich.*

[MORE ONLINE](#)

NEWS

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Grace Encounters Take Advantage of New Media



Taking advantage of new media, Encounter Church in Kentwood, Mich., began videotaping “Grace Encounters,” testimonies similar to profession of faith that take place in front of a camera instead of the congregation.

Since its implementation, at least 12 members have testified through video. Twelve more are waiting to be a part of the next recording session. Although some members hesitated, interest in these video testimonials has increased since the church posted a few examples online. Members, from college-age students to retired adults, also have chosen to share them on Facebook and Twitter.

“Young people especially want to show their family and friends back home that they’ve

changed, that God is working in their lives,” said Rev. Dirk Van Eyk. “I get comments from family members thanking us for making a way for them to be a part of this change even though they’ve never been to Encounter Church.”

Van Eyk said that technology has allowed members who don’t particularly enjoy the stage find another means to profess how God has worked in their lives. Members can post the video multiple times and communicate their story on different media platforms.

“The idea came from a conversation with Professor David Rylaarsdam at Calvin Seminary way back when I was a lowly seminarian,” said Van Eyk. “Children at the Lord’s Supper had just become a hot topic, and I wondered what would happen to profession of faith if it were no

Lauren De Groot is a member of Encounter Church who video-taped her testimony.

longer used as a ‘gatekeeper’ for communion.”

“Technology, of course, is a means, not an end,” he said. “Using technology in the church is only useful insofar as it facilitates person-to-person and person-to-God interaction. One of my favorite surprises through this journey is how people have gravitated toward a theme and have become magnets for people struggling with those same issues.”

—K. Schmitt

CRCNA Appoints New Head of Faith Formation

Syd Hielema, most recently campus chaplain of Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, has been appointed to work full time for the Christian Reformed Church, heading up its efforts in discipleship and faith formation.

“My longing and my dream is to participate in the larger process of challenging and encouraging and setting congregations free to be more and more transformed by grace to become more like Jesus,” Hielema said.

Hielema, 60, has been a high school teacher, a theology professor, and ran Redeemer’s youth ministry certificate program. He is also a commissioned pastor in the CRC. A member of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster, Ont., he will remain in Ontario with an office in Burlington, but report to the denomination’s executive director.

Hielema comes to the new position having laid groundwork over the past year directing a faith formation initiative one day a week and making “toddler steps” as he put it, working one day a month as youth ministry ambassador for Ben Vandezande, who was, until recently, the interim director of Canadian ministries.

Hielema said this appointment shows that the denomination recognizes that intentional discipleship and faith formation is central to the calling of the local congregation and therefore needs greater support.

“I feel deeply privileged to be invited to participate at a time that I think is very significant in our denominational history,” he said. He describes a fork in the road where ‘same-old’ is equivalent to disobedience and instead he senses a shift the heart of which “is a rediscovery of the power of grace” in our congregations.

“That’s what I long to see,” Hielema said, “congregations shaped by grace and that shaping happens through intentional cradle-to-the-grave discipleship.”

The new position, which does not yet have a finalized title or job description, provides leadership to the Faith Formation Collaborative Working Group—part of the CRC’s wider refocusing on Five Streams of ministry.

—Alissa Vernon



Syd Hielema

Michigan Churches Respond to Tornado Damaged Community

On Sunday, July 6, a tornado touched the lives of Michigan residents in Kentwood and Wyoming, damaging homes, trees, and power lines over a six-mile (10 km) stretch. The Christian Reformed churches in Ideal Park and Kelloggsville, along with World Renew, responded to meet the needs of their neighborhoods.

Rev. Evan Heerema of Ideal Park CRC said, “[World Renew] heard about [the tornado] and got in touch with me. They cut trees off the street. Members who live close by got their chainsaws out and gloves on and helped wherever they could.”

Rev. Ron Bouwkamp of Kelloggsville CRC said that church members got involved once they heard of or saw the damage on the news. “Members and staff began removing trees at the church.”

Ideal Park CRC served as a hub for clean-up efforts and as a place of refuge from damage. A food truck used their parking lot; relief agencies used the church’s activity center to meet with those affected by the tornado. “We are the only church in the Ideal Park community,” said Heerema, “so we see ourselves as a place of refuge for natural disasters. We are a gathering place, a place of rest, a place of shelter, a place where the presence of Jesus can be felt in the neighborhood.”

Kelloggsville CRC hosted community meetings to connect area residents with information and resources.

A few members of both churches suffered from the effects of the tornado. A Kelloggsville member lost a garage; another family lost some shingles from their house. One Ideal Park family had a tree fall in on their house. No one suffered major personal injuries during the touchdown.

By the following Wednesday, Heerema said, most of the cleanup was finished and the power was back on. The experience reminded him “how quick our church is to help people when there is a need without any expectation of being repaid.”

—K. Schmitt



Trees were downed at Kelloggsville Christian Reformed Church in Kentwood, Mich.

NEWS

Love Says It All: Alberta Youth SERVE in High River

When you first drive through High River, it looks like any ordinary small town. However, the High River SERVE trip showed me how truly devastating the flood of June 2013 was. Hauling topsoil in flimsy wheelbarrows, painting battered fences, and laying replacement paving stones were what I signed up for when our youth leaders mentioned the trip. But the unexpected parts were the most rewarding.”

That’s what Shelby Forster, 18, said after spending a week in High River, an Alberta town of 13,000 people devastated by flooding a year ago. More than 90 percent of the town’s homes were affected; many were rendered unlivable.

Forster, of Iron Springs, was one of 49 teens and youth leaders from 10 Christian Reformed churches throughout Alberta who gathered in High River on July 12 for a week-long SERVE project.

One of the unexpected parts for Forster was the power of the

Spencer VanderSchee, 14, of Woodynook CRC helps spread grass seed.



stories shared. “Meeting countless locals who loved to tell their stories and [hearing] how hard they have fought to overcome the disaster was one of my favorite parts of the trip.”

Although the flood waters receded over a year ago, much cleanup and rebuilding still needs to be done. The town’s infrastructure and the homes and livelihood of thousands of people suffered severe damage. The whole town was evacuated for 10 days. So-called “red” houses with “Unsafe” and “Unfit for Human Habitation” signs on their front doors sit forlornly beside vacant lots where houses once stood. High River CRC’s most senior couple have not even been able to look inside their home since the day they left. Many grieve for things washed away or

ruined. Most downtown businesses remain dark and boarded up. Some have reopened in what is called a “Sprung Structure Strip Mall,” tensioned membrane buildings resembling a row of tents.

(L-r) Amber Stigter, Ashley Stronks, Jannick Verburg, Jonah Abma, Karen Hagens, Jeremiah Rosendal, with Darrin Brubacher of Samaritan’s Purse on top.



SERVE team members let their legs bring the message.

Several pastors from CRCs around the province worked together to bring teens to High River as a SERVE site, partnering with Youth Unlimited and Samaritan’s Purse.

“We asked Youth Unlimited to join us,” said Ron deVries, Classis Alberta North’s youth ministry

consultant, “and they willingly became a part of the story. They were willing to be flexible so that we could make this event work.” Samaritan’s Purse provided the majority of work sites, a mobile trailer with six shower stalls, and even a tab at a local grocery store among other things. Meals and worship took place at High River CRC; Spitzee Elementary School across the street provided classroom floors for sleeping.

Shalee Giesbrecht, 14, was one of the youngest on the SERVE team. “I felt my connection with God growing closer as I served him that week,” she said. “I loved how everyone was so grateful that we were working there. They gave us Popsicles, Freezies, cake, cookies, iced tea. They would tell us their story, and we would listen with open minds and open hearts. After we finished a house, seeing what we accomplished, I felt like I had really done God’s work. It was an amazing feeling to be done and know that you helped a life.”

Rev. Rick Abma was the main speaker during the evening praise and worship services. Referring to the altruism and community spirit created when hundreds of volunteers helped after the flooding last year, Abma challenged those present to seek to be community at *all* times, especially in their own neighborhoods. “We should not wait for a flood, a death, or a disaster to see that kind of coming together,” he said.

As the SERVE team worked at 30 sites during the week, they heard many heartfelt thanks from locals. Even the mayor stopped by to thank them. “You’re the



(L-r) Shelby Forster, Miranda Mulder, Landen Stronks, Tyron Weenink, Duane Whitrow, Chad Van Aken, with Darrin Brubacher of Samaritan’s Purse.

hands and feet of Jesus,” exclaimed one woman whose house sits across the street from High River CRC and whose basement was completely flooded. Another told how, after three heart attacks, she would certainly not have been able to do the “back-breaking” work required to redo her stone sidewalk or remove and haul away all the river silt from her backyard, a necessary step before replacing the yard with new topsoil and grass seed.

“As we drove around town in the beautiful sunny weather, [we noticed] the lack of people outside, in their yards and in their communities. It really seemed like a ghost town at times,” said youth leader Ellen Lyzenga. “Having this group of kids there for a week helped to bring some of the life back.”

Many SERVE participants thought *they* should be the ones to say thank you. Miranda Mulder, a 17-year-old member of High River CRC said, “When all was said and done, the kids were the ones to say, ‘Thank you for letting us be a part of the healing process.’”

“Through every fiber of this event, God led the way,” concluded Ron deVries. “From the moments we decided to go ahead, he was planning the route. We just followed. Through prayer, story, and lives, his glory was revealed. To God be all the glory.”

—Janet A. Greidanus



One of the High River SERVE work groups.



The High River SERVE team.



Mayor Craig Snodgrass (back row center in sunglasses) stopped by to thank the teens working in High River.

JANET A. GREIDANUS

NEWS

Dordt College Gets Health Care Injunction

Dordt College, located in Sioux Center, Iowa, has been granted an injunction that will allow it to continue with its current health care policies until a court ruling is obtained regarding the U.S. government's Affordable Care Act mandate.

College president Dr. Erik Hoekstra explained that the mandate requires all organizations with more than 150 employees to include certain prescription drugs in their health plans, several of which some Christian organizations object to. "While the government has allowed churches an exemption from this mandate, Christian colleges were not part of this exemption," he said. The college contends that it is a religious institution and would like to be viewed in that way. "We believe that religious institutions such as Dordt College should have the right to refuse coverage that runs counter to their religious convictions. While our health-care plan does cover birth control our board was concerned that the mandate also required coverage of 'morning after' and 'week after' pills that have a potential to work as abortifacients."

In October 2013, the Alliance Defending Freedom filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on behalf of the college and in May the injunction was granted.

Hoekstra hopes that the steps taken will effectively communicate what Dordt stands for and how those beliefs are central to its identity. "We hope that our objection to this mandate communicates that what we believe is central to who we are and what we do," he said. "We are a religious educational institution with a mission to equip students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively for Christ-centered renewal in all areas of life. Further, we hope the government will see that religious convictions and obedience to God's norms for human life extend beyond the door of the church into every area of life."

—Kyle Hoogendoorn



Staking a Solid Foundation

"In publicly accepting the promises God made to us in baptism, we stake a claim on our faith and our church." That was the message of a profession of faith class at Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church. As part of the service, the students drove a stake into the ground to create a marker of this significant part of their faith journey.

The idea for the staking ceremony came out of a discussion in a profession of faith class. The class, made up of middle school aged youth, talked about the doubts that

Meadowlands Fellowship CRC youth mark their profession of faith with stakes in the church's garden.

putting a stake in the ground to function like an anchor." Almost immediately, one student asked if they could do just that and drive an actual stake into the ground at church.

The ceremony took place at the close of the service when the congregation filed outside to the gardens beside the church. While each student drove a wooden stake into the ground in the garden, Vander Horst read the verse that was inscribed on it. Vander Horst then gave the benediction, and the congregation responded with singing "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow." After the service, congregation members were invited to highlight their favorite verse in each student's Bible.

The stakes, made of black locust, will last in the ground for many years, so students can return to the garden and see this marker of their profession. Vander Horst anticipates that this might become a tradition for future classes, or at least an option for students to participate in. He sees a need for churches to develop a culture in which members can implement ideas like this one. "Especially when young people come up with an idea, rather than default to 'no, it won't work,'" said Vander Horst, "try to say yes."

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt



Student Meaghan Flokstra drives her stake into the ground.

are part of every Christian's walk with God. Pastor Everett Vander Horst explained that publicly professing their faith is one of those moments students could look back on and remember their commitment, "like

Sharing Food and Faith in Fredericton

Reaching out to neighbors is sometimes as simple as sharing a meal together. Each Tuesday afternoon in the summer, volunteers gather at a park in Fredericton, New Brunswick, to provide a meal for people in need and to build community. Located one kilometer from Fredericton Christian Reformed Church, this outreach ministry began three years ago at Neville Street Park, which is adjacent to a low income housing neighborhood.

Henny Drost, a member of Fredericton CRC, has been part of this ministry from its beginning. "When it started, the main goal was the children," said Drost. "We



HENNY DROST

Sharing a meal on Tuesday afternoons at Neville Street Park in Fredericton.

wanted to help those who suffer poverty and abuse."

They meet in the park for a time of food and fellowship with 10 to 15 families who live in the housing complex. "It's very simple," Drost explained. "We set up a table, bring food, and share it with the families. We say a short prayer and hang out with them

while the kids play in the park. It's just a bit of support to say, 'I care too.'"

Through these relationships, volunteers are able to help out in various other ways. One helps people with tax returns. Drost brings several neighborhood girls to the GEMS club at Fredericton CRC each week, and deacons have

been able to help some of the families in need.

Drost would love to develop their winter program as well. Last winter, church members made up meal plates and brought them to the families each Tuesday. Drost would like to have an indoor space to meet and organize crafts and games for the children.

"It's not just the food they need. The biggest value I see is the interaction," said Drost. "Even if you can't count the impact, even if it's just one person who is blessed through this, this is something I enjoy and a way I can use the gifts God has given me."

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

Teaching Ethics in Prison

"They were completely engaged in the material. The poignancy of the stories they would tell far exceeded the material I was used to getting." This was Lee Hardy, a philosophy professor at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., talking about his students. The students ranged in age from mid-20s to late 50s. Many came from broken homes and have experienced severe poverty and racism. All were inmates at Handlon Correctional Facility.

Students taking the three-credit course, titled "Ethics and Christian Life," met for about four months, two hours at a time. It consisted of readings, tests, and writing assignments, just like a regular course Hardy would teach at Calvin. He heard about the program through Calvin Theological Seminary, which had been offering courses at the facility for a few years.

Hardy, who is a member of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, began the course with Plato's *Republic*, and from there moved into the study of the Ten Com-



Calvin College professor Lee Hardy

mandments, the Beatitudes, and the Christian concept of vocation, to name a few topics. "I soon learned that I needed to allow more time for discussion. [My students] had things they wanted to say, and our class represented one of the few opportunities they had to speak and be heard, where people listened to them, took them seriously, and responded to their ideas and opinions."

Teaching at Handlon also gave Hardy a firsthand look at God's redemption. "I was privileged to witness God at work in dramatic ways, to see lives turned around. It renewed my appreciation of the power of God's Spirit and the unpredictable ways of God's grace."

—Callie Feyen

NEWS

CHURCH WORLDWIDE

A Ban on New Church Construction Angers Sudanese Christians

Christians in Sudan frequently face arrests, impromptu questioning, and expulsion. But conditions worsened after the government announced a ban on the construction of new churches.

Shalil Abdullah, the Sudanese minister for guidance and religious endowments, made the announcement on July 12, sparking criticism from top Christian clerics who warned of shrinking worship space in the mainly Muslim and Arab north.

After South Sudan's independence in 2011, many Christians moved to the newly formed country, which has a large Christian population. But a sizable number remained.

Abdullah argued there is no need to grant plots of land for new churches since the existing ones were enough for the remaining Christians.

The Rev. Kori Elramla Kori Kuku, general secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches, said the government's intentions were shocking and misleading.

"We (Christians) have the right to have new plots of land and building of new churches," he said. "We need the churches for the growing of Sudanese Christians."

The human rights organization Christian Solidarity Worldwide, which works on behalf of persecuted Christians, issued a statement saying the continued practice of demolishing and confiscating church land constitutes a violation of the right of freedom of religion or belief.

Sudanese religious freedom became a rallying cry after the sentencing to death of Meriam Yahya Ibrahim, a Christian woman who was charged with apostasy. Eventually Ibrahim, who is married to an American citizen from South Sudan, was freed and has since moved to the United States.

—Religion News Service



All Saints' Cathedral in Khartoum is an Anglican church and one of the houses of worship that the Sudanese government says is enough to serve the remaining Christian population.

PHOTO BY FREDRICK INZVILL

Minnesota Youth Find Community at Church Hangout



Kristin Sterk makes meals for young people every week at Open Rock.

In a culture that offers endless choices of afterschool activities and programs, the young people of Willmar (Minn.) Christian Reformed Church and Unity CRC in Prinsburg choose simple community.

Every Monday evening year round, 10 to 20 middle and high school students gather in their youth building to share a meal together, work on homework, use the computer, and play fooseball and pool. They call it "Open Rock"—named after their youth building called "The Rock." Dan Sterk, the youth pastor for both churches, said, "It is very low key. It is very simple. It's youth ministry at its finest for being relational."

The majority of the young people are from Willmar CRC or Unity CRC, but many feel comfortable bringing friends because of the relational and nonthreatening environment. "It can be a gateway. We are not

intimidating. They will actually come to a youth group night," said Sterk. The nonstructured environment gives youth leaders the opportunity to connect one-on-one with kids.

Young people are drawn to community, but they also gravitate to good food. Kristin Sterk, Dan's wife, makes meals and visits with the young people every week at Open Rock. "Kids will send me a text message asking what is for dinner tonight," said Dan Sterk.

Young people met intermittently for Open Rock until a little over a year ago Dan and Kristin Sterk made it a weekly, year-round event. "There is something about kids and a desire for community. If you start building this sense of community and if you feed them they will come," said Dan.

—Amy Toornstra

FAQs

Outreach

Q Do we take the salvation of our neighbors seriously enough? Our church has no real outreach plans, and other than the occasional sermon that mentions hell, it appears we've forgotten what is at stake. Shouldn't we be more urgent?

A Sharing the hope of the gospel with our friends and our neighbors should be embraced as a gift. Yet it is normal that we are sometimes reticent to share this hope with those closest to us. Our religious views are a deeply personal subject, and not all of us feel prepared to discuss such matters.

It is helpful to think of salvation as much broader than just what happens after we die. It certainly includes that. But if that's all, we are giving short shrift to the wideness of the gospel. When we frame salvation as tapping into life with the Creator of the universe, we see our entire existence as part of a broader divine reality in which we are intimately connected to everything—and everyone—in creation.

Christ invites and enables us to be freed from things that enslave us—worry, greed, selfishness, destructive habits, and more—while bringing us into a life of trust, selflessness, and devotion to a purpose and person greater than ourselves. Salvation is right now! It is something we need to experience and embrace daily. And this changes how we relate to other people, our neighborhood, and even our planet.

Ideally, such an ongoing transformative relationship with God is evident in everything we do. When that happens, a conversation about what motivates you might be a natural topic of conversation.

Let's reframe salvation from a focus on escape from punishment after we die to experiencing life with God in Christ now. This difference will be good for our neighbors and our neighborhood.

—Bryan Berghoef was a CRC church planter and is the author of *Pub Theology: Beer, Conversation, and God*.

Conflict will always be messy, and it is never fun.

Ethics

Q When does income inequality become a justice issue?

A The growing gap between wealthy elites and people surviving in poverty is on the public agenda in a new way. Using historical research, economist Thomas Piketty concludes that a large wealth gap is bad for capitalism in a book titled *Capital for the Twenty-first Century*. Market economies work better, he argues, when governments take measures to reduce the gap through tax policies and public services that benefit everyone.

People who read the Bible should not be surprised by Piketty's research. Nations do well, promises Scripture, when people put justice first. Not all income inequality is unjust. Absolute equality in wealth can be unjust if it does not take account of different circumstances.

A justice lens prompts a different question, but it does not ignore inequality. It focuses on living together in a way that allows every person to fulfill God's calling to care for God's world. When limited access to resources prevents people from living with dignity and using their God-given gifts to contribute to society, then something is wrong with the way resources are being managed. God created enough for all.

When people use wealth and power to control others or to "play god" in the lives of other people instead of enabling others to be co-creators with God, then relations between rich and poor are unjust.

Justice leads us to ask more challenging questions but also more hopeful ones in the important public debate about distribution of wealth in our times.

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

Faith Formation

Q It seems like we're "paralyzed disciples."

Q Twenty years ago our classis was traumatized by the women in office debates. Our own congregation was not damaged by this turmoil, but our pastor confided that it's almost impossible to start new initiatives because we're so anxious about returning to those difficult times. Is this disease terminal?

A I sure hope not! Your congregation needs to learn that healthy churches need conflict, provided that this conflict is surrendered to the Holy Spirit and covered by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Only two kinds of churches never have conflict. The first is cults, because they have given one person permission to make every decision. The second is dead churches, because they have nothing to decide that matters. Your paralysis is headed toward the second category.

I would encourage your pastor to preach a four-week series on conflicts in the book of Acts, pointing out the crucial role these conflicts played in the growth of the church. Proverbs 27:17 could be used as a motif throughout the series: "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." It might also be wise to bring someone in to lead a workshop with your council along the lines of "How the Spirit uses conflict to mature the church."

Conflict will always be messy, and it is never fun. But on this side of that final trumpet, we can't escape it. I like to say that the Lord desires to use our unholy conflicts as "holy growing pains" for his transforming work in and through us. It's difficult but crucial.

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



A Case for ★ CHRISTIAN ★ Schools

“The overall aim of Christian schools is to help students become citizens of the kingdom of God, responsive disciples of Jesus Christ.”

—HARRO VAN BRUMMELEN, EDUCATOR

THE GYM was too small, the bus ride too long, and the musty building too old. In my mind, those seemed like three good reasons for me to leave the Christian school I attended for the local public secondary school. Having just turned 13 and needing to assert my independence, I informed my parents of my decision.

Needless to say, after a long conversation that included references to the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 1), Psalm 78, and a visionary pastor named Rev. Van

Andel, I began to understand that my parents' vision for Christian education was much deeper and wider than a hardwood floor and Plexiglas backboards.

As parents consider home school, public school, or Christian school for their child's education, what many hope to find is a place where their vision for their child and the school's vision for learning overlap.

One of the privileges of my work as a Christian school principal is speaking with new parents who are exploring the possibility of enrolling their children in

a Christian school for the first time. Areas such as athletics, ACT scores, formational practices, mission statements, music programs, science labs, service projects, and even a large gym might all be part of their vision for their child's education. But what if a family was asked to strip that vision down to the core? Why might Christian education be the right fit?

Families considering Christian schools can expect that these schools will partner with them in helping their children understand that our whole world belongs to God. They can expect that, through

experiences both in and out of the classroom, their children will better understand how to be responsive disciples of Jesus Christ.

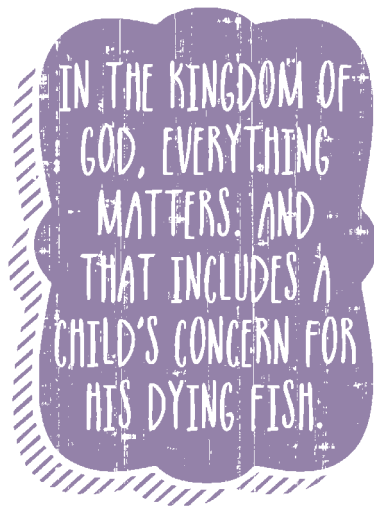
The purpose of Christian teaching, according to educator John Van Dyk, is “to equip our students for works of service. That is, to enable them to function as knowledgeable and competent disciples of the Lord, exercising their kingdom tasks by hearing the will of the Lord and implementing it wherever they find themselves.” Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff puts it this way: “The aim of Christian education must be to conduct education and scholarship from a Christian *perspective*.” Wolterstorff suggests that a robust Christian perspective must do much more than just point out the errors in secular thinking; rather it must offer an alternative that demonstrates to students what it means to be a peculiar people with particular practices.

The Context of Faith

When students and teachers engage learning from this perspective, everything in Christian schools becomes distinct because the core values and truths are framed through the biblical narrative. Student learning is nurtured in the context of faith. The pedagogy teachers use, the topics they choose to teach, and how a school implements its discipline policies must all reflect the story of salvation.

When this happens, the Christian school curriculum provides time and space for students to learn how mathematics, poetry, biology, sexuality, evolution, and the environment are part of God’s good creation. Tim Van Soelen, director of the Center for the Advancement of Christian Education at Dordt College, reminds us that “a biblical or Christian perspective informs all of these parts of the curriculum, helping us understand God’s creation and our participatory role in its restoration and reconciliation in a very special way. However, creation and curriculum also help us develop this biblical or Christian perspective or understanding of truth. It is a beautiful reciprocal relationship that recognizes the need to be lifelong learners.”

Parents should also expect that the Christian school classroom will be free of rhetoric, fear-mongering, and stereotypes as teachers walk and talk with their students through complex topics. In a Christian school children should never hear statements like “We don’t ask those questions around here!” Rather, Christian schools need to honor the questions that are raised as much as the answers. Christian schools must empower their teachers to avoid simple and trite answers to topics that are due much respect and thoughtfulness.



Christian education explores God’s hope for his world framed in the context of the story of creation, fall, and redemption leading to restoration. Christian schools remind students that there is a loving and good God who creates and upholds the universe and calls students, his human creatures, to live in and restore to goodness what is broken. A distinctly Christian curriculum will focus its attention on this good Creator and what he has made, on how it has gone wrong, and on how we might be called to help restore it to God’s original intent.

Opportunities to bring restoration and shalom can happen through curricular and extracurricular engagement. It could mean removing invasive species in a forest or participating in regular stream-cleaning. It could mean having the varsity basketball team spend an hour a week coaching at the local community center, initiating a “buddies” program at the local seniors care home, or providing tutoring

and homework support for children who are marginalized.

The Christian school curriculum must always demonstrate to students how any topic is, in that moment, a small piece of something bigger. A skill such as reading is essential because it is foundational to learning, but literacy also matters because it is a good gift from God that can allow students to become co-creators in God’s kingdom. Jodie Bomhof, a kindergarten teacher, says that every aspect of the Christian school curriculum in every grade matters because “God’s rule extends over all creation and impacts all areas of the curriculum.”

A Role in God’s Kingdom

A Christian school curriculum and pedagogy cannot limit student learning to a transactional enterprise where knowledge is valued for the ultimate goal of high test scores or upward mobility. Of course, Christian schools must value a strong academic program. Nurturing learning in the context of faith means that Christian schools will not only prepare students to live faithfully as 6-, 8-, and 18-year-olds; it will also prepare them to enter fields such as law, medicine, plumbing, philosophy, engineering, and landscaping.

Christian schools need to remind students that vocation is, as Fredrick Buechner says, “the place where a person’s deep passions and the world’s deep needs meet.” Each student belongs to God’s story of redemption and each has a significant role to play, whether in preschool, elementary school, or secondary school. For example, the *Teaching for Transformation* curriculum model developed by the Prairie Center for Christian Education and used by various Christian schools around North America values the given topic as well as helps students understand how that topic is related to being a community builder, justice seeker, or God worshiper, both in the classroom and as students enter their everyday, walking-around life.

Within a Christian school, curriculum and pedagogy cannot be separated. Ed Noot, executive director of the Society of Christian Schools of British Columbia, points out that of equal importance to »

what we teach (the curriculum) is *how* we teach (our pedagogy). “I believe Christian educators need to become increasingly intentional about ensuring that our pedagogy is authentic, effective, and reflective of our foundational beliefs,” he says. Along with curriculum, pedagogy also shapes a student’s world-and-life view because how a teacher teaches communicates what the Christian school community values.

Both curriculum and pedagogy in a Christian school should foster curiosity and encourage students to delve deeper into the wonder and majesty of God’s creation. When I walk into a classroom at my school and see the learning outcomes on the board and observe how teachers and students gather around the topic and learn from each other, it is clear that the goal is not just to fill students with knowledge. Students are also learning deep truths about who God is and how he works in the world. And they learn to respond in gratitude as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Engaging the Stories of the Culture

Children are amazing. Really. Spend a day or two in any school and you will be in awe of the students who line the hallways and fill the classrooms. I disagree when people tell me that kids today have it so easy. While I don’t know if it’s harder or easier growing up today than it was when I was a kid, I do know that it is different.

Today children face a barrage of what Jamie Smith calls “cultural liturgies.” Whether in the form of Instagram or Twitter, the movie theatre, the mall, television, smartphones, texting, the supermarket magazine aisle, or any other idols of our time, children have never faced so many competing interests that desire a piece of their heart. These liturgies seductively and subversively tell our children that they will be fully alive and loved if they “own this” or “do this” or “look this way.” Sadly, many children and adults cannot resist the message.

Some parents believe that sending their kids to a Christian school will protect them from these competing stories. But it will not. A Christian school that does

not engage the culture in which students live does its children and parents a disservice. Rather, Christian schools are to equip students with the tools to identify and respond to the idols of our time.

Engaging culture must go beyond identifying good and evil. Students must be able to understand and articulate how and where and why their desires are being shaped by the stories told by the culture—stories that wear down their hearts and minds. Christian schools must help kids see that they do not need to capitulate. They must offer students a better story—one that reorients their hearts and minds in a radical way. Our students need to see that the story of Jesus boldly proclaims that there is nothing they can do to make Jesus love them more than he does, and there is nothing they can do to make Jesus love them less than he does.

Practicing Discipleship

But is talking about faith in a Christian school context enough? How do Christian schools help students desire this better story and live out their faith? Words are not enough.

It reminds me of trying to teach my daughter how to ice skate from the confines of our living room. We watched skating on TV. We walked on skates and worked on keeping our balance. I could not have explained it any better, I thought. She was ready. Then we went to the arena and got on the ice. What a shock for us both when she fell immediately and began to cry. So did I. I was foolish for thinking that explaining to my daughter how to skate without practicing on the ice would turn her into a skater. Perhaps Christian schools are equally foolish when they talk about teaching students how to be disciples of Jesus Christ without allowing them to be involved in Christian practices.

Christian schools know that students were created to love *and* to know, and they help students direct their love toward that of Jesus Christ through these unique practices. So, for example, when I walk through our elementary school in the morning, I hear children singing, reciting Scripture, and praying together. Kids pray for grandparents who are sick, for friends

who are lonely, for dogs that are lost and fish that have died. What a wonderful response to the cultural stories that desire our children’s hearts!

Each morning these children are acknowledging that our whole world belongs to God. These are goose-bumpy reminders that “nothing matters but the kingdom of God, but because of the kingdom of God, everything, literally everything, matters.” And that includes a child’s concern for his dying fish. Christian schools offer students a chance to “re-story” their lives each day through such practices.

Perhaps these seem like simple practices—and they are. Yet I wonder how children’s hearts are being directed or redirected when they pray, sing, and read Scripture communally each day. In addition, these practices remind us to pause. Yes, mathematics equations and science experiments have deep value, and God calls us to be engaged in these academic pursuits. But in our busy lives, where many children go from one activity to the next, these practices remind us how we are called to be in the world.

This is why Christian schools must provide opportunities for students to practice creation care, to visit and sing with older saints at the care home down the road, and to serve food at the local shelter. These practices connect us to God’s creation and they show students how they can bring hope, faith, and love to a broken world.

Christian schools engage in these activities because practicing them helps students become aware of how to be in a right relationship with God, with others, and with the creation we live in. In the words of Jamie Smith, “Christian education is not just about the transfer of information but also the task of *formation*—the formation of the kinds of persons that constitute a ‘peculiar people.’” ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



Matthew Biemers is the principal of Surrey (British Columbia) Christian Elementary School. He is a member of The Bridge

Community Church and is working on his Ph.D. in education at George Fox University.

Making Space

WHEN MY HUSBAND and I found out that I was pregnant, we had two responses. He danced around the house and I collapsed on our bed, elated and terrified. We had only been married a few months, and although we decided to have a baby early, I knew that we were in for something that my predictions and plans could not fully measure.

What I wish I had known, or been better prepared to face, was the ways in which my own childhood would come back to haunt and hurt me as a mother.

I grew up in an abusive home. My parents are both alcoholics, and my mother was often angry, unhappy, and unpredictable. I often got the sense that my siblings and I were more burden than joy for her. When she left my father for another man, one who beat her and abused us, my sense of worth was forever altered.

As a young woman, I did what I was supposed to do: go to therapy, find a church family, carve out a different kind of life for myself. I knew that I had been hurt very deeply by my childhood and took great care to not only create boundaries between myself and my mother but to develop healthier ways of living in relationship with others.

But parenthood turned everything on its head. Suddenly I was plunged into an emotional terrain that I did not know how to navigate; I was sick and exhausted as a pregnant woman and beyond exhausted as a new mother. And while the avalanche of advice that I got from family members was all well-meaning, it was too much to bear in the face of a larger pressure: my mother's desire to be a part of my child's life.

My mother, despite her mistakes and inabilities, is a loving, lovable person. She adores flower gardens, dogs, and Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*. It has never been the case that I wanted to separate myself from her, even in the face of all that we have endured together.

But that is exactly what I had to do. When my son was about six months old, I realized that my inability to sleep at night was a symptom of postpartum anxiety. I would nurse him and stare into the darkness, listening for someone to break in (which is what I had to do as a teenager, waiting for my mother's boyfriend to show up drunk and violent at our doorstep). My anger and hurt burned into the night, and I realized that it would burn right through my family's life if I let it.

So I wrote my mother a long letter, telling her that, for the time being, I needed space. No weekly phone calls, no plans for visits. I cried, sealed the envelope, and put the letter in the mail. And in doing so, I reestablished a boundary that, in reality, will need to be revisited time and time again.

My inability to sleep at night was a symptom of postpartum anxiety.



Henry Cloud says that “boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me.” For a long time, I had subsumed my mother's needs for family and love as my problems to solve. When faced with my own child, these needs came into great conflict. And while I want to honor my mother, the most honest way for me to honor her is to recognize her for who she is; to forgive, but to also be wise.

A package came in the mail for my son a few weeks ago: a box of books from my mother, ones she had bought from a library sale. He loves them. And I love my mother, whose life has shaped mine in inescapable ways, but whose weaknesses are in God's hands, not mine. ■



Allison Backous Troy is a writer and educator who resides in Laramie, Wyo., with her husband and son.

Where Are They Now?

by Joella Ranaivoson



FYF 2014 students and leaders: (front) Aaron Einfeld, Izhar Alvarez, Anthony Vander Laan, Aren Plante, Laura Vander Horst, Bailey Sarver; (middle) Jessica Driesenga, Jennie Palkowski, Joella Ranaivoson, Cinthya Martinez, Jenny Koopmans, Katherine Van Herk, Maiah Rop, Kyra Newhouse, Onalee Sneller; (back) Tyler Triemstra, Quintin Attema, James Jeninga, Anna Persenaire, Brian Hofman, Trey Aguirre, Kyle Kooyers, Jason Vander Woude, Thomas Huisman, Aydan Schat, Christiana Reitsma, Ian Smit, Micaela De Jong, Jacob Mannitje, Carley Van Swol, Matthew Guichelaar.

“I’m fairly certain that without Facing Your Future, I would not have gone into ministry, and Encounter Church would not exist. As a result, several hundred people would not have a church they call their home today,” said Dirk VanEyck, a church planter and lead pastor at Encounter Church in Kentwood, Mich.

Twelve years ago as a high school student, at the recommendation of his youth pastor, VanEyck looked into the theology



Dirk VanEyck preaching.

and ministry program at Calvin Theological Seminary and participated in a program called Facing Your Future (FYF).

It turned out to be an unforgettable experience.

For Laura de Jong, who has finished her first of four years in the M.Div. program at Calvin Theological Seminary, FYF was six summers ago. It was “incredibly formative for some of the fundamental things I believe and ways I live my life,” de Jong said.

“It was the first time I’d come across the idea of spiritual disciplines or incorporating a rhythm. . . . I still remember discovering the idea that being busy means you have less capacity to love.”

You add.
God multiplies.

“Without Facing Your Future, I would not have gone into ministry.”

Three weeks of living in college dormitories with peers and taking a trip to Turkey is what drew Sarah Steen Schreiber to FYF 13 years ago as a high school student, but the opportunity to explore vocational ministry was also compelling.

For Steen Schreiber, who now finds herself back on her old stomping grounds as the newly appointed assistant professor



PHOTO BY KAREN HUTTENGA

Synod 2014 peppered Sarah Steen Schreiber with questions before approving her as an assistant professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary.

of Old Testament at Calvin Seminary, having mentors—Christian adults walking with her and speaking truth into her life—and the friendships she formed with her FYF peers were the striking points of the program.

She has come full circle and now serves as one of the FYF instructors.

So what is this program that has been so formative and important for these individuals who began their journeys in and toward vocational ministry while still in high school?

FYF coordinator Jessica Driesenga, a Calvin Seminary M.Div. grad and Ph.D. candidate at Fuller Theological Seminary, names four goal areas for FYF: theological, vocational, spiritual, and relational. The expectation is for FYF participants to experience growth in each of these—both as individuals and as a community.

Students nominated and selected for FYF are high school juniors and seniors

in whom their Christian leaders have seen gifts for leadership, service, and perhaps vocational ministry. After being accepted into the program, FYF students begin their journey.

First there are books to read: books on Reformed theology and confessions, on spiritual disciplines, and on story.

In early July, they arrive at Calvin Seminary. The first 10 days are spent living on campus in a residence hall and “doing life” like a seminary student. They sit under the teaching of seminary professors, engaging topics from *Missio Dei* to eschatology to the Apostles’ Creed to CRC church governance. They also learn to practice spiritual disciplines in small groups with their peers, led by a live-in leader who is a current Calvin Seminary student.

During this on-campus segment, they also engage with the city of Grand Rapids. The first Sunday morning is spent in worship with a local congregation; other congregations in the area provide lunch and dinner each day back on campus.

The first 10 days culminate in Bridge Day, a day of outreach and engagement in downtown Grand Rapids. Students practice and witness the connection between theology and ministry in the classroom and life on the street.

During the second 10 days of FYF, students participate in an excursion. Divided into three groups and led by two live-in leaders, they travel to another part of North America to engage a ministry context different from what they know, serving with and learning from a pastor and a church community.

FYF 2014 students traveled to Austin, Texas; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Roseland in Chicago, Ill.

The Austin group witnessed and explored what ministry looks like in a post-Christian and eclectic society.

In Salt Lake City, where Mormonism is the dominant religious and cultural tradition, the group engaged in Mormon-orthodox Christian dialogue and ministry with a local church.

The Roseland group learned what it means to be ministers of reconciliation in a racially taut environment on the south side of Chicago, formerly a significant CRC enclave.

Of the several books each student and leader reads before FYF begins, one is specific to the context of the excursion she or he will take. This helps prepare them for what they will encounter when they are outside their comfort zones.

The idea of high school students thinking and engaging deeply in all manner of theological topics may sound forced—until you sit with some FYF students and



Prof. John Cooper gets to know an FYF student at an annual FYF Faculty Picnic.

hear them pondering together the “intermediate state,” or what it means to live and work for the coming kingdom of God, or racial reconciliation in divided communities.

Then it becomes clear that, although FYF participants are young, their roots go deep, their experiences in God’s world and Word are broadening their hearts, »

and their longing for and questions of God are keen.

FYF provides both space and a place for young people who are interested in theology, leadership, service, and vocational ministry to be with like-minded and often like-hearted peers. It is three weeks of learning, practicing, playing, and living with people who may

become good friends for years to come.

This was true for Derek Buikema. “The people were incredibly significant. I hadn’t experienced that depth of friendship before FYF.”



PHOTO BY JOSH SIEGERS

Derek Buikema

Buikema said. Even though the friendships were forged 11 years ago while he was in high school, he still keeps in regular contact with his two closest friends from FYF. Buikema received his M.Div. from Westminster Seminary and is now the preaching pastor at Orland Park CRC in Illinois.

The program has a tangible impact on participants. FYF alumni have gone on to pursue theology in their undergraduate and graduate studies and are pastoring churches or ministering in other vocations.

To Driesenga, the facet of the program that stands out is its emphasis on discipleship. From practicing spiritual disciplines with small groups that provide both accountability and encouragement, to living together in a residence hall, to eating, worshipping, and being in lectures together, the program is built on the

notion that life as Christian community, “participating in the life of the church,” facilitates faith formation and growth.

The students selected for FYF are often mature beyond their years, as well as curious and inquisitive about God, faith, and life. They get to explore these things together for three formative weeks.

But lest anyone think it a dour kind of summer endeavor, students and leaders also love FYF because it’s fun.

“Often, theology and theological study can be presented as dull, bookish, and overwhelmingly serious work,” Driesenga said. “Theology is serious, but it’s also fun! While we take God seriously in this program, we don’t take ourselves too seriously.”

For Adrian de Lange, a recent Calvin Seminary graduate, FYF was an opportunity to wrestle with his future. “I left FYF with a much clearer sense of God’s leading and with serious excitement for God’s



Adrian deLange

work in the world and for my ability to be a part of it!” he said. De Lange recently accepted a call to serve at New Life Church in Grand Junction, Colo.

While FYF is especially well-suited for students with gifts and callings for vocational ministry, young people who want to work in other fields also pass happily—and beneficially—through the program.

When Lauren Riemersma was an FYF student in 2008, she wrestled with a sense of calling to both health care and youth ministry. Today, she has achieved her B.S. degree in nursing and is pursuing a master’s degree in youth and family ministries at Calvin Seminary and is actively seeking where God would use her next.

Facing Your Future Facts and Figures

Total number of FYF graduates:

- 200 men
- 227 women

Impact:

- One in three FYF graduates attended seminary.
- One in four attended Calvin Theological Seminary.

Number of books distributed to FYF participants:

- 1,823

Sample book titles distributed:

- *Desiring God’s Kingdom* by James K.A. Smith
- *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport: Making Connections in Today’s World* by Richard J. Mouw
- *Same Kind of Different as Me* by Ron Hall and Denver Moore with Lynn Vincent
- *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* by Albert M. Wolters
- *The Life You’ve Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* by John Ortberg
- *Engaging God’s World: A Reformed Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* by Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

Profile of FYF 2014:

- 13 men
- 12 women
- 18 from the United States: (Mich., Ill., Tex., Wisc., Minn., Calif., Colo.)
- 7 from Canada (Ontario, British Columbia)

Facing Your Future has been generously funded by the Lilly Endowment over two grant cycles. Sustaining support is generously provided by designated offerings from Christian Reformed churches.

You add.
God multiplies.



FYF students are encouraged to seek solitude for personal reflection, journaling, and prayer.

Ben Hoekman took the FYF journey in 2013 and will begin his second year of undergraduate study at Kuyper College this fall. FYF “played an incredible role in helping me discern my calling for ministry,” Hoekman said. “I am incredibly excited to see where God is going to lead me in my future.

“While God has not seemed to lay out my calling piece by piece for the exact vocational setting I’d like to work in, FYF has encouraged me to broaden the spectrum of these possibilities, allowing me to discern a number of ministry settings where I can be made available to use my gifts for his kingdom,” Hoekman said.

This is the goal of FYF: to give young people a place, space, and time to build relationships with other students in community; to deeply engage theology and ministry and to experience it on the ground in different contexts; and to discern where God might have them serve.

Students grow in Spirit and in truth, and at the end of the three weeks are eager to give themselves to God’s service. It’s a wonderful thing. ■



Joella Ranaivoson is an M.Div. student at Calvin Theological Seminary. She served as a live-in leader for FYF 2014.

What’s Next for Calvin Seminary?

Dear Church,

Facing *Our Future* was the unofficial theme of my third year as president of Calvin Theological Seminary. And because you are an essential member of the community that undergirds Calvin Seminary, I invite you into our Facing Our Future conversation.

Over the course of the past year, I enlisted a creative planning process and consumed more than a few pads of sticky notes to help map the landscape of hopes and dreams for Calvin Seminary. Groups of students, staff, faculty, and board members each had opportunity to post on sticky notes their ideas that could help us identify critical academic needs and how best to serve students—past, present, and future.

What surfaced is a clustering of opportunity questions that we face in future plans:

- What other programs should we explore putting in “distance” delivery, if any?
- How better can we serve churches and pastors?
- Should Calvin Seminary explore offering a Doctor of Ministry degree?
- What learnings from a church renewal lab (still local and in pilot stage) can we share more broadly, and how?
- What adjustments still need to be made to strengthen the curriculum as we center our training on “formation” for ministry?

If you’re willing, please use some imaginary sticky notes and send your ideas and input on these and other questions to me at stickynotes@calvinseminary.edu. Please tell us how you think Calvin Seminary can or should serve you and your church better.

Now I invite you into one more important conversation. It’s about money and our financial model at Calvin Seminary.

When I began as president, Ministry Shares support accounted for about 44 percent of our operating income. In just three years, we have seen that slide to 37 percent. We project that next year it may be about \$350,000 less than when I started.

Because of this, we will need to raise thousands of new dollars to maintain our ministry and support for students, including FYF graduates, in the years ahead. I know that these are challenging times for all of us. Yet I also know I would not be leading honestly if I neglected to sound the alert that this challenge must be faced in order to face the future well—together.

Looking back on the first three years of my service as the seventh president of Calvin Theological Seminary, I am filled with both deep gratitude and buoyant hope. You have helped to mark this journey with your expressions of encouragement, helpful advice, and steady prayers.

Looking to the future, Calvin Seminary will remain clear and convicted in its call to serve the church. With your prayers and partnership, together in humble confidence, we can respond to the opportunities and challenges before us!

Serving with you,
Jul Medenblik
President, Calvin Theological Seminary

Now Concerning the Times . . .

“Stage theories” often help us make sense of times that we’re facing, giving us a sense of where we’ve been and where we’re headed.

I believe they can also help us to better understand ourselves. So I turned to the archives at Calvin’s Heritage Hall to find a 1976 sight and sound presentation that used stages to explain the college’s story. While Calvin’s story is not identical to the story of our denomination, there’s enough shared history to discover meaning.

The first stage, according to the script, was *antithesis*, a stage lasting from 1876 to 1934. The authors defined those decades as the tension of opposites. Rules kept us from card playing, going to movies, and dancing, to name a few. Those were things of the world; we were to be different—in opposition to society.

The second stage, pegged at 1943 to 1950, was *integration*. During this stage the college asked: How do faith and learning work together? How do we understand contemporary literature, with its portrayal of earthly realities apart from redemptive possibilities? How should Christians participate in scientific inquiry?

Commitment was the third stage, characterized by “commitment to God’s Word and the Calvinistic heritage, commitment to making that Word critically relevant in thought and life, commitment to Jesus Christ as its energizing source.”

The script then turns to the unrest of the 1960s and explains how the next stage emerged as *involvement*. “What came out of the unrest of the sixties is the conviction that Christians must be involved in revolutionizing the world for Christ.”

How then should we describe the stage we’re in now? I hope our present reality involves each of the four stages. While no longer an immigrant group, antithesis remains: the kingdom of our allegiance is directly opposed to the kingdom of darkness.

While our bookshelves indicate that we’ve done much to integrate faith and learning, it seems the work is never done;

we’re always in an uneasy dance with the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.

Our commitments, I trust, are unwavering, and our passion, I hope, is to revolutionize the world for Christ.

If we look around, we see that social norms are changing rapidly. Swimming with information, inundated with entertainment, and overwhelmed by technology, we find ourselves closer together in a shrinking world—yet more polarized than ever. Sometimes it seems as if we’re under assault.

A faithful response? Our current stage must be marked by discernment, as Romans 12:2 (NRSV) instructs: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Our tradition has often been characterized by intellectual rigor. Just open any *Acts of Synod* and you’ll be reminded that we excel at thinking biblically and debating vigorously through issues we’ve faced throughout

each generation. But we must surround intellectual rigor with so much more. First Thessalonians 5 (NRSV) begins with the words “now concerning the times” and calls us to admonish, encourage, help the weak, be patient, seek to do good, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks, and test everything.

Yes, concerning these times we must rely on the gifts of the Spirit as we test everything. Testing shouldn’t suggest timidity or tentativeness. Rather, such discernment requires us to be wise stewards of the gifts God has entrusted to us, both in the ministries of our home congregations as well as those we share.

It requires us to continue our tradition of biblically examining the challenges society places before us. It requires us to try new ways of reaching the world for Christ. It is time for discernment.

Discernment is our task for these times, for this “stage.” But lest we think it’s all up to us, read the Thessalonians passage to its conclusion, where we find this reminder: “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.” ■



“We must rely on the gifts of the Spirit as we test everything.”



Steven Timmermans is the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

add.
God multiplies.



Farm women from the village of Yei in South Sudan participated in agriculture training.

Changing Agriculture in South Sudan

In 2012, Benna Jabez, Hapilonia Agoro, and Cecilia Tomalo represented three farm families from Pisak village in Yei, South Sudan, who participated in a World Renew agriculture training.

World Renew has been present in the country since it became independent of Sudan in 2010.

“Our families have all benefited from World Renew’s agriculture training,” said the three women. “Our farms are producing more crops, and with the new techniques . . . our tasks in the fields can be finished faster.”

Hedd Thomas, World Renew’s country representative, said, “Women like Benna, Hapilonia, and Cecilia are spearheading the transition of Pisak’s people from decades of violence and displacement to being food secure.”

Thomas says that while the results so far are mixed, the work done in Yei two years ago is still producing benefits.

“Each year World Renew assists 1,160 families in Yei with growing crops like corn, peanuts, beans, and sorghum,” Thomas said. “The new practices are also promoted through two Christian radio stations in Yei.”

Many of the improvements that Benna, Hapilonia, and Cecilia have made relate to adaptations of their farming practices that can increase the amount of food and its nutrient value. These include the following:

- Planting just two corn seeds together instead of five or six.
- Planting corn in rows instead of broadcasting the seed. This makes weeding easier.
- Weeding early to give plants a sturdy start.
- Spending less time weeding.

The mixed acceptance of the new practices also gives World Renew new opportunities. “We are now changing some of our methods and the time frames of our activities to better fit farmers’ needs,” Thomas said. ■

—Beth DeGraff, *World Renew Communications*

God’s Love Story in the Bible

With the help of his rusty walker, Poncho made his way to the church classroom. He was the first one there every week. Even as the most senior elder serving his church, Poncho knew he still had much to learn.

At 70 years old, Poncho was finally fulfilling his goal of reading through the Bible. He was one of nine students taking part in a Bible study led by Abe Lee, a missionary with Christian Reformed World Missions in Mexico.

“Poncho loves the Bible,” said Abe. “Now he is deepened by God’s love story within it.”

After reading about God’s love for his people, Poncho wanted to reflect that love in his own life. The many hours each day Poncho had been spending in front of his television turned into time spent helping around the house and having meaningful discussions with his wife.

The class also made Poncho look at his relationship with his son, who took part in the Bible study as well. Poncho realized he had made mistakes when raising him. But now Poncho had the opportunity to make things right.

“Poncho apologized in front of the whole class,” Abe said. ■

—Brian Clark, *Christian Reformed World Missions*



Poncho studies for a Bible study lesson.

A Heart for People Who Are Homeless

After living in the residence halls at Calvin College, Tami VandenBerg moved to Easttown, an artsy neighborhood near downtown Grand Rapids, Mich.

She was attracted to the historic buildings, small businesses, and close sense of community. It was home, and this sense of “home” has helped transform her into an advocate for people who are homeless.

“You can’t deal with anything in your life if you don’t have a place to live,” she stated. “If you ask the homeless what they need, they will say rent far more than any other thing.”

After earning a degree in English at Calvin in the late 1990s, VandenBerg began writing essays and stories, finding herself drawn to “people on the fringes.”

“I began to see that much of the good that social workers and counselors tried to do for homeless folks was wasted due to inadequate or no housing,” she said. “How do you effectively coach someone who has walked around all night with no place to go?”

VandenBerg was hired by the Salvation Army to work with homeless people. After awhile, she took time off to start two successful businesses—one in

Easttown and the other downtown.

She then became director of Well House, a nonprofit that provides safe and affordable housing. When she took over, Well House had 143 applications for 20 rooms.

“We have six houses now—soon we’ll have seven—in addition to a number of lots for future expansion,” she said.

Well House takes in persons not served by shelters or other agencies—people coming out of jail, people with addictions, and those who have mental illnesses. ■

—Mike Van Denend, Calvin College



Tami VandenBerg has worked tirelessly on behalf of people who are homeless in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Bob and Brenda Holtrop started the Missio Dei community in Omaha, Neb.

Ken Brings Missio Dei T-shirts For Friends

He hadn’t had a drink in 22 years. As a recovered alcoholic, Ken knew the temptations that would attack him if he chose to attend parties with coworkers. Employed at a family-owned hair salon, he was keenly aware of the role alcohol played at these gatherings. After years of declining invitations, Ken was urged by the Lord to go.

It was a hard decision. Ken commented, “I realized that I needed to do this if I was going to live out what we were learning about living a missional life. I needed to go and love my coworkers.” He brought T-shirts that he’d had printed with the words *Missio Dei*.

Missio Dei is a Latin term meaning “the mission of God.” It is also the name of a new church community in Omaha, Neb., that is funded in part by Home Missions.

Bob Holtrop and his wife, Brenda, accepted the call to start this missional community two years ago. “God gave us a vision to find people who wanted to live missionally through daily relationship-building with the people we come into contact with,” said Holtrop.

As a group, they have served neighborhood pancake breakfasts and barbecues, blessed random people at the mall, served meals at a children’s hospital, caroled at a nursing home, and done reverse trick-or-treating on Halloween.

The Missio Dei community wants to live like Jesus every day, not just on Sundays. “The problem is that we grew up in a culture where Sunday is the only main day. Our challenge is to change that paradigm. Monday through Saturday are important too,” Holtrop explains. ■

—Rachel Gabrielse,
Christian Reformed Home Missions

You can find longer versions of these stories, as well as additional stories, online at thebanner.org/together.

You add.
God multiplies.

Floating Radio: Creativity in Media Ministry

With some 18,000 islands, more than 700 living languages, and a predominantly Muslim population, Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) has needed to get creative in sharing the gospel in Indonesia.

BTGMI broadcasts in 13 tribal languages in Indonesia. With a handful of staff and hundreds of volunteers, the media ministry also coordinates Listener Communities where radio listeners across the country can come together in homes or communal spaces to openly worship and share their faith.



A member of the Radio Apung ministry team guides his boat out to sea.

But some areas of Indonesia are too challenging to reach by land and too dangerous for staff to work on the ground.

Radio Apung—or Floating Radio—ministers to indigenous Muslims in Sumatra, one of Indonesia's largest islands.

“*Kristenisasi*, or Christianization, is forbidden in all of Indonesia,” said Daniel Budilaksono of BTGMI’s Indonesian outreach. “In Sumatra, the Muslim community is closed and difficult. Both preachers and

listeners can be prosecuted if they are caught.”

Each week, Radio Apung staff prepare an audio program in a small studio near the shore. With a 1-kilowatt-powered radio transmitter and solar panels as a power source, one or two men from the station take to the seas in a small boat to broadcast the program to tribes living in North Sumatra along the coast.

“People are responding well,” said Daniel. “This ministry keeps our staff safe and offers gospel hope to those living in fear. Not without its own risk, but it’s worth it.” ■

—Claudia Elzinga, *Back to God Ministries International*

CRC Office Taking Climate Change Seriously

A report to Synod 2012 made a prophetic proclamation: “Climate change is occurring; it is very likely due to human activity; it is a moral, ethical, and religious issue; and urgent action is required to address it.”

Among its several recommendations to CRC congregations and individual members, the report directed denominational buildings to mitigate carbon emissions.

As it turns out, efforts to reduce carbon emissions and increase energy efficiency had already been underway for years at the office in Grand Rapids.

In 2009, John Bolt, chief financial officer of the CRCNA, was approached by a Michigan-based technology company with an offer to revamp the denominational building’s heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system in order to make it more energy efficient.

Three years after the project’s completion, the results are compelling. As of January 2014, the changes made by the denominational building have resulted in a savings of 2,680 metric tons of carbon dioxide—the equivalent of taking 564 cars off the road for one year—totaling \$544,000 in recuperated energy costs.

—Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, *Office of Social Justice*



Trees help control water runoff in the rain garden at the CRC building in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Solid Rocks

Have you ever tried to move a really big rock? It is no easy task! Rocks can be very tiny, like a grain of sand, or huge, like some of the tallest mountains in the world. Rocks are all around us. But most of us don't stop to think about where they come from.

Let's do a little digging. Perhaps we'll unearth some fabulous facts about rocks and have some fun along the way!



ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

Mom!?

I think I am going to need a new egg carton!



What Are Rocks?

Rocks are solid pieces of material that are found on the earth's surface, also known as the earth's crust. Rocks can also be small pieces of larger rocks that are broken from cliffs or mountains. There are three main kinds of rocks in the world:



Igneous rocks are formed from cooled magma. Magma is melted rock that simmers deep below the earth's crust. Sometimes pressure and heat from inside the earth are so intense that the magma bursts through the ground in fiery mountains called volcanoes.



Sedimentary rocks are a mixture of tiny pieces of rock, sand, or mud pressed together over a long period of time. Sometimes you can see smaller bits of rocks in sedimentary rocks like shale (made from hardened mud) or sandstone (made from sand).



Metamorphic rocks are a combination of igneous and sedimentary rocks. Below the earth's surface, these two types of rocks are under a great amount of heat and pressure. Sometimes the heat and pressure are so great that the two rocks fuse together, creating a completely different kind of rock!



Rocky Writings

Find five to seven smooth stones about the size of your palm. Use tempera paints or acrylic craft paints to paint each rock a different color. Allow the rocks to dry. Then use a fine-tip black marker to write a special message to a family member or a friend. Write one word on each rock until the message is completed. Message ideas could include: "Mom, you rock!" or "I hope your day rocks!" You could also write a portion of Psalm 18:2—"The Lord is my rock"—to remind your loved ones of God's rock-solid love!

Goin' on a Rock Hunt

Take an empty egg carton outside, along with a magnifying glass and your wild imagination, and go on a rock hunt! See how many different kinds of igneous, sedimentary, or metamorphic rocks you can find in your neighborhood or around your school. Place each of your rock findings in one section of your egg carton. God made each stone unique—some smooth, some jagged. Others with speckles, dents, or dimples. Just as each rock differs from other rocks, always remember that God crafted *you* to be one of a kind!

Rock-Solid Faith

You might be surprised just how often rocks show up in the Bible. Here are a few examples:

- Elijah the prophet used 12 large rocks to build an altar to God (1 Kings 18:31).
- David killed Goliath with a single stone in a sling (1 Samuel 17:50).
- When Jesus rose from the grave, the large rock that covered the entrance of the tomb was rolled away (John 20:1).

But did you know that we can actually learn something about God by taking a closer look at rocks? Check this out:

"The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge..." —Psalm 18:2

Just like a mountain is solid, firm, and unmovable, God's love for us is as solid as a rock. God does not change, nor does his love for us ever move or shatter. We can always trust that our mighty God will hold us securely in his arms!



Christin Baker is a full-time stay-at-home mom. She is a member of Resurrection Fellowship Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Make Some Rockin' Rock Candy

Note: Please get an adult to help you use the stove for this recipe.

What you will need:

- Saucepan
- Medium-size glass jar
- Pencil
- Food coloring (optional)
- Thick string
- 1 cup water
- 2 cups sugar (plus a little extra)



What to do:

1. Combine 2 cups of sugar, water, and food coloring in a saucepan and simmer over medium heat until all of the sugar dissolves.
2. Add rounded teaspoons of sugar to the solution until no more sugar dissolves in the water (you should see sugar at the bottom of the saucepan when this happens).
3. Remove saucepan from the stove and allow the sugar solution to cool until it is warm.
4. Pour sugar solution into the jar.
5. Tie a thick string to the middle of a pencil. Place the pencil across the mouth of the jar so that the string hangs down in the sugar solution.
6. Place the jar in a room where it will not be disturbed. Leave the solution overnight. The next day, check out the sugar crystals that have formed!

If you want larger crystals, repeat steps 2-6 with the remaining sugar solution in your jar. Place the pencil and string back on the jar, and more crystals will form. Each time, your crystals should grow larger. Then enjoy your rock candy treat!



BY DON KLUMPEEN

LESSONS OF A HOLY LAND TOUR

AFTER YEARS of drawing on stories and teachings from the Bible in my ministry, I was eager to finally see the settings of these very important events firsthand. I also wanted to learn about what is happening in the Holy Land today.

In preparation for our tour in March 2013, we were asked to read the book *Blood Brothers* by Elias Chacour, a Palestinian Christian and the Archbishop of the Melkite Catholic Church in Galilee. I'd first heard Chacour speak in 2010 at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., where he told of his difficulties in getting a permit from the government in Jerusalem to build a gymnasium for his inter-religious school near Haifa, Israel. Chacour's school is a peace-building endeavor, drawing together 2,500 students from Christian, Muslim, Druze, and Jewish families from kindergarten through high school.

Chacour eventually received the permit after seeking the help of James Baker,

secretary of state under the first President George Bush.

A significant highlight of our tour was visiting Chacour's school. He pointed out that because of their common descent from Abraham in the Bible, Jews and Palestinians are indeed "blood brothers" who should live in harmony, as they did during his childhood. He believes that his Palestinian ancestors and their Christian faith date back to the time when Jesus and his disciples walked in their villages and olive orchards.

Contrary to the idea that this part of the world was "a land without a people" in 1948, the land was largely occupied by Palestinians, often living comfortably and cooperatively with communities of Jews. But the history of their relationship since Israel became a separate nation in 1948 has been hostile and oppressive.

We were reminded of that on our tour during a heart-wrenching visit to Yad Vashem, the well-known holocaust museum in Jerusalem. As we gathered

at a site memorializing a "righteous" Dutch woman for protecting Jews during the holocaust, our sad reminiscing was interrupted by the deafening roar of a half-dozen military helicopters passing over the city.

These powerful instruments of control and suppression undoubtedly cause fear and dread for Palestinians, just as Nazi tanks, trucks, and sirens did for Jews in Western Europe around 1940. Signs of militarism are a part of modern-day life in Israel.

In 1978, I was surprised to learn from a Palestinian Christian living in San Francisco that there were many Palestinian Christians living in Nazareth of Galilee where this man had grown up. While in Israel, I shared this with a Palestinian from Nazareth, who sadly said, "That was in 1978. By now there aren't many Christian Palestinians in Nazareth. They have moved to other countries."

In our American enthusiasm for supporting the Jews in Israel, we have ignored

HOW LONG, THEN, CAN WE PRETEND THAT WE ARE UNINVOLVED?

the plight of the Palestinians, many of whom leave Israel rather than struggle with nagging fear, great restriction of movement, and limited opportunities for personal fulfillment for themselves and their children.

Much of the news coverage Americans get about Palestinians is dominated by reports on a militant political group known as Hamas, which has governmental power in a terribly overcrowded section of Israel known as Gaza. As the Israeli government allows more and more new “settlements” to occupy what is considered Palestinian land, Hamas militants desperately fire rockets toward those settlements. The Israelis respond with overwhelmingly greater firepower, causing disproportionately far more damage and deaths in Gaza, and we go on imagining that the behavior of Hamas represents “the Palestinians.”

It is time for us in the U.S. to realize that the Palestinians have a variety of opinions about how to present themselves as a distinct national group in Israel and in the world. But they all struggle with

diminished human rights and second-class citizenship as residents of Israel.

You’ve probably heard that in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations the Palestinians will not agree that Israel has a right to exist as a nation. I used to be convinced that this was wrong on the part of Palestinians and prevents progress in peace-making. But then it occurred to me that if I were a Palestinian negotiator, I would have this question: Which Israel should have a right to exist—the Israel with considerably smaller land area consigned to them in 1948? The Israel with greatly expanded borders after 1967? The Israel with considerably greater expansion through the present settlements? Or an Israel of the future with little or no land area for the Palestinians? And, in a related issue, an Israel that is ethnically pure Jewish, with limited rights for non-Jews?

Before true negotiations can proceed, Palestinians need to know what they are agreeing to. With the increasing constriction of reliable Palestinian land, is it not understandable that some of the Palestinians protest with violence? Is it not understandable that fellow Arabs in the nations surrounding Israel are upset by this blatant injustice?

Much of my own ministry has been among Native Americans. Over 200 years of gradually encroaching settlements of various white groups coming to occupy the North American continent, these Native Americans also suffered irreparable losses including huge land areas once occupied by many different tribes in different regions; the gradual deaths of perhaps 20 million Native people from starvation, diseases, and war; and the destruction of their unique cultures.

The history of our treatment of the American Indians, with the encouragement of government leaders and military power, is shameful and suggests obvious parallels to what has transpired for Palestinians in Israel in the past 65 years.

So I appeal to Jewish Americans and to fellow Christians who support Israel’s development and who see it as fulfillment of Bible prophecy to take seriously what

is happening in Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians.

The abuse of Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli government is likely to have more and more exposure not only to Americans but to the whole world. Palestinians should have equal rights as citizens of Israel or be allowed to develop a viable separate nation. The building of high walls topped with barbed wire, heavily armed checkpoints, expansion of settlements in Palestinian regions, and harsh responses to occasional expressions of desperate protest from Gaza threaten any “solutions” to existing tensions.

The achievements of Jewish people in the fields of medicine, psychology, and other sciences are well-publicized, and they are admired around the world. When will we see compassion for “brother Palestinians”? When will we see creative breakthroughs that replace the boiling tensions with constructive cooperation?

The world knows that the Israeli government, and, in a sense, the people of Israel, are very dependent on the U.S. Americans are seen by the people of the Middle East and many governments as co-responsible for Israeli government actions. How long, then, can we pretend that we are uninvolved, or that we can do nothing about it! Our representatives in Washington D.C. should be informed that we disapprove of the Israeli government’s policies toward the Palestinians.

We are in a position to confess that in our history of dealing with ethnic and racial differences we have made some very serious mistakes, which we now regret, but also that we’re working on these issues and making some progress.

We can then invite our Israeli brothers to do this too. ■

Digging Deeper

- “*Israel & Palestine: A Very Short Introduction*”—a six-minute film clip from Jewish Voices for Peace. jewishvoiceforpeace.org/content/israeli-palestinian-conflict-101
- *B’tselem*—a reliable source for news about the occupied territories. btselem.org/English/

Films (available on Netflix or Amazon)

- *Little Town of Bethlehem*
- *Five Broken Cameras*

Books

- *Blood Brothers: The Dramatic Story of a Palestinian Christian Working for Peace in Israel* by Elias Chacour (Chosen Books)
- *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer* by Phyllis Bennis; available for free download. endtheoccupation.org/section.php?id=52



Don Klompeen is a retired CRC minister with added training for addiction and family counseling. He served Native Americans for 20 years of ministry and participates in outreach activity at Mill Creek Community Church near Seattle, Wash.

Worthwhile Watching: A Christian Critic's Take on the Movies



AS A MOVIE CRITIC who is also a Christian, I'm frequently asked how believers can reconcile their faith with their viewing habits. To an extent, this is something I still wrestle with, film by film. As part of that ongoing conversation, here are a few possible—though by no means exhaustive—answers to the more common questions I've heard.

Why should Christians bother with movies? First, because they're art—another way humans use God's gift of creativity to explore their place in the world. Second, because film is one of the dominant cultural forces of our time. To say Christians can ignore movies is akin to saying we can ignore language.

What should I look for in a movie? The short answer: nothing. Don't go to a movie with an agenda, but with curiosity and humility. Too often Christians approach films as judges, ready to declare them good or bad based on religious morality. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us in *The Cost of Discipleship*, this is not

Don't come to a movie with an agenda, but with curiosity and humility.

our calling: "Discipleship does not afford us a point of vantage from which to attack others; we come to them with an unconditional offer of fellowship, with the single-mindedness of the love of Jesus."

Should Christians watch films with explicit sexuality? They can. After all, some movies acknowledge sexuality as the good, God-created, Christ-affirmed gift it is, while even those that depict distorted sexuality often do so in the spirit of lament. What's more, to decry onscreen sexuality rather than, say, violence, creates a hypocritical hierarchy of sin. Why do we so often object to the sexual content in movies, but passively devour films chock-full of murder?

Should some movies be off-limits to Christians? No, with the caveat that this doesn't mean all Christians should watch all movies. If the subject matter of any film—be it sexuality or alcohol—is a source of temptation and a stumbling block for someone's faith, that person has every right to avoid the movie.

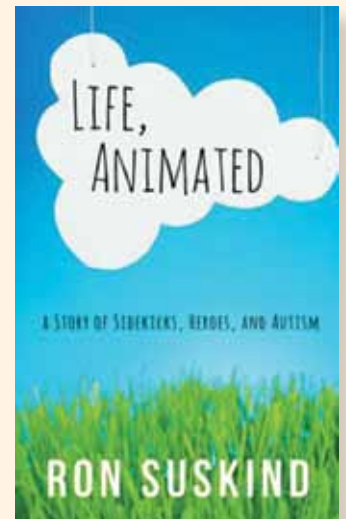
What about Philippians 4:8? Shouldn't Paul's exhortation that we think about "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable" also be a guide for the movies we watch?

Yes, as long as we hang onto the "true" part. Movies speak truth, often in ways that are difficult to bear (much like certain psalms and prophets). The best films are true to the human experience, to the universal urge to know why we are here, how we should live, and what we should desire. As Christians, it's our calling to listen in love to these questions before we offer our answers. ■



Josh Larsen is the editor of *ThinkChristian.net*, a digital magazine about faith and contemporary culture from Back to

God Ministries' ReFrame Media. He also reviews movies at LarsonOnFilm.com and cohosts the *Filmspotting* podcast.



Life, Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes, and Autism

by **Ron Suskind**
reviewed by **Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema**

When Owen Suskind was a typical 3-year-old, he "vanished" with the onset of what was later diagnosed as autism. In the ensuing months and years, Owen's family was able to communicate with him through one means: Disney movies. In this emotionally gripping book, readers catch a glimpse of Owen's parents' pain and fear for his future. But—and this is the overwhelming tenor of the book—readers will celebrate the love, tenacity, and courage of a family who learned to embrace Owen for who he is, an undisputed blessing. (Kingswell)

A READER-SUBMITTED REVIEW

Sometimes our readers submit reviews to us for online use. Just click on "Submit a Review" in the Tuned In section of www.thebanner.org.

A Biblical Understanding of Pain

by John Timmerman
reviewed by Tom Boersma

Pain is an unavoidable part of the human experience. Professor Timmerman leads this discussion about the origins of pain, the biblical response, and practical examples of how Christians can deal with pain in their lives. While providing a comprehensive coverage of pain, this book is engaging and does not require the mind of a theologian to navigate the nine brief chapters. (Cascade Books)



Supermodel

by Foster the People
reviewed by Greg Veltman

Foster the People's second album integrates indie credibility with Afrobeat sensibilities. The upbeat melodies belie the sense of disappointment and frustration in lyrics like these: "So are you what you want to be?" and "Is this the life you've been waiting for/ Or are you hoping that you'll be where you want with a little more?" In spite of the uncertainty, the music inspires a more optimistic and hopeful future. "The truth stands in the end/While you're deciding what to do." (Columbia)

THE LOWDOWN

Good Reading: Does the teen in your life struggle with reading the Bible? Joel R. Beeke's booklet *How Should Teens Read the Bible?* is full of practical tips. (Reformed Heritage Press)

Commanding Title: This month Aussie Christian pop duo for KING & COUNTRY release their second album, *Run Wild. Live Free. Love Strong.* (Word)

Ragamuffin Prayers: The late author of *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Brennan Manning, had completed his new book of prayers, *Dear Abba*, before he passed away. (Eerdmans)

In Review: *Mom's Night Out* (Sony) and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (Walt Disney) are both out on disc this month. You can read what *Banner* reviewers thought of them at thebanner.org.

Whisper

by Chris Struyk-Bonn
reviewed by Jenny deGroot



In Struyk-Bonn's debut, a dystopian society abandons, isolates, and sometimes kills anyone born with a disability. *Whisper*, a young teen who was born with a cleft palate, escaped drowning at birth and has learned to hold her breath ever since. Together with others segregated and separated from family, she lives a quiet life in a forest. Music plays a central role in this young adult novel, giving solace and hope. A good read for adolescents, full of mystery, suspense, and possibility. Ages 12 and up. (Orca Books)

Like Father, Like Son

reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Set in contemporary Japan, this film focuses on a young and loving family: a successful, driven businessman, a musically gifted and equally driven son, and a gentle, caring mother. A twist early on sets in motion a life-changing reality, and another family enters their lives. By contrast, this father is not motivated by financial and career success. He and his wife love their three children deeply in a free and unstructured atmosphere. The story creates tensions and breaks down stereotypes as the families grapple with what parent/child love really is. (IFC Films)



MORE REVIEWS
ONLINE

Looking for the Perfect Pastor

*I lift my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber.*
—Psalm 121:1-3

I REMEMBER IT AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY. The day was November 13, 2010. The place, a fairy ring of redwood trees where I had spent the better part of the day at the conclusion of a five-day all-male retreat. “During your time in the woods,” retreat master Richard Rohr had promised all of us, “you will experience the change that changes everything.”

I had no idea what to expect, what I would find, what would happen to me. I just sat there quietly, surrounded by majestic trees that reached up to the heavens like Jacob’s ladder.

Earlier in the week we had participated in various rituals designed to strip away the junk we surround ourselves with in order to suppress the pain of our woundedness: our addictions, our macho posturing, our nauseating piety, our well-crafted victim status. Doing this brought us face to face with the painful realities of our broken lives, realities that were different for each man there. The truth is, life is hard.

For me, the wound was caused by having been abandoned at an early age by my father. He simply walked away, never to return. As a result, I grew up feeling different from my peers. It felt like something important was missing from my life. As an adult, looking back at the various stages of my life, it seemed as if much of the time I had been looking for a perfect father to make up for my childhood loss. All to no avail.

With that painful awareness I was sent into the woods that day, along with the promise that God wanted to touch me at the precise point of my need, to heal me with the change that changes everything. So there I sat, alone, among the trees, waiting. That’s not my style, usually, to just wait. I like to make things happen. “Don’t just sit there, do something,” was my motto. Sure enough, after a while I couldn’t stand it any longer, so I took out pen and paper and began to write.

Bitterly, angrily, I wrote down the name of a man I knew. *Why couldn’t he have been my father?* And then another name. *Why couldn’t I have been his son?* And what about him, he was a cool dude. And so on and so on. *He would have been great, as would he, and he, and he.* . . . The list grew.



And then it hit me. As I looked over the list of names of men God had placed in my life at one time or another, I realized that even though none of them individually had been a perfect father to me, between all of them God had provided me with some amazing fathering over the years.

One of those men had taught me to work with my hands. One shared with me his love of books. One was an excellent listener. One gave me a place at his table when I needed it. One was always able to boost my confidence. One tried to tell me about women as best he could. Another showed me how to be a parent.

In fact, the more I thought about it, the more it occurred to me that the partial, limited, incomplete fathering of all these



Can we allow God to meet our needs in the way he thinks is best?

And then it hit me again: It wasn't just our whining friend who was looking for a perfect pastor. I was too. Somehow I had bought into the notion that the only real and valid and meaningful pastoring God was going to provide for me would have to come to me through the person of our church's pastor.

But what if the person with the title "pastor" isn't always there? What if she isn't very good at providing pastoral care? What if there are too many other people who need his pastoral attention? And, much more important, why am I limiting God to provide for my needs only in the one way I have decided it should be done? What if God wants to meet your and my need for pastoring through others: a fellow church member, a spouse, a neighbor, a coworker, a teacher, a student, or even the family dog? After all, how many of us are blessed by the unconditional acceptance of a loving pet in times of loneliness or despair?

And here's the real question: Can we allow God to meet our needs in the way he thinks is best? Can we look for pastoral care from sources other than the "official" pastor? Can we recognize that care when it is provided for us in other ways? Can we accept it whenever it is lovingly offered? Or are we too busy whining that the "real" pastor isn't doing his or her job well enough according to our expectations?

Perhaps the real problem is with our expectations. Perhaps we have not yet honestly faced up to what we really need to heal our wounded hearts.

So I, for one, am going to let my pastor off the hook and let him be whatever God wants him to be.

How about you? ■

men together added up to better fathering than many boys receive from their own fathers who are in their lives for many decades. God had richly blessed me throughout the years, but I had failed to see it because I had been looking for that blessing in a different form.

So there it was: the change that changed everything.

Everything? Let me tell you what happened next. Not too long ago, I shared breakfast with a friend. As we often do, we found ourselves commiserating about how our pastor is failing us in any number of ways. Then we remembered another friend, who happens to be an incessant whiner, and we said to each other: "It seems like he is just looking for a perfect pastor to magically make all his problems go away."



John Van Donk is a former Christian Reformed pastor who, after multiple careers in construction, as a truck driver, software sales person, and dairy farm manager, now happily makes his living repairing pool and spa equipment.

Sabbath Rest

CHRISTIANS OFTEN STRUGGLE to understand what Sabbath observation means for us today. The Old Testament clearly prescribes a day of rest from work, as well as a Sabbath year and a Year of Jubilee. The Old Testament Sabbath is ultimately a sign and promise of the true rest that is inaugurated by the Messiah (Col. 2:16-17).

But far from nullifying the Sabbath, Christians live in the reality to which the shadow of the Sabbath points (Heb. 4:1-11). Because Jesus deepens, intensifies, and internalizes other Old Testament commands for his followers (as in Matt. 5), we ask, what does this mean for our Sabbath observance?

From seventh day to first day. In John's gospel especially, Jesus' resurrection is both the eighth day of creation as fulfillment of God's intentions in creation and the dawning of the first day of new creation. Rather than working throughout the

Sunday is a mini-Easter, and is, as the Heidelberg Catechism proclaims, a "*festive* day of rest." So we focus less on somber ceasing from labor and more on joyful celebrating. And if we truly understand who God is for us, the idea of skipping the festivities has no pull on us.

Rest from normal work. Rather than asking legalistically whether it is permissible to work on the first day of the week, we need to ask ourselves a different question. Is my life structured according to a pattern of disciplined work and real rest, or am I caught up in a ceaseless cycle of stress and sloth? If the Old Testament Sabbath was a step of faith that trusted God to provide for his people, do my patterns of work show that I trust God to provide?

We dare not divorce "spiritual" rest from our actual patterns of sleep, work, and ceasing from that work. The two are inex-

The discipline of rest is a key to human flourishing.

week and then resting on the seventh day, Christians mark the first day of the week with rest because of God's gracious action toward us. The pattern of our week thus marks a proper understanding of God's grace and our action—we live *from* God's rest and work *on the basis of* his gracious provision, not to somehow attain it.

Worship. If the point of Sabbath is rest, wouldn't it be more restful just to stay in bed on Sunday mornings? Bible scholar John Walton points out that the biblical concept of rest is not merely inactivity but properly ordered activity. Rest isn't simply kicking back in a lounge chair but living a life that is in sync with God's intentions for human life.

The fourth command—Sabbath—is inextricably linked with the first—honoring God as God. So it is fitting that new creation people are called together on the first day of the week for worship, preaching, sacraments, prayer, offerings, and fellowship. True rest is found only in worshipping our triune God for who he is and celebrating what he has done for us. Each

trically linked. Furthermore, if my work consistently forces me to forsake the assembly of God's people, I need to ask whether I am living by bread alone or by the Word that comes from the mouth of God. Though some may see the discipline of rest as a burden, it is a key to human flourishing, a point that Jesus underscores in his declaration, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

God instituted a weekly rhythm of rest and work *for us*. In a culture full of restless people seeking fulfillment in all kinds of things, a Sabbath people who mark a joyful rhythm of worship, rest, and work will be a powerful witness to the One who alone provides true rest. ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



Branson Parler is associate professor of Theological Studies at Kuyper College in Grand Rapids, Mich. He and his wife, Sarah, have four kids.

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!

After my husband hung up from a phone call, I asked, "Who was it?" He replied, "Mary." Our young son, Sam, then asked, "Magdalene?"

—*Jen Schoenherr*

During a power outage last week, my PC, TV, and games console shut down immediately. It was raining really hard, and I couldn't ride my motorcycle either. So I talked to my wife for a few hours.

She seems like a nice person.

—*Cornelius Witt*

Our 5-year-old granddaughter has had hearing problems since birth. One day she came home from preschool and reported that she couldn't hear her teacher very well. Her mom told her that she would have to visit the ear doctor because her ears weren't working right.

At bedtime her mom talked about how God hears us when we talk to him and assured her that he loves talking to us.

The next morning our granddaughter came downstairs and said, "Mom, I definitely need to go to the doctor for my ears."

Asked why, she replied, "Well, when I woke up this morning I started talking to God, and I

couldn't hear a single word he said to me!"

—*Fred and Cheryl Haan*

He who hesitates is probably right.

—*Cornelius Peters*

A minister decided to get acquainted with a new family in his congregation. When he knocked on the door, a voice inside called out, "Is that you, Angel?"

"No," the minister replied, "but I'm from the same department."

—*Alvin Bosma*

Our family was watching a Christian school production of *Go, Go, Jonah*. Jonah ran off the stage and started circling the audience.

My 4-year-old daughter said, "Mom, where is Jonah running to?" I whispered that he was trying to run away from God. She burst

out laughing and said, "He doesn't know God is everywhere!"

—*Christine Winter*

The owner of a bed-and-breakfast wanted to name his three available rooms after the gospels. Not knowing which names to pick, he finally decided on Matthew, Mark, and Luke. "Now," he thought, "if only I could come up with a name for the bathroom!"

—*Dick Bylsma*

One morning while my 7-year-old son was getting ready for school, I reminded him of an upcoming appointment with the allergy specialist. His eyes grew wide as he asked, "Will they give me needles?"

"I don't think so," I replied. "They'll apply the allergen to a patch, place it on your skin, and see if you react to it."

"I already know what they'll find I react to," said my son matter-of-factly.

"Oh? What's that?"

"Needles!"

—*Nicole Van de Kraats*

Recently retired, I have availed myself of several services offered by our community's Senior Center. Last week I took a safety course put on by the police and fire departments. I failed the course.

When we were asked what steps we would take in the event of a fire, apparently "big ones" was not the right answer.

—*David Hollander*

One day my 3-year-old granddaughter, Lily, came up to her mother with her play stethoscope and said, "Mommy, I want to hear Jesus in your heart."

—*Nancy Van Dyk*



"I think it's a pretty dirty trick not to spell 'phonetic' the way it sounds."