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³² Why Is It So Hard To Talk About Homosexuality?

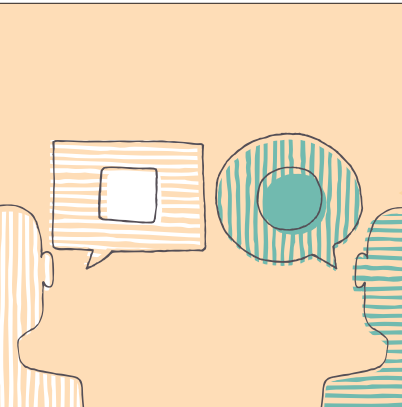
³⁸ My Only Comfort—Really?

²² Awareness:
The First
Step

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from *Lift Up
Your Hearts*

BANNER

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He Lives within My Heart

EMILY BRINK'S ARTICLE (P. 18) REMINDS ME OF A TIME almost three decades ago when synod, the annual leadership meeting of our denomination, had to ratify the predecessor to our new songbook (*Lift Up Your Hearts*). That was the “grey *Psalter Hymnal*” many of us still have in the pew or up on our screens. Back then, synods did more micromanaging. As a delegate I was assigned to the advisory committee that was to propose to synod what it should do with each and every hymn in the book. It was the most edifying committee I’ve ever served on. We sang our whole way through the entire hymn section, noting which songs we thought needed revision, a thumbs up, or a thumbs down.

The most difficult decision, one we debated endlessly, was whether or not to advise synod to include a perennial favorite hymn, “I Serve a Risen Savior.” Throughout the process the song had been included, tossed out, reintroduced, and tossed out again. Reason? The closing line in the refrain goes like this: “You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.” That line was perceived by many to be subjectivistic, basing our belief in the resurrection on our own (subjective) experience rather than on the (objective) Word of God, which clearly tells us that Jesus rose. Others argued that the hymn does not actually *deny* the importance of the objective truth of Scripture, but that it merely highlights the reality that the Holy Spirit also confirms the truth of the resurrection in our personal experience (our “hearts”). But, of course, the song doesn’t actually *say* that.

The advisory committee finally agreed that subjectivism in our times is enough of a threat that synod should toss the song out.

What happened when that recommendation actually hit the floor is my all-time favorite synod moment. Our reporter, Rev. Roger Kok, dutifully moved to have synod drop “I Serve a Risen Savior” from the proposed hymnal. After some back and forth debate, it seemed clear that the grey hymnal would be lighter by at least one song. Then an elderly delegate took the microphone and gently asked: “Mister chairman, before we ditch this song can we at least *sing* it?” The chair shrugged his shoulders and said, “Why not?” Emily Brink sat down at the pipe organ and led the body in such a thrilling, soul-stirring singing of “I Serve a Risen Savior” that it nearly brought down the thousand ceiling lights in Calvin College’s Fine Arts Center.

Roger Kok, clearly a veteran reporter, spied the writing on the wall well before the echoes of “He lives within my heart” had died away. He vigorously waved his white handkerchief in surrender. The rest is history: “I Serve a Risen Savior” went on to be a favorite in the grey hymnal and has been adopted with nary a peep of protest in *Lift Up Your Hearts*.

As long as the Holy Spirit still finds ways through and around our “due process,” I have hope for our church. Like brother Kok, may those among us who have ears to hear, hear. And may the rest of us receive the grace to *listen* to them. ■

What happened
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moment.



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How Hard Could It Be?

YEARS AGO, a painting displayed in the window of a neighborhood gallery stopped me in my tracks. It was a simple composition of a chair by a window. For some reason this ordinary domestic scene drew me in. I wanted that painting.

Trouble was, it cost several hundred dollars, more money than our family could justify spending at the time.

Maybe I should make my own painting, I thought. How hard could it be?

I bought a box of acrylic paints and some brushes, along with a medium-size cardboard-backed “canvas” for my very first painting. Oh, and a book about how to mix colors.

A few weeks later, during a rare moment when I had the house to myself, I opened the box. Admired the pristine tubes of color.

Made myself a cup of coffee.

Came back to the table and tried to draw a chair by a window on the canvas. Very lightly, in pencil—a pencil with an eraser. Did I mention I’m terrible at drawing? Seriously, I’ve never progressed

beyond stick figures and balloon-on-a-stick trees.

I drank my coffee and replaced the paints, unopened, in the box. Put the box in a drawer.

Years passed. Every once in a while, my kids would ask when I was going to do my painting.

The truth is, I was too terrified to even unscrew the cap of a single tube of paint. I knew I’d mess up.

Last fall, my daughter and son-in-law were in town for Art Prize, a three-week event that brings lots of art to my city. Art in all forms, shapes, and sizes—from two-dimensional works to sculptures and installations and interactive sites. Some of these works take your breath away with their beauty and power.

One artist had two small paintings on display on the sidewalk. I walked right by them. My son-in-law stopped to chat with the artist. Then he caught up with me and said, “You should talk to him.” I went back and looked at the paintings—a cityscape and a picture of a woman in red walking down the street on a rainy

day. The artist told me he’d been painting for less than a year. He told me he couldn’t draw. He told me he’d never taken an art class. That he’d bought a box of paints 15 years ago and put them underneath his bed. Until one day he finally took out the box and opened the paints, loaded a brush with color, and started applying the color to canvas. No drawing. No preconceived idea. He just started painting and stood back and looked at what was there. And kept on.

Tears came to my eyes as my heart opened up to the possibility that I could overcome my fears. Be bold enough to try. I’ve always felt that God created me with an eye for the beauty in the world. But the notion that I could participate in the Spirit’s creative work by daring to act on what I saw in my mind’s eye took time. Many years, in fact. And a stranger whose story opened the doors of my heart. ■



Judith Claire Hardy is associate editor of *The Banner*. She attends Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy.

— HENRI J. M. NOUWEN

I Am Your Pulpit Supply

Don't preachers have a drawer full of sermons?



I AM YOUR “PULPIT SUPPLY”—a term that ranks with “vacant church” for strange ecclesiastical language. I’m a semi-retired Christian Reformed minister who fills in for ministers who have a Sunday off. I enjoy getting around to various congregations and keeping my preaching skills sharpened.

I receive an average of around \$80 for preaching at a church, though I’ve been paid anywhere from \$50 to \$250 (once) over the past few years. For what, exactly, you ask? After all, don’t preachers have a drawer full of sermons? Don’t I just need to pick one on Sunday morning and go with it?

Here’s my routine—and I bet it’s not far from the norm.

I begin a week or two before the preaching date, when the church asks for my text, sermon topic, and title. They usually also ask for a hymn to follow the sermon. I often lead at least part of the worship service, so I need to look over the order of worship, which the church emails to me.

I have lots of sermons on file. But I don’t have a “traveling sermon” that I preach wherever I go. Instead, I consider the liturgical season, the congregation, and what’s happening in the world, and then I choose an appropriate sermon for that occasion.

The week before the preaching engagement I go over the sermon. Typically I see ways that illustrations or applications don’t work because they were intended for their original context or are out of date. Sometimes I discover that my thinking has changed on a particular text. These developments usually lead me to make substantial changes.

The Saturday night before preaching, I spend a couple of hours going over the sermon. I do the same for another couple of hours early Sunday morning. Then there’s the drive to the church, about two hours spent there, and the drive home.

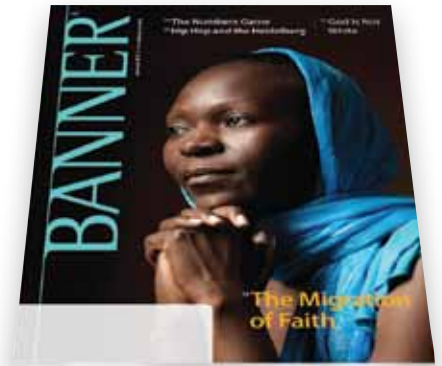
All told, there is an absolute minimum of eight hours of work involved, but usually more like 12 or 15. So the average payment of \$80 works out to about \$10 an hour—more likely \$5 to \$7. Contrast this with what, say, a plumber might get for eight hours, and on a weekend.

I preach at my home church three or four times a year for free. I think of it as sharing my gifts and experience with my congregation, just like the Sunday school teacher or youth group volunteer. But when I’m asked to go to another church to preach, it’s not charity. I don’t depend on the income, but it’s the kind of work for which a “worker deserves his wages” (Luke 10:7).

Do you know what your church pays for pulpit supply? Is it fair? Some churches have not changed the “pulpit supply” budget line for years or even decades. Maybe it’s time to take a look. ■



Leonard Vander Zee is serving as interim pastor at Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Origins

It seems as though Mr. DuMez believes his views are rooted in a “literal” reading of Genesis 1 (“Speaking of Jurassic Ark,” Nov. 2014). But why should this be?

Discovering the “literal” meaning of a biblical text does not necessarily mean approaching it with straightforward chronological assumptions. “Literal” in its traditional sense refers to “the original intent of the author.” Even Augustine in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* recognized this, concluding that a faithful exegesis of Genesis 1 need not demand a six 24-hour day creation period. Furthermore, one can hardly suggest that Augustine (writing in a.d. 415), was motivated by a compromising pressure to “accommodate” Scripture with our current scientific theories!

—Jon VanHulzen
Lynden, Wash.

Regarding “We Need Not Fear the Dinosaur” (Nov. 2014), I wish to comment that the author mixes truth with unverifiable data: “. . . the discovery of a 68-million-year-old dinosaur in Alberta”; “. . . hold a 30-million-year-old fossil”; “. . . hike into a meteor crater that is 50 thousand years old,” etc.

This is science? Unfortunately many people aren’t aware of how truth and unverifiable data are mixed like this and

TTERS

simply accept it because of the truth elements.

—*Julia Dieterman*
Fort Worth, Texas

Revival

Re “These Bones Can Live!” (Nov. 2014) by Henry Wildeboer.

“Perhaps our denomination is in need of revival.”

A Holy Spirit revival in the Christian Reformed Church?

Yes, please!

—*Alic Anderson*
Calgary, Alberta

In his article “These Bones Can Live!” Henry Wildeboer talks about the decline in CRC membership from 316,000 in 1992 to 245,000 in 2014. He asks, “Where do we look for a road map that can lead us out of this morass?”

Pastor Wildeboer had some great suggestions for the church and the members. It seems to me he is talking to the members who are still attending, but will his suggestions reach the “lost sheep”?

In the Reformed churches, we used to have a rich and strong tradition of family visits by the pastor and elders. In many churches this practice has fallen out of favor. Could part of the solution be bringing back this practice? Active members can grow stronger through personal contact. Inactive members could be contacted to find out the reasons for their withdrawal and to indicate that they are missed. A loving contact, including Scripture and prayer, can be made in the home or coffee shop.

—*Bram Wiersma*
Grimbsby, Ontario

Revival, yes (“These Bones Can Live!”).

In 2013, after many decades, my wife and I became part of the 22 percent that

left the CRC. We and others worked hard and prayed continuously for a revival in our church. Sadly it wasn’t to be. For years our energies had been consumed by the existing congregation. We finally had to connect with other Christians to move beyond that.

CRC roots and doctrine run deep, though. Will we be transplanted back into the CRC at some point?

Looking forward to the revival. . . .

—*Raymond Drost*
Queensville, Ontario

“These Bones Can Live!” notes that the CRC has lost 71,000 members in the last 22 years. It is critical to remember what caused that loss. Most was due to the CRC’s acceptance of women in the offices of elder and pastor on shaky grounds. We are now faced with a very similar situation: the homosexual agenda.

Will the CRC once again supersede “Thus says the Lord”?

—*Neal Vanderwerff*
Seattle, Wash.

Humor

I have enjoyed reading *The Banner* for years. The multiple topics throughout the years have provided the church a way to address the questions on many of our minds, which, in turn, continues to provide a forum for the church to discuss multiple subjects.

Additionally, I have always enjoyed the “Punch Lines” humor page containing jokes and comical anecdotes.

—*Robert Hoekstra*
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Over the last number of months, the humor page has drifted away from punch lines, jokes, laughter, and true humor, and instead we have a number of stories about cute children as told by parents

and grandparents. I really miss the real jokes and punch lines.

—*Ben Vanderlugt*
Komoka, Ontario

All One Body

I’m very disturbed by the News article regarding the views of Dr. Amy Plantinga Pauw (“Grand Rapids Event Advocates Full Participation of Practicing Gay Church Members,” Nov. 2014). Her statement that “ideas written then do not necessarily equate to the human experience now” seems to put into question the inerrancy of God’s Word. The example of Paul speaking of men having long hair is very narrow in scope. We need to look at the whole of Scripture. How often is this mandate repeated? I’m able to find many passages in the Old and New Testaments where the practice of homosexuality is spoken against by God in clear language.

We aren’t intended to look at “the human experience now” and try to conform Scripture to that, but just the opposite. As Matthew 5:13 tells us, if “salt loses its saltiness . . . it is no longer good for anything.”

—*Nancy VanDerLaan*
Comstock Park, Mich.

Correction

In the *Ministry Report 2014* inserted into the December issue of *The Banner*, financial information for Calvin College was incomplete; the graphs did not reflect the final, year-end results. For a complete copy of Calvin’s audited financial statements, please go to www.calvin.edu/financialservices/reports/.

NEWS

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Teen Sends Rainbow Dash to the Stratosphere, Captures Amazing Photos

Who doesn't want a picture of space—one that came from your own camera?" asked seventh grader Katherine Gilbert after sending a weather balloon into the stratosphere with Rainbow Dash aboard.

For several years, Katherine, a student at a science, math, and technology magnet school, and her father, Mark, a computer programmer, began exploring



Mark and Katherine Gilbert get scientific for father-daughter time.

The Gilberts' capsule boldly proclaims that the earth is the Lord's.

recover the capsule. The Gilberts lost GPS tracking when the balloon fell below 11,000 feet (3,300 m) and only knew approximately where it had landed. They spent many weekends scanning fields.

On October 31, the balloon with camera was found by a farmer about 75 miles (120 km) away in a cornfield near Reading, when the capsule's cords got caught in his combine. He called the Gilberts and was one of the first people to see the amazing photographs.

The recovered photos are "spectacular," according to Katherine—and so worth the work. The Gilberts released a YouTube video to celebrate the recovery of the capsule and to share some of the photos. (Please visit www.thebanner.org to see the video.)

The Gilberts are members of Milwood Community Church (CRC), Kalamazoo, Mich.

—Anita Ensing Beem



God's creation together through science projects. Two years ago they decided to photograph the Earth's curvature from the stratosphere, which meant lots of research through websites and YouTube videos.

They purchased a weather balloon six feet (2 m) in diameter and equipped it with an instrument pack they built, including a radar reflector, parachute, digital camera, and a *My Little Pony* Rainbow Dash toy as passenger. Katherine decorated it with the words of Genesis 1:1, along with the sentence "And we get to explore it!"

To get the information from the balloon to the ground they added a GPS receiver and a ham radio transmitter to enable them



Katherine, Mark, and friends get ready to launch their balloon.

to track the balloon's progress. That meant earning ham radio technician licenses, requiring months of study and practice.

Finally, on August 20, their preparation culminated with the balloon's 83,244-foot (25,372 m) ascent from Kalamazoo, Mich. The entire flight took only a couple of hours, but it took two months to

We're Still Here! KAIROS Community Celebrates Its Resilience

Five years after losing its government funding, the KAIROS community in Canada celebrated its resilience with "We're Still Here!" events that included at least one Christian Reformed congregation.

The denomination is a member of KAIROS, an ecumenical initiative of eleven churches—from mainline to evangelical churches. Its aim is to seek social change in response to the call to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

KAIROS had been receiving funds from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for more than 35 years. The foreign aid work of KAIROS had always been applauded by CIDA officials.

But in November 2009, the government rejected KAIROS's application for funding. Although the official reason given for the decision not to fund KAIROS was that the organization did not fit the new CIDA guidelines, mystery surrounds the cessation of funding.

CIDA—now integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development—had recommended funding the KAIROS proposal. But somehow the word "not" was manually inserted into what was intended to be the letter of approval. By a stroke of a pen, the letter of approval was altered to say the opposite. Despite appearances before a parliamentary committee and



Members of Fellowship CRC in Edmonton rally to celebrate the survival of KAIROS.

persistent questioning in the House of Commons, to date no one has taken responsibility for adding the handwritten word to the letter.

In the wake of that loss of funding, supporters, churches, and Catholic religious orders increased their support, and KAIROS sur-

vived. This survival was the incentive for cross-Canada events on November 30 to celebrate "We're Still Here!"

In Edmonton, Alberta, members of Fellowship CRC incorporated the celebration into their first Advent Sunday service with a special offering for KAIROS that

raised \$2,154. After church, members posed for a communal photo to show their support for the organization. Children held signs with the words, "We're Still Here!"

"You know how small a congregation we are, so this was a wonderful surprise!" exclaimed church member and KAIROS board member Louisa Bruinsma. "It is so affirming to see such strong support for social justice and to stand with our ecumenical partners in the Lutheran, Anglican, Mennonite, Catholic, Society of Friends (Quakers), United Church, and Presbyterian communities, and together state that this work will continue, that KAIROS is not going away and is still around."

—Janet A. Greidanus

Iowa GEMS Make Donation to Local Animal Shelter

In December, the GEMS girls' club at Good News Chapel in Oskaloosa, Iowa, collected \$150 to purchase and donate supplies for the Stephen Memorial Animal Shelter. Sheryl Woods, head counselor, noted that the girls went shopping for the needed items, dropping the remaining \$5 in the Salvation Army's red kettle.

"The girls were so happy to buy all of the stuff," Woods said. "Learning that giving is better than receiving was felt by all of the GEMS. What a good lesson to learn at their young age! We have begun to fill our bank again. Thank God for all of the blessings bestowed upon us at our small church."

A representative from the shelter came to church during a GEMS meeting to receive the donated supplies.

—Melissa Holtrop



The Oskaloosa GEMS bought supplies for cats and dogs at a local shelter.

NEWS

Historic Communion Set Returned to Illinois Church after a Half-Century

After more than a half-century away, several pieces of the original communion set of First Christian Reformed Church in Fulton, Ill., have been returned to the church. And, as Helen (Putt) DeGroot will note, it has been quite a journey.

From its founding in 1886, the church used the communion set until 1940, when a new set with trays of individual glass wine cups was purchased. DeGroot's father,

Rev. James Putt, served First CRC from 1940 to 1953.

For a while the pieces were stored in the kitchen of the church, forgotten until a remodeling project. At that time an elder gave four of the pieces, along with an old hand-held baptismal font, to Putt. DeGroot said that her mother often used the pieces for floral arrangements even after they moved to California.



The 1886 communion set is now back in First CRC in Fulton.

The set included two wine servers, a bread plate server, and one wine goblet that were later bestowed upon DeGroot. In the 1970s, she had them replated with silver; sadly, one wine gob-

let went missing. Still, she and her daughter continued to display them until DeGroot moved in 2010.

"When I again decided to move, I looked at the beautiful >>

Florida Flea Market Gospel

For many Christians, going to church on Sunday is non-negotiable. But for some, going to church on Sunday means missing out on work that helps pay the bills and puts food on the table. Such is the case for some folks near Longwood, Fla. So Rev. Felix Fernandez of New Heart Christian Reformed Church decided to bring church to them.

For almost two years, congregants of New Heart have rented a booth at the local flea market once a month in order to share God's love with anyone who happens by. "We speak with people and pray with them. We meet them where they are and point them to Christ," Fernandez explained.

Fernandez got the idea to go to a flea market after talking to a woman who, for 13 years, could never go to church because of her business in the market. When the economy crashed in 2007, the



Congregants at the New Heart CRC booth in the flea market.

woman had to close her shop. However, she told Fernandez that God provided for all her needs. "She shared with me how ashamed she felt over the fact that for 13 years she did not trust God."

"I sensed God tugging on my heart," Fernandez said. "If the

devil wants to use flea markets to keep people out of church, then I want you to use it to bring people to church," he heard. So that's what he did.

Rafael Forestier, who believes New Heart is doing important work, found out about the church one day when he took

his kids to the flea market for some shopping. "I love the way New Heart accepted my family," he said. "I think bringing the church to the people is the gospel in its purest form."

Another couple, who for health reasons couldn't attend a morning service, came to New Heart's Sunday evening Spanish service. They'd heard about New Heart at the flea market from someone who did business there. "Even when we are not at the flea market, God is still at work," Fernandez said. He told his congregation that God is confirming their work and telling them, "Keep going back because I have many people in this city!"

—Callie Feyen

West Michigan Church Celebrates Three Centenarians

pieces that I had carefully packed away and realized that these pieces were old historical church pieces that should be displayed in the Fulton Church," DeGroot said.

Earlier this year DeGroot mailed the three pieces and a small baptismal font to Delbert Housenga, a former member of First CRC who had received two of the other original wine goblets. Looking for his goblets, however, he discovered they were not to be found. To his surprise, he saw them on display on a visit to the local museum several weeks later. It remains a mystery how they ended up there, but the museum allowed the pieces to be reunited with the others and displayed at the church.

"This is a most unusual story, and one that makes me feel excited and thankful that it all came together," DeGroot said. "I am so thankful that as I aged I realized the historical value of these old artifacts and made contact with my old time Fulton friends to help in this momentous task with such marvelous results." DeGroot now resides in Arkansas.

A locked custom cabinet donated by Leanna Schipper from the memorial fund of her late husband, Leroy, now displays the six original pieces.

—Melissa Holtrop

It's not often that a church includes a member who has reached the age of 100.

Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Mich., is blessed three times over. Three of its members—Ella Hoezee, Henrietta Meinema, and Lula Ringerwole—have reached the century mark.

The church recently held a special worship service honoring the three centenarians that included their favorite verses and songs. Only Meinema, the oldest



Lula Ringerwole

of the three at age 101, was able to attend, but family members of the other two women attended and read favorite Scripture verses during the service.

"How often does this happen? The situation inspired some creative thinking," said Robert Nesky, one of Immanuel's elders. "As a church, we wanted to celebrate some special milestones."

Two of the three women are charter members of Immanuel, which was founded in the late 1950s. The third joined less than a year after the church opened.



Henrietta Meinema

The service also included a video of Hoezee reciting Psalm 121 from memory. Bob Huisman, the church's pastor, got the idea to videotape Hoezee when he went to visit her and asked her what her favorite Scripture passage was.

"When she recited it, I thought more people than me should hear this," Huisman said. "That was special and touching for everyone to see."



Ella Hoezee

Church members signed a large card for each of the women and enjoyed cake and coffee in between services.

—Greg Chandler

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Willis De Boer

1923 - 2014

Willis De Boer, 91, was a New Testament scholar, a faithful colleague and friend to many, and a veteran of World War II. He passed away on November 11 after a season of failing health.

De Boer attended Calvin College, served in the U.S. Army Air Corps for three years, and then returned to complete his seminary studies. He graduated in 1951.

De Boer served Washington, D.C., Christian Reformed Church and Bradenton (Fla.) CRC.

After obtaining a doctorate in New Testament from the Free University of Amsterdam, De Boer taught Bible at Calvin College until his retirement in 1988. During retirement, he served several congregations that were without a pastor.

De Boer was known as a gifted teacher and scholar. He loved the denomination and was deeply interested in the spread of the gospel. People knew him as kind, reliable, and hard-working, with a wonderful sense of humor.

De Boer is survived by his wife, Gertrude, and by five children and their spouses, five grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

—Louis M. Tamminga
Further information on recently deceased ministers is available each year in the front pages of the Christian Reformed Church's annual Yearbook and on The Banner's website.

NEWS

Calgary Christian School Hires Chaplain to Aid Students' Faith Development

Calgary Christian School has hired its first chaplain in the school's 50-year history. The question everyone seems to be asking is, "Why would a Christian school need a chaplain?"

In most states and provinces, Christian education happens in private, independent schools. In Alberta, however, schools like Calgary Christian School (CCS) are part of a public school system. "Here we have a public/private collaboration," explained Ken DeWyn, executive director of CCS. "We happen to be a public school that distinguishes itself as an 'alternative' to the

traditional public school. Our differentiating feature is the integration of the Christian faith. Other alternative schools might be based on sports, language, or the arts, but we are dedicated to understanding and living out our faith in every subject, discipline, activity, and moment." CCS opened its doors in 1963 and joined Palliser Regional Schools approximately six years ago. The school has 420 high school students and 425 students in kindergarten to grade 6.

"There had been a desire over the last few years," DeWyn explained further, "to augment

staff with additional support to help with weekly chapels and other areas of faith development. We realized that if we were to intentionally shape the student experience at CCS as a definitively transformational Christian experience, a more holistic approach was needed. We agreed that a robust chaplaincy would be effective in actively defining and directing that effort."

Jason Kupery, principal of Calgary Christian High School, cited a heavy teacher workload as one reason for hiring a chaplain. "Educational demands and high expectations, coupled with reduc-



Rev. Layne Kilbreath

tions in prep time and a growing student population, have created heavy expectations for our »

Body and Soul Collective Shares the Heidelberg Catechism in Song

Jeremy Zeyl combined his love of music and love for the Reformed confessions to write a collection of worship songs based on the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession. Through them, he hopes to share some of the richness of Reformed faith. "It's immediately accessible through music—it's a way to share it," he said.

Zeyl's songs were recently played and recorded at a concert over two nights to a full house at Talbot Street Christian Reformed Church in London, Ontario, where Zeyl is the worship director. Musicians included the Body and Soul Collective, a group of musicians from the church and its street-level ministry, Sanctuary London. They were joined by vocal trio Isobelle Gunn and bluegrass band A String and A Prayer.

Blending styles and people, the event brought together



Jeremy Zeyl and bluegrass band A String and A Prayer.

worshippers from a broad spectrum.

"The identity of the Collective is rooted in the Christian community in London at large and beyond," said Jeremy Jongejan, Sanctuary London's worship pastor. "The music is just a

vehicle for us to connect with each other."

The response was positive. "It's awesome," said Dan Tigchelaar after the concert. "I love the Heidelberg Catechism, and I think [music] is probably the new tool for passing on all that confessional

stuff—I can take some of it home with me."

Tine Buma said his favorite song was "Into the Mess." "You know when something lands on you in a new way—this one did."

Dan Flaherty of A String and A Prayer explained how the song "I'll Follow You" was first used in a church service with a typical modern praise team. When Zeyl approached the bluegrass group with it, "he was playing it for us, and we just all joined in—it was very natural. . . . The songs are very adaptable for worship."

Zeyl has enjoyed seeing people come together to create this event because in the end, he said, "It's about more than the music; it's about offering it to God. A few came forward and said it spoke to them in special ways—that's good enough for me."

—Anita Brinkman

staff. Hiring a chaplain has alleviated the strain of that burden and allowed for a fresh perspective on our foundational faith programs such as peer advisory groups, Bible programs, and chapels. The chaplain will also be a sounding board for students who are struggling with or need support in their faith. The school environment moves at such an incredible pace, and in the midst of the noise, we need a calm, understanding, and wise voice to support our students."

That voice is embodied in Layne Kilbreath, a minister in the Christian Reformed Church who himself graduated from CCS in 1999. The Lantern CRC in Calgary called him to serve in this capacity.

"In the few weeks I've been on the job," said Kilbreath, "I can see that the school is running at light speed—I pray my presence will help people see and respond to God's light in the busyness of everyday life. Overall though, my huge goal is to be a friend on the journey, a safe person for students to be real with as we wrestle with what it means to be faithful to Jesus in our world today."

—Janet A. Greidanus

Riseup House: Hope and Healing after Spousal Abuse

As a Coffee Break Bible study leader, Joanne Van Beek had heard her share of domestic abuse stories. She understood the unfortunate reality that the face of domestic violence could very well be the woman sitting next to her in church on Sunday.

Later on, through her studies at Edmonton's Taylor Seminary, Van Beek found herself drawn to women's issues and concerns. In June 2007, with an M.Div. degree and a Women's Shelter Crisis Worker Diploma in hand, Van Beek gathered a group of friends in her living room to share her dream of starting a not-for-profit organization for women experiencing intimate partner abuse. And so Riseup House was born. Van Beek is a member of Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church in Leduc, Alberta.

Although she had never led or directed a registered charity, "I Googled the words 'how to start a nonprofit' and got started," Van Beek said. The rest is history.

Van Beek possesses the same passion she had back in those early days. Although Riseup House Society, as it is currently called, welcomes all women, its biannual five-day healing retreats, each limited to nine participants, are for Christian women who have experienced spousal abuse. Through small group educational sessions, spiritual rituals and meditations, art therapy, music, and laughter, the retreat strives



Riseup House in Leduc, Alberta.



(L-r): Zelda Kause, Petra Lewing, Joanne Van Beek

to create opportunities for deep emotional and spiritual healing.

Responses from women who attended the retreat clearly indicate that such healing does take place.

"I experienced forgiveness, friendship, healing, and renewed faith. I learned skills for my future, like recognizing an abuser," said one participant. "It was life-changing!" another said. "I learned that I am not alone and that there is help. . . . I have reconnected spiritually and feel clear and focused again. The 'ceremonies' we did were also powerful and extremely beneficial to my healing."

Riseup House has come a long way since that day in Van

Beek's living room when she first shared her dream with a group of friends. It is now located in a lovely, century-old house in Leduc. The first support group was attended by just two women. Since then, 500 women have participated in groups or sought counseling at Riseup House. Women from Alberta as well as British Columbia and Ontario attended the most recent retreat. As well as healing retreats, there are weekly women's support groups, counseling services, a resource library, and educational workshops and seminars.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Canadian Foodgrains Bank Growing Project Yields More Than a Corn Crop

An 18.5 acre-plot of land in southern Ontario yielded almost 3,200 bushels of corn for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB). It also yielded a new partnership between Tillsonburg Christian Reformed Church and its neighbor, Mt. Elgin United Church.

It was the first time either church had done a CFGB growing project. Pete Ypma, who coordinated the project, said, "Both congregations are relatively small, but both have a background that



is strong in agriculture, so a growing project is a good fit."

The acreage sits on Plank Line, part of a provincial highway between the towns of Tillsonburg and Mt. Elgin. "We were fortunate to have a parcel of land made available to us in a high-visibility area for the project," said Ypma. The churches split the cost of renting the land, raising cash through offerings and fundraisers. All the materials and other costs were



Matthew Y., age 11, in the CFGB plot in July.

covered by local businesses and agricultural suppliers, so 100 percent of the proceeds were donated to CFGB.



Noteworthy

James Payton took home first place at the annual Word Guild awards for his book *A Patristic Treasury—Early Church Wisdom for Today*. Payton is a professor at Redeemer University College and a member of Ancaster (Ontario) Christian Reformed Church.

The boys' volleyball team of **Woodland Christian High School** (Breslau, Ontario) won the gold medal in the Ontario volleyball championship tournament. All four finalist teams in the division were Christian high schools.

The **Mount Vernon (Wash.) Christian High School** boys' soccer team recently earned its first state championship title. Tyler Houtsma, grade 12, was chosen by Washington Central Soccer as forward of the year. Michael Hancock, also grade 12, was chosen as defender of the year. Riley Hood, grade 11, earned goalkeeper of the year.

Peter VanderZaag, an expert potato grower, recently received China's prestigious Friendship Award from premier Li Keqiang. The award is the nation's highest honor for achievement by a foreign expert who has made outstanding contributions to China's economic and social progress. VanderZaag is a member of Alliston (Ontario) Christian Reformed Church.

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



The boys' volleyball team of Woodland Christian High School.

—Banner correspondents

The crop was sold through London Agricultural Commodities for about \$13,500. With the Canadian government matching the cash four to one, the project raised almost \$68,000 for CFGB.

The group learned some things along the way, including the need to start raising support early on, the diligence required to keep up with the project and keep it in people's minds, and the joy of celebrating similarities with others in the the broader church.

Reflecting on the experience, Ypma said, "To me, the amazing thing is something we witness on the farm every year: God allows us to stick a little over seven 50-pound bags of corn seed into some of the best dirt on earth, and he provides a harvest of what looks like it's going to be about 500 times that!"

—Anita Brinkman

FAQs

Ethics

Q Jesus taught that adultery is the only ground for divorce (Matt. 19:3-9, 5:31-32; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18). Does this mean that you cannot divorce an abusive spouse?

A Whenever there is abuse, the first step should always be to remove the victim to safety. Jesus' teaching cannot be used to force a person to remain in an abusive relationship at all costs.

Jesus' statements must be understood in their original context. Normally, in ancient Judaism, only men could divorce their wives unilaterally. Only under extreme circumstances could a woman request a court to force her husband to divorce her. Hence, Jesus was entering into an ancient debate among Jewish rabbis that focused primarily on how easy or difficult it was for a man to divorce a woman. Within the framework of this debate, Jesus emphasized God's original intent for the marriage covenant, siding with the position that restricted divorce to only one extreme ground—that is, adultery or infidelity on the woman's part.

In this historical cultural context, divorced Jewish women were vulnerable to becoming poor, marginalized, and disgraced. By siding with the most restrictive position in this divorce debate, Jesus was also protecting Jewish wives from being vulnerable to a husband's whim. Jesus was defending the more vulnerable partner in his ancient Jewish culture's marriage customs.

In that spirit, I believe that Jesus would defend the abused partner and would not insist on anyone risking their well-being and their very life by remaining in an abusive marriage. This aligns with a long tradition in church history that recognizes Jesus' "exception clause" as applying beyond only adultery to other instances that are equally destructive to the marriage covenant, including abuse and abandonment.

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

Divorced Jewish women were vulnerable to becoming poor, marginalized, and disgraced.

Church

Q At our last elders' meeting, we lapsed the membership of a large group of non-attenders. I believe there were 23 of them. Now I'm feeling a little guilty about this. Should I?

A It sounds like that feeling might be appropriate. It depends on whether the elders had truly done a thorough pastoral job while in contact with as many of these people as possible. If so, and if you made a decision on each person, one at a time, you're off the hook. But if not, and if, heaven forbid, this was a "cleanup of the records" done in one fell swoop, then you should share your feeling with your colleagues.

Synod insists on three conditions that must be met for elders to lapse membership. First, persons must "claim to be still committed to the Christian faith." Second, they must "claim to be worshipping elsewhere." And third, the consistory must not be "aware of any public sin requiring discipline" (Supplement, Art. 67, Church Order).

If just one of these three conditions is not met, elders must continue their pastoral work so that no one "falls between the cracks." That further work should be of an inviting yet also disciplinary nature. Persistent shepherding is the order of the day. If the non-attenders reject Christ, they must know how serious that is. If they walk away from the church and its ministry, they must be reminded that regular worship is as important for their life of faith as watering is for their plants.

Yes, I do know that such shepherding is hard and time-consuming work often met with shrugs or threats. But it's far better and so much more satisfying than not having cared one bit.

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

Relationships

Q My husband is an angry man who sometimes yells and throws things, also at me. Now that our children are grown I'm not sure I still want to be married to him. He says he doesn't know what comes over him, and he is always sorry when it happens. What can I do?

A The person struggling to know how to express anger must take concrete steps to understand and deal with this problem. You have a right to live in a house where you know you are safe. Anger is energy that needs to be discharged in a safe way. For example, chopping wood or yelling at an inanimate object away from others are safe; yelling at someone you love or putting a fist through a wall are not.

In a safe place like a restaurant, explain how difficult it is for you to have to worry when his anger might explode next, and tell him that you cannot continue to live this way. Be clear that from now on you will expect him to abide by a rule of nonviolence. If he won't agree, or refuses to take actual steps to get help, move out or insist (with the help of a lawyer and/or the police) that he move out for now.

If a separation is necessary, remember that having different addresses does not mean you are no longer married. Rather than thinking of it as ending your marriage, think of the separation as an incentive for your husband to take responsibility for his anger and as motivation (if he loves you) to take concrete steps toward change.

And pray together, if possible. Ask for help from the Holy Spirit, who is our counselor and comforter in times of trouble.

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

BY EMILY R. BRINK

Ten Tunes from *Lift Up Your Hearts*



WHAT AN ASSIGNMENT—to highlight 10 songs from LUYH, the still-new collection of more than 900 psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs! “LUYH” is the affectionate acronym for *Lift Up Your Hearts*, pronounced like the last two syllables of “Hallelujah.” This songbook, edited by Joyce Borger with Martin Tel and John Witvliet, was published in 2013 by and for the Christian

Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America (see “Lift Up Your Hearts,” April 2013). Indeed, the publication of LUYH is reason for grateful praise to God.

But how to choose just 10 songs? It’s a bit like asking a parent which is his or her favorite child. I have been blessed by so many songs! Do I concentrate on the differences between this new songbook and the previous hymnal? Choose some old and some new? Focus on those that are currently popular?

In the end, I selected songs arising from Reformed roots, mostly from Christian Reformed and Reformed Church contributors, to celebrate these gifts offered in LUYH to the larger body of Christ. Some may be new to *Banner* readers, though

they are loved in many congregations in and beyond the CRC and RCA. Also included are a few samples from resources increasingly available online, including hymn stories, worship elements, music resources, and more.

“The First Place” #15

A good first song is one based on Colossians 1:15-20 that exalts Christ, the firstborn of all creation who deserves first place in the life of every Christian. The soaring refrain starts out with the phrase “Every inch of this universe belongs to you, O Christ,” bringing to mind the often-quoted words of Abraham Kuyper, the famous Dutch theologian, writer, and statesman who wrote that “every inch” of creation belongs to Christ. Kuyper was very influential in the founding of what eventually became the CRC (see “Conscious Christianity,” Aug. 2014).

Song writer Matthew Westerholm—a pastor, composer, pianist, and educator—is currently working on a Ph.D. in Christian worship and is pastor for worship and music at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis.

Web resources include a recording, ideas for pairing with “Beautiful Savior,” FlexScores (see sidebar), and this prayer for illumination:

Lord Jesus,
your majesty surpasses all
that your disciples could have imagined.
Your goodness exceeds all that we think or understand.
As your Word is proclaimed today,
open our minds and hearts
to perceive your majesty and goodness more fully
and to respond in joy. Amen.

—*Worship Sourcebook, second edition*

“We Are People on a Journey” #142

Gregg DeMey, teaching pastor at Elmhurst (Ill.) CRC, wrote about his song: “[It] grew out of a series of retreats called ‘The Deeper Journey,’ a ministry of the Great Lakes Region of the Christian Reformed Church. The text names the increasingly profound ways in which disciples are invited to follow in the footsteps of Jesus: from the road of service; to taking up the cross and relinquishing sin; to receiving the gifts of water and Word, wine and bread; to the final journey to our true country and homeland.”

Web resources include Scripture and confessional references, prayers, a recording, and FlexScores.

“Come, Holy Ghost” #232

Bruce Benedict, chaplain of worship music at Hope College in Holland, Mich., composed a new tune to his own adaptation of this classic 9th-century text still found in many hymnals (see also LUYH 231). “I wrote this hymn,” he said, “while visiting my parents’ home in Virginia shortly after Easter in 2005.

Online Resources for Songs in LUYH

There is a growing treasure trove of resources available online for pastors, musicians, worship planners and leaders, and anyone interested in exploring the songs in LUYH.

The easiest way to access the information for these 10 songs (and all others in LUYH) is at liftupyourheartshymnal.org. Once there, click on the Songs tab. Then click on the song title or type the name of the hymn in the search box. This takes you to hymnary.org (an amazing go-to source for stories and information on thousands of other hymns as well). All but one of the resources there—stories, bios, prayers, reflections, recordings, and more—are available without cost. The exception is “FlexScores,” an extremely helpful resource that offers the opportunity to purchase and print instrumental parts, in any key you choose, to match the instruments you use in your church.

The LUYH website, liftupyourheartshymnal.org, also contains other interesting information regarding the hymnal including hymn stories, FAQs, comparison charts for previous hymnals and LUYH, permission and copyright information, and more.

I was thumbing through their Methodist hymnal and starting working through the text ‘Come Holy Ghost’ as a potential anthem for Pentecost Sunday coming up. Satisfied with the tune I had written, I shared it with one of my worship leaders at Redeemer Presbyterian (Indianapolis) where I was leading music at the time. Ray Mills quickly composed a chorus to fit my verses. . . . It was so well received that it eventually became a congregational favorite. The song has now gone on to be enjoyed by a number of congregations, colleges and seminaries in the United States and abroad.”

Web resources include several worship resources, a recording, and FlexScores.

“Be Gracious to Me, Lord” (Psalm 57) #355

Larry Visser composed a tender, lyrical melody for this prayer of lament and hope. The psalm is followed by an optional prayer for times of natural disaster. Since 1999, Larry Visser has been minister of music and organist at LaGrave Avenue CRC in downtown Grand Rapids, where he also regularly plays recitals and leads hymn festivals. His organ and choral compositions are published with GIA Publications and Wayne Leupold Editions, Inc.

Web resources include this reflection on Heidelberg Catechism question and answer 1: “Only when God’s children know that ‘he watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation’ can they sing ‘sleep in peace . . .’ for they know that ‘God’s love shall never cease’” (stanza 2).

“Greet Now the Swiftly Changing Year” #400

This is the only text I’ve chosen that was also in the 1987 *Psalter Hymnal*. While the tune chosen for 1987 was good, this new tune by Alfred Fedak just sparkles with joy, matching the call to “Rejoice! Rejoice! With thanks embrace another year of grace.”

Al Fedak was a member of the committee that produced *Sing! A New Creation*—the first bidenominational song collection for the CRC and RCA published by Faith Alive in 2001. A graduate of Hope College, Fedak has been minister of music at Westminster Presbyterian Church on Capitol Hill in Albany, New York, for many years. He has more than 200 choral and organ works in print.

Web resources for this song include FlexScores as well as this reflection: “In the passage of time, the child of God lives with expectancy—for God to renew them and for God to lead them in obedience (*Our Song of Hope*, stanza 9). Even though time passes and years end swiftly, God is eternally faithful. And so God’s children testify using the words of ‘Our World Belongs to God,’ paragraph 1: ‘As followers of Jesus Christ, living in this world—which some seek to control, and others view with despair—we declare with joy and trust: Our world belongs to God!’” »

The publication of LUYH is a reason for grateful praise to God.

“We Will Extol You, God and King” (Psalm 145) #562

Like #15 and so many contemporary songs, the content of these stanzas is brought home in a memorable refrain, this time responding to God’s call to pass on our faith from generation to generation. I thrill to hear faculty and students joining their voices in this song at Calvin College chapel services. This song was a winner in the 2007 hymn contest for the 150th anniversary of the CRC. It was composed by Greg Scheer, minister of worship at Church of the Servant, Grand Rapids, Mich., and composer of hundreds of songs and arrangements, many published by major publishers.

Web resources include prayers and Scriptural and confessional reflections as well as FlexScores.

“Kyrie”/“Lord, Have Mercy” #633

This simple call-and-response setting of an ancient prayer of confession and lament dates all the way back to the psalms (51:1; 57:1) and to the cries of those seeking healing from Jesus (Matt. 9:27; Luke 17:13). The Greek text is still sung throughout the world. This setting was composed by retired RCA pastor Kathleen Hart Brumm, who has written many hymn texts and children’s songs. It has become a favorite prayer of confession in the bilingual English/Spanish service in my own congregation, with this translation by Calvin Seminary student Roberto (Tito) Venegas:

Kyrie. Kyrie. Señor, ten piedad. Señor, ten piedad.
Christe. Christe. Cristo, ten piedad. Cristo, ten piedad.
Kyrie. Kyrie. Señor, ten piedad. Señor, ten piedad.
Kyrie. Kyrie. Eleison. Eleison.

Web resources include this prayer of confession by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.:

Gracious God, it’s always the same sins. We have sinned the same way over and over, losing our temper, forgetting your grace, silencing our conscience. Like every addict, we have a habit. But you, gracious God, are our higher power, and we need your power this very day, this very hour. Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy upon us. Amen.

“O God, We Kneel Before Your Throne” #680

Composed for the 125th anniversary of Calvin College and Seminary, this song is based on Ephesians 3:14-21. It first appeared as an anthem for choir and congregation with brass and timpani accompaniment. Author Ruth van Baak Griffioen and composer Roy Hopp are both Calvin alumni. Hopp, composer of many choral compositions and hymn tunes, directs the Calvin Seminary Choir. A performance of this song by the

Modesto (Calif.) CRC choir and congregation is available at tinyurl.com/ModestoCRC.

Web resources include a recording and a summary of the sermon preached on this text at the anniversary service by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., then president of Calvin Theological Seminary.

“My Only Comfort” #781

Both the treasured question and answer 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism and the beloved early American tune RESIGNATION come together in this setting by Marlene Veenstra, a member of and former secretary at First CRC, Sioux Center, Iowa. With the help of other members at her church—Dordt College music professors Karen De Mol on the text and Dale Grotenhuis on the harmony—she prepared this poetic rendering so that people could sing this treasured confession communally. This setting became loved in her home church, started to spread, and was also published in *Reformed Worship* (June 2004).

Web resources include background notes on the Heidelberg Catechism and FlexScores.

“Abana in Heaven” #911

This setting of the Lord’s Prayer is sung by Arabic-speaking Christians throughout the Middle East. A Christian Reformed pastor on a tour visited a Palestinian orphanage for boys in Bethlehem and heard them singing this setting from memory before going to bed. He was so moved he told me about it, but it wasn’t until later that I was able to get a copy of the music from an Egyptian hymnal, which came to us through Anne Zaki. Zaki and her husband, Naji Umran, are Christian Reformed missionaries in Egypt. When singing it at a recent Calvin Worship Symposium, a woman expressed through tears that this was the first time she had ever heard the Arabic language except in a negative context on the news.

Sing this prayer as a gift from and an intercession for our brothers and sisters in Christ in a suffering part of the world. I have been unable to track down any information about the composer from Lebanon. (Note the song number, a coincidental but poignant reminder of a terrible day in 2001.)

Web resources include a recording and FlexScores.

There you have my list. Another month, there might have been different choices, perhaps my favorite songs from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, or my top 10 songs composed since the 1987 *Psalter Hymnal*—that would also have been interesting.

As you explore LUYH, remember that when we sing these songs, we join our voices with the church of all times and places, united as brothers and sisters in Christ, giving praise to our God who created us to sing. ■



Emily R. Brink is resource development specialist for congregational song at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Grand Rapids, Mich. She was editor of the *Psalter Hymnal* (1987) and *Sing! A New Creation* (2001), the first CRC/RCA joint songbook.

Feeling Good

THE WOMAN in the red shirt addresses me with a cheerful “Welcome to Meijer!” Her name tag says “Nancy.” Her hair is bleached, her lips are painted the color of her Meijer-issue shirt. Her black stretch pants are maxed out.

I feel pretty good, but I don’t quite know why. “Nancy, you must know where everything is. My wife has sent me to buy mixed greens. Where do I find that?” I say. Her smile disappears behind a frown of concentration. At last she suggests I try the produce department. Not wanting to add to her discomfort, I say thanks and leave her to compose her face from bewilderment to sunny optimism. I’m guessing this woman can’t quite make it on her Social Security checks because she has to buy groceries for her out-of-work daughter’s kids.

As I make my way toward the produce department, an old man is pushing a loaded cart into a checkout lane. The rim of his camouflage hat is a dark halo shading his florid cheeks and bulbous nose. A pair of suspenders, out-matched by the pull of gravity and the push of belly, clings to his trousers. I’m feeling good.

A pony-tailed teen, Marlboro behind her ear, pushes a cart while texting. Tattooed around her neck is a strand of barbed wire. On her left cheek, just below her eye, more body art: feathers. I’m feeling good, getting closer to the mixed greens.

I nearly get run over by a woman driving an electric cart. The metal wire basket in front is heaped with bags of chips, sixpacks of Dr. Pepper, a loaf of Wonder Bread, and several packages of hot dogs. She holds a large cane between massive legs. Swollen ankles bulge over the edges of her scuffed moccasins. A smile of apology accentuates her cheeks. I feel good, but I don’t think it’s because of her smile.

I thank God
for irritating
my eye with
a stubborn
plank.



Sorting through a bewildering variety of mixed greens, I finally choose: Spring Greens. An old man is writing a check in the express lane. The clerk throws me an apologetic glance. The man’s hand trembles, his face a mask of concentration as he slowly writes his name, the signature a daunting exercise in penmanship. Carefully he tears out the check and pushes it toward the clerk. He turns to shuffle off. I greet the clerk, slide my credit card, right-side up, through the slotted machine, grab my receipt, and hustle toward the exit, feeling good.

Nancy is still at her station. As the automatic door opens at my approach, she calls out a cheery, “Thanks for shopping at Meijer!” her smile in place.

Back in the parking lot, my thoughts return to last evening’s home fellowship discussion. The topic had been judging others, trying to remove the speck of sawdust while ignoring the plank in our own eye. Dallas Willard’s assertion in his book *The Divine Conspiracy* that contempt is a major part of condemnation had startled me. Condemnation, he said, always involves some degree of self-righteousness and distancing oneself from the one we are condemning.

It dawned on me then that in my quick errand, I had singled out and smugly compared myself with Nancy the greeter, the man with the big nose, the tattooed teen, the woman who filled her basket with junk food, and the man fighting the ravages of old age. I felt good because, having taken care of myself over all these years and having made good life choices, I looked good.

I get in my car but do not start it. The bag of healthy garden greens is on my lap; in my mind are images of the people I’d noticed. I have half a mind to go back into the store, hug Nancy, and tell her how good she looks. Instead I bow my head over the steering wheel, cradle the greens in my hands, and thank God for irritating my eye with a stubborn plank. And for Jesus, who touched lepers, ate with outcasts, consorted with prostitutes, healed all manner of sick folks, and made it clear to his disciples that neither his nor his parents’ sin caused a man to be blind. ■



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

Awareness: The First Step

by Bonnie Nicholas

It's difficult to have a mandate that includes raising awareness about something that no one wants to hear about and everyone would prefer didn't exist—abuse.

Yet without the awareness that abuse does exist in congregations of the Christian Reformed Church, and without insight into its dynamics and impacts, we can never hope to prevent it or respond well when it comes to light.

Many congregations participate in Abuse Awareness Sunday, the fourth Sunday in September. That is a good first step.

"It's hard to put flesh on things while respecting confidentiality," said Pastor John Lee of Bethel CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa. "But I can say that the family of God at Bethel has not been immune to abuse in all its ugly forms.

"Like many Christian communities, we are pretty good at keeping it hidden. Abuse Awareness Sunday gives us permission to bring some of those shadows into the light of God's grace.

"To speak tender truths, we need to hear and be honest with our need for the gospel. It is also a reminder to pray for



Carol Vander Ark Champion (right), administrative assistant for Safe Church Ministry, and her sister Sara Pikaart, onsite coordinator for the Safe Church Forum at Bethany CRC, find a few moments to enjoy the scenery in Gallup, N.M.

all whose hearts have been broken by abuse and to ask God to make us a community of both healing and safety."

Pastor Jim Poelman of Redeemer CRC in Sarnia, Ontario, used bullying as the theme for a Sunday morning worship service.

"We used the Safe Church bulletin insert on the topic," Poelman said. "A

video on bullying from the Skit Guys was shown for our call to live our new life in Christ.

"In the children's message, our storyteller told of her own childhood experience of being bullied and how, finally, asking for help put an end to the bullying.

"As I considered the characteristics of bullying in preparation for my preaching," Poelman said, "a phrase from my past kept coming to mind: 'Sticks and stones can break my bones but names will never hurt me.'

"Anyone who has been bullied knows this is a cruel lie. Words, texted or spoken, never fall off of us like rain falling from a duck's back. They cut deep."

Pastor Hector Garcia of Iglesia Buenas Nuevas (Good News CRC) in Miami, Florida, had the domestic violence bulletin insert translated into Spanish for his congregation.

"We inserted that as a flyer in our bulletin and the preaching was on the topic," Garcia said. "We hope to incorporate more elements in the future, but for being the first time our congregation had an Abuse Prevention Sunday, we are pleased that people responded very positively. It helped some people to open up about abuse issues they are struggling with."

Creating awareness about abuse is one of the mandates of Safe Church teams active throughout the United States and Canada. Safe Church Ministry works to make available a variety of resources to fit different ministry contexts (crcna.org/SafeChurch/resources-abuse-awareness).

Awareness: it's a good first step. ■

Please pray . . .

- for congregations like Bethany CRC that are making new efforts to prevent abuse and to protect children and those who are most vulnerable.
- for congregations like LaGrave CRC that have discovered creative ministry opportunities to offer support to those impacted by abuse.
- for successful Safe Church events that lead to greater awareness that abuse has impacted many people in our congregations.
- for boldness to stand up against abuse, even amid the fear that can keep people from becoming involved. The dynamics of abuse stand in direct opposition to the gospel and the way of Jesus; therefore, we must take a stand.
- for the Lord to bless volunteer Safe Church team members like Sara Pikaart and Irene Fridsma, who provide leadership in equipping congregations for abuse awareness, prevention, and response.



Bonnie Nicholas is the director of Safe Church Ministry for the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Beyond Awareness into Ministry in Red Mesa

There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. —1 John 4:18

Not too long ago, my church, Bethany Christian Reformed Church in Gallup, New Mexico, formed a Safe Church committee and developed a Safe Church policy. As a church, we felt a calling to the responsibility of keeping all who participate in worship and the activities of the church safe from abuse. Safe Church Ministry has a mission to raise awareness about abuse, to prevent abuse, and to deal with abuse in a biblical way when it does occur.

Our small but determined committee was eager to spread the word to Classis Red Mesa as we found that only one other church in the classis (a regional group of churches) had a Safe Church policy, and many churches had never heard of Safe Church Ministry. Even though it was so new to us, we decided that we needed to share what we were learning with area churches. A date was set for a Safe Church Forum at Bethany.

As we reached out to area churches, the response was somewhat baffling. Many people expressed how great the need for Safe Church is here in the Southwest, but their enthusiasm was tempered by fear and shame.

As we know, abuse thrives in dark environments. In order to address these issues, it is critical that we become educated about abuse and begin to talk about things that have happened within the church. In bringing these issues into the light, we are able to address them, heal from them, and prevent abuse from happening again.

Over 40 pastors and members of Classis Red Mesa churches attended the forum, some traveling over three hours. Bonnie Nicholas and Carol Vander Ark Champion, the Safe Church Ministry staff, instructed us in creating and implementing a Safe Church policy, introduced the *Circle of Grace* abuse prevention program, and taught us how the church can respond to domestic violence as well as the historical trauma and its impact on Native Americans. It was a weekend packed full of worship, learning, and interaction. I'm excited about the new relationships sparked on that day.

We are now forming a classis Safe Church team with members of several churches. There is much work to be done, and it's easy to get overwhelmed. But we know that God goes before us. We benefit from the resources offered by Safe Church Ministry.

Our weekend ended with small groups in prayer for healing, safety, and guidance as we step into this important ministry. As small groups circled up in prayer, the soft murmur of many voices rose in English and Navajo to seek God's blessing. It was music to my ears.

—by Sara Pikaart,
Safe Church team member



Sign in front of Bethany CRC in Gallup, N.M.

You add.
God multiplies.

Beyond Awareness into Ministry in Grand Rapids

LaGrave Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., has been addressing issues of abuse by developing a safe environment for children.

An ongoing step is to develop a safe environment for those who have been impacted by domestic violence. To that end, the LaGrave LiveSafe team was formed in 2012 to raise awareness about domestic violence, to offer a listening ear, and to access resources that can help individuals find their way out of an abusive situation.

The LiveSafe team has developed a set of guidelines to be followed. Often abuse is not disclosed by the one being victimized but by someone close to that person. Therefore, it is imperative that resources are available to all members of the congregation to educate them about abuse and about where someone trapped in an abusive relationship can get help.

Members of this team work to gather and distribute resources from various organizations that offer assistance (the Power & Control Wheel, a useful tool to define and understand abuse, is one such resource).

The LaGrave LiveSafe team consists of seven members who have been trained by Safe Church Ministry. Our mission is to offer information through bulletin notes, tables with resource information, and Q&A presentations.

We encourage pastors to reference the problem of domestic violence from the pulpit, especially addressing the cloak of secrecy that prevents abused persons from coming forward. We are also available »



Irene Fridsma



Safe Haven Ministries is a domestic violence center in Grand Rapids, Mich.

» to confidentially help someone find a place of safety if needed.

Another area of ministry has been to women abused many years ago. Women in their 60s and 70s have a need to reveal the abuse they've experienced and break the silence they have held for so long. It is never too late to experience healing.

—by Irene Fridsma,
Safe Church team member

Shamed into Staying

how could I leave with children
where would I go
who would hear my cry?

when jake and sarah divorced
buzzards pecked at the carcass
of their twenty-year union

they clucked for her
what is the matter with her
women don't know their place
why does she want to embarrass
her family and hang out dirty laundry

they will cluck for me
she must be having a breakdown
I hope he gets professional help for her
her poor husband has so much
stress at work
she should make a happy home
if this really was a problem
she should have called the police
shame on you for speaking out
against your husband
shame on you for exaggerating
shame on you for being so thoughtless

—by Irene Fridsma

Welcome to The Gathering

In her memoir, *Dancing with Max*, Emily Colson describes the challenges and joys of raising a child with autism, including a common experience for many: the difficulty that comes with attending a worship service.

Over one-third of families who have a child with a disability have changed churches because they did not feel welcome. Many stopped attending church altogether, and some even left the Christian faith.

When Colson attended a worship service at The Gathering, a church plant in Holland, Mich., she was thunderstruck by the presence of many people who have autism and other disabilities, as well as many non-disabled people.

The Gathering is a joint venture of Benjamin's Hope, a community for people affected by autism and developmental disability, together with the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. Disability Concerns provided behind-the-scenes assistance in the formation of The Gathering.

Colson reflected on this experience in a blog:

"The band hit the first note and people flooded forward, dancing. I could feel my heart race; I'd been waiting 20 years to experience this—ever since my son Max was diagnosed with autism.

"At The Gathering, residents, family members, friends, and people who have not felt welcome at other churches worship weekly. Dancing is encouraged. Jumping is expected. Sitting is optional.

"In his message, pastor Eric Peterson told us about God's power to help us when we ask him. In the middle of a point, a commotion broke out beside me. Two young women with disabilities were visibly upset.

"Is everything OK?' Pastor Eric asked gently. 'Should we stop and pray?'

"As if waiting for the invitation, several young men who also have disabilities jumped forward to pray. I ached at the simple beauty of stopping life, of asking God to come to our rescue at this very minute. 'God, please help us love each other,' one young man with autism began to pray. 'Please give us peace.'

"It took my breath away. 'This is who we should be in our churches,' I thought, 'totally transparent, willing to drop everything to be with one another in our needs,



Emily Colson (left) with Benjamin's Hope founder and executive director Krista Mason.

present with someone without demanding that they change for our convenience?

"How many families affected by disability sit at home on Sunday mornings because they can't find their way into a seemingly perfect church? How many people without disabilities stay home for exactly the same reason? Tears filled my eyes as if my heart had been pried open. God wants us to come to him as we are, open, vulnerable, even in our most untidy state.

"At the end of the service we danced again and swayed and hugged and cried. We held hands high as we sang the final song, and I thought, 'This changed my life.'"

(Abridged by permission of the author from specialneedsparenting.net/gathering.)

You add.
God multiplies.

A Vision for Diversity

Oasis Community Church, a multiethnic church in Moreno Valley, Calif., is committed to unity and diversity despite some challenges it has faced, said Rudy Gonzalez, a race relations advocate for the Christian Reformed Church's Office of Race Relations,

"The Race Relations vision for diversity is our denominational vision, and it belongs to all of us," he said. "Oasis' leadership is committed to that vision."

Pastor Al Breems and his young family, together with a few families from Hope CRC in the neighboring city of Riverside, began the journey of Oasis in 1991, Gonzalez said.

They saw a need to start a church in Moreno Valley, a community pieced together from several communities surrounding a nearby Air Force base.

Moreno Valley was unique, offering homes costing up to \$100,000 less than those in neighboring communities. The lower prices drew a wide range of residents from various ethnic groups.

"We sensed God's heart for people yearning for a unique community," said Robert Velasco, a founding member and worship leader at Oasis. "People from diverse ethnic and educational backgrounds living as neighbors needed a place where they would feel welcomed and celebrated."

Ethnic leaders at Oasis made the commitment to unity and diversity a reality.

Tim Blackmon, a Dutch immigrant pastor of African American descent, served as co-pastor. When he took a call to another church, Greg Wilson, another African American, assumed a leadership position.

"Sadly, Greg was diagnosed with cancer and went home to be with the Lord,"



(above) Rev. Donald Byker and the worship team of Oasis Community Church.



(left) Robert Velasco

(below) Oasis youth, 2013 and 2014



Velasco said. "However, by that time, the value of raising multiple ethnic ministry leaders—elders, deacons, and pastors—was a value in the Oasis ministry that continues."

The priority of diversity over preaching, worship, or leadership style frustrated a few people, said Velasco. But many members supported the commitment. It also helped pastors preach a more relevant message, he said.

Despite some differences over the years, the church has grown in numbers and in spiritual maturity, said Velasco. The congregation remains committed to embracing the biblical vision for people of every nation, tribe, people, and language united as one in Christ.

"The work is challenging. But it also strengthens our resolve to embrace and celebrate people and their culture," Velasco said.

"Oasis may not be the largest church in the city, but it is well-known for being the most community-connected one."

Race Relations and Oasis started developing a relationship in the 1990s.

Gonzalez was working with World Renew at the time. He had come to know Al Breems and had many conversations with him about the value of congregations embracing unity and diversity. Breems helped to cast a vision for unity and diversity by creating space for Race Relations workshops.

Gonzalez said the workshops gave Race Relations an opportunity to share a vision of helping to create sustainable ministries "that will outlive the sunset of monocultural congregations."

—Office of Race Relations

My Mother, the Church

I never showed my mother much appreciation when I was an active, mischievous, and ambitious young child. I never felt the need.

I think every mom knows this sad truth. Kids don't thank parents nearly enough, mostly because they are not fully aware of the late nights, the hidden worry, the relentless barrage of economic and emotional investment that goes into raising a child, or five, as in my family of origin.

The blood, sweat, and tears that go into providing growth opportunities and increased responsibility in order to develop a well-rounded, Christ-following child is ongoing, tough, and mostly thankless work.

I am now 46—not old, but also not young. Perhaps the celebration of Ontario's Family Day this month would be a good time to say "thank you" to my mother.

Former *Banner* editor and Christian Reformed Church pastor Andrew Kuyvenhoven wrote a small booklet that referred to the church as "Mother." I remember reading it in my late teens. It opened my eyes to the true nature of belonging to a local church. If the church is the bride of Christ, then we, God's children, are also children of the church. The CRC that raised me and taught me what it meant to be a Christian is my mother: Christ's bride, our Mother! The church.

My appreciation for my mother the church is not much different from my childhood lack of appreciation for my birth mother. I have been unaware of the hidden cost and work that it takes for the CRC to provide the growth opportunities and kingdom-changing initiatives that help raise fully-developed disciples of Christ. But I am learning.

“If the church is the bride of Christ, then we, God's children, are also children of the church.”

In my first six months as Canadian Ministries director, I have grown in my awareness of my faith mother, the CRC. Knowing mostly the denomination in its Canadian setting, I now understand the breadth and depth of our work in neighborhood communities, local churches, and within the broader culture.

I see my faith mother praying with people at the bottom of the social ladder; celebrating racial differences and gifts; supporting the causes of the Aboriginal community; making hospital visits; working with other faith traditions on creation care, peace, or human trafficking.

I see her ministering to Muslims; working in community development; engaging policymakers in government—and the list goes on.

And then she turns around and finds time to be proactive about the at-home practices of raising youth; gathering for corporate prayer; discerning best practices for keeping the house in order; balancing the checkbook, and intentionally guiding her children into Christian education. The list

goes on and on. This CRC mother is a strong woman!

But I also see her frailty and brokenness. Perhaps you would say her concern for her own children needs some sharpening. Perhaps she does not always communicate clearly and effectively. Perhaps she is getting a little old and could use more youthful energy. Perhaps she squabbles with her marriage partner too often. Perhaps she gets wrapped up in external matters too heavily. Perhaps.

But she is human. As I watch her working imperfectly, yet with such zeal, I understand Proverbs 31 better. It is not a description of my birth mother, but of my faith mother, a mother who provides opportunities for growth and who wants her children to cling to her and yell "Pick me! Can I do it?" as partners in her work for the causes of Christ.

I am 46 now—not old but also not young. Perhaps now would be a good time to say "thank you." ■



CRC members make a significant contribution to the Canadian Council of Churches.



Rev. Darren C. Roorda is the Canadian Ministries director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

OUT AND ABOUT

Alumni and Students to Serve in Colorado

This March, the Calvin College Alumni Association will be offering a joint alumni-student service project in a flood-damaged region of Boulder County, Colo.

The week-long service learning experience will be coordinated through Calvin's Service Learning Center in conjunction with World Renew's Disaster Response Services.

Besides building on the relationship they have with World Renew, alumni officials hope this spring's endeavor "will strengthen connections between alumni and students," said John Wynbeek, chair of the association board's faith and service working group.

Since Calvin's Service Learning Center has traditionally sent out a number of student service learning teams during the college's March spring break, this time of year seemed like a natural opportunity



Calvin College alumni who worked with World Renew in Colorado.

for the center to pilot an alumni-student service trip.

This effort will "allow alumni to connect with Calvin students and students to witness people dedicated to

lifelong service," said Noah Kruis, associate director of Calvin's Service Learning Center. ■

—by Michael Van Denend,
Calvin College

Sonia's Call to Jesus

Sonia was heading home from a doctor's visit, experiencing horrible pain. She had just learned from the doctor that she needed an operation.

"I was crossing the street in front of the market when someone stopped me and handed me a *DisquePaz* card," said Sonia.

DisquePaz (Dial Peace) is a Portuguese telephone ministry produced by Back to God Ministries International and its Portuguese partner, *Luz Para o Caminho* (Light for the Way).

Together they partner with churches throughout Brazil to bring the gospel to people in the community and to build



People in Brazil receive daily devotional encouragement through *DisquePaz*.

the church. People call their local *DisquePaz* number for a daily message and to connect with a spiritual counselor.

Sonia called the number on the card. "I heard a very

beautiful message," she said. "Then the phone volunteer asked if I attended church. I said no."

She placed the *DisquePaz* card in her bag and continued

home. Two days later she saw the card again.

"I began to call the number over several days," she said. "Soon I felt like going to church. I quite enjoyed it, because everyone welcomed me. I felt such a peace in this church that I began attending every Sunday."

Today she is baptized. "I am saved for the honor and glory of the Lord," said Sonia. "It was through *DisquePaz* that I came to Jesus. And here I am. Hallelujah!"

—by Claudia Elzinga,
Back to God Ministries
International

OUT AND ABOUT

Going Glocal

Colin Watson, a speaker at the Glocal Church Summit, works in men's ministry at Madison Avenue Christian Reformed Church, a multicultural congregation in Paterson, New Jersey.

Among other things, his church offers an after-school program, a discipleship ministry, and help for people recovering from addictions.

Madison Avenue CRC, says Watson, is an example of the kinds of congregations high-

lighted at the summit, held in Los Angeles in November.

"Our church works to be a congregation that celebrates and embraces diversity," said Watson, who spoke at the summit on the issue of diversity.

The event drew people from 17 different states, three regions in Canada, and Mexico and Korea.

The word *glocal* is a hybrid combining local and global; it refers to doing global ministry in one's own neighborhood.



People offer praise during Glocal Church Summit.

"The question we addressed was 'How do we engage with people from around the world from a local perspective?'" said Rev. Moses Chung, director of

Home Missions, which sponsored the summit along with other CRC agencies.

In the traditional model, Chung said, missions tend to be viewed as outreach done by a church for people in other places.

While it is important to do this, it is also crucial to realize that the world has come to us, said Chung.

"Many of the cultures from around the world are represented in our own neighborhoods," he said.

—by Chris Meehan, CRC Communications

Sharing *The Story* in Chapel

Planning chapel for Calvin Seminary is similar to planning worship for a congregation. While it's nice to have freedom of choice for each service, sometimes it's healthier and more meaningful to pursue a theme for a period of time.

That's why the seminary chapel planning committee, served by Rev. Howard Vander Well of the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, selected the book *The Story* as an anchor theme this academic year.

According to the publisher, the 31 chapters are a compilation of the biblical texts, arranged as one continuous and chronological story of the God of grace—"the God who speaks; the God who acts; the God who listens"—in short, the God who so loves his world.



Participants in the Calvin Seminary chapel service using *The Story*.

"*The Story* provided our planning team an overall theme for our worship this year and gave us opportunity to portray the progress of God's redemptive plan through both the Old and New Testaments," said Vander Well.

"While it was an aid in our planning, we trust it is also a model for our students

who are preparing to lead ministries in the pastorate," he said.

That's why every seminarian was given a copy for their personal library, either in English or in Spanish (*La Historia*).

—by Jinny De Jong, Calvin Theological Seminary

Longer versions of many of these stories are available online at thebanner.org/together.

You add.
God multiplies.



A group of teens who are part of the World Renew program.

Helping Teens Take Control

Since January 2013, World Renew has been implementing a Canadian government-funded, four-year project in Senegal and Nigeria. The project aims to protect young people from sexual exploitation, equip them to make healthier decisions, and teach skills to help them start a business.

It involves training young people with lessons about their bodies, their rights, and the risks they face when they make certain decisions. These young people then teach these lessons to a group of their peers who are between 15 and 25 years old.

“This program is very important,” said Pastor Sene of St. Louis, Senegal. “There are so many problems in the neighborhoods of our city and in our villages.”

Groups of young people use skits, song, and dance to address difficult subjects, formerly considered taboo, with their parents and other adults.

“I am always quite shy,” one female participant in Senegal said. “But during the lessons, we did a lot of skits and songs so that when it was time to perform for our village, I knew what to say and do.”

Parents report that as a result of the program, they are now having healthy conversations with their children and young people are making better choices. Several instances of exploitation and abuse have been prevented.

Angela Ukpanukpong, a female participant in Nigeria, said that through the program she has made a commitment to maintain good values and avoid risky behaviors. She is confident that God will continue growing her leadership abilities so she can contribute to her home and country.

—by Kristen deRoo VanderBerg, World Renew

Gangs and the Gospel

Jorge Hernandez crossed the border into California when he was young. His mother worked hard to provide for him and his brother, but they were still poor.

Jorge, or as most people know him, “Little Gee,” remembers getting his first pair of decent shoes from one of his homeboys. He remembers how that feeling of fulfillment quickly led him to involvement in gang life and crime.

Ultimately, he remembers how God showed up in an unlikely place to turn his life around.

“God used a ‘lifer’ in the prison cell next to mine,” Little Gee remembers. “This was a man who had just been sentenced to life in prison, and he was talking about love and grace. That shook me.”

Little Gee’s life didn’t turn around automatically after that. In fact, he used the opening pages of the Bible the inmate gave him not for its message but for rolling joints. Slowly, however, Little Gee started to wonder more about what the Bible said.

Today Little Gee serves as a pastor, and he is just one part of a growing network of Christian leaders in Guatemala City.

Christian Reformed World Missions missionary Joel Van Dyke founded the Center for Transforming Mission (CTM) Guatemala to help train and support leaders like Little Gee in their various outreach programs.

With help from CTM, Little Gee’s ministry has become a part of a larger ministry to current gang members, residents of a nursing home that was abandoned by its staff, and a day-care ministry.

—by Brian Clark, Christian Reformed World Missions



Missionaries gather and give blessings to pastor “Little Gee.”

Growing Things

Can you imagine a world without plants? No grass, just dirt and rocks. No shady trees to sit under. No flowers. But worse than that, no farms and nothing to eat—not even meat, because most animals either eat plants or they eat other animals that eat plants.

Sounds a little scary, doesn't it? Without plants, human beings could not survive on God's earth. That's why God created a beautiful, plant-filled world for us to share and care for. Here are some fun ways to enjoy the gift of plants!

Jonah and the Vine

There are lots of stories about plants in the Bible. But one of the most interesting is the story of Jonah and the vine.

God said to a man named Jonah, "Jonah, go to the city of Nineveh. The people there are doing very bad things, and we need to help them stop."

Jonah said, "No way, God!" and he ran away. You know how that ended up. Jonah got swallowed by a big fish—but after that, he decided to do what God wanted him to do.

Jonah went to Nineveh. He told the people to stop doing bad things—and they DID stop! So God forgave them, because that's how God is. But Jonah didn't care about the Ninevites. He wanted God to punish them. So he sat down outside the city to pout.

The hot sun beat down on Jonah. He was sweaty and thirsty and miserable. So God grew a leafy vine to give Jonah some shade. Jonah was sooooo happy about that vine. But God had something to teach Jonah.

The next day, God sent a worm to munch on the vine, and the vine died.

Do you know what Jonah did? He threw a world-class fit! He stomped and he shouted and he shook his fist.

God said, "Jonah, are you kidding me? All you care about is this one little vine? Why don't you care about all those people in Nineveh?"

The Bible doesn't tell us what happened next. Write your own ending to this story. Do you think Jonah learned what God was teaching him?

No, not a player-a case. It clearly says a CD case!



ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

Plant Puns

- Q. How do you fix a broken tomato?
A. With tomato paste.
- Q. Why did the banana go to the doctor?
A. Because he wasn't peeling well.
- Q. What is a vampire's favorite fruit?
A. A neck-tarine.
- Q. What did the carrot say to the tomato?
A. Nothing. Carrots can't talk.



Make the World's Flattest Garden

What you need:

One clear CD case; potting soil; a small bowl; grass seeds or radish seeds

What you do:

- In a small bowl, mix about 1/3 cup of potting soil with a teaspoon of water. Add more water, one teaspoon at a time, until the soil is wet but not muddy.
- Open the CD case up. Use a spoon to fill the bottom half of the case with wet soil.
- Sprinkle about 1 teaspoon of seeds onto the top edge of the wet soil.
- Carefully close the empty side of the CD case over the soil-filled side.

Prop your CD garden up on a windowsill indoors. Whenever the soil starts to look dry, carefully open the case and add a little water. In about a week, your seeds should start to sprout!



High-Speed Radishes

Can't wait for real plants to grow? Go online and visit tinyurl.com/FastSeeds to watch radish seeds grow in less than one minute.



Weird Plant Names

E S T R A N G L E R F I G S T
 B E D S Q F L I Q W W H K C N
 D L R K A T X L I C V C W O A
 S E E T U U Y S H F I X B R L
 N P E E D O S Z A H N A K P P
 E I X W D O V A C L H Z M S E
 E L A M E I O D G Y I L C E V
 Z S J L N S N L I E Y K P F I
 E W B U U A E G B W T I A L T
 W O C G S O N E H N K R B O I
 O C C N C D Q J H E O U E W S
 R B E G S K N K B C A G J E N
 T H Z E I V W B O Z J R A R E
 O B E D I E N T P L A N T R S
 E G A B B A C K N U K S T T D

Some plants have really strange names! Circle them in the word search below. Look up, down, diagonally, and backwards.

- Bleeding Heart
- Cheeseweed
- Corpse Flower
- Cowslip
- Dragon Blood Tree
- Hens and Chicks
- Obedient Plant
- Sausage Tree
- Sensitive Plant
- Skunk Cabbage
- Sneezewort
- Strangler Fig

Eat Your Plants

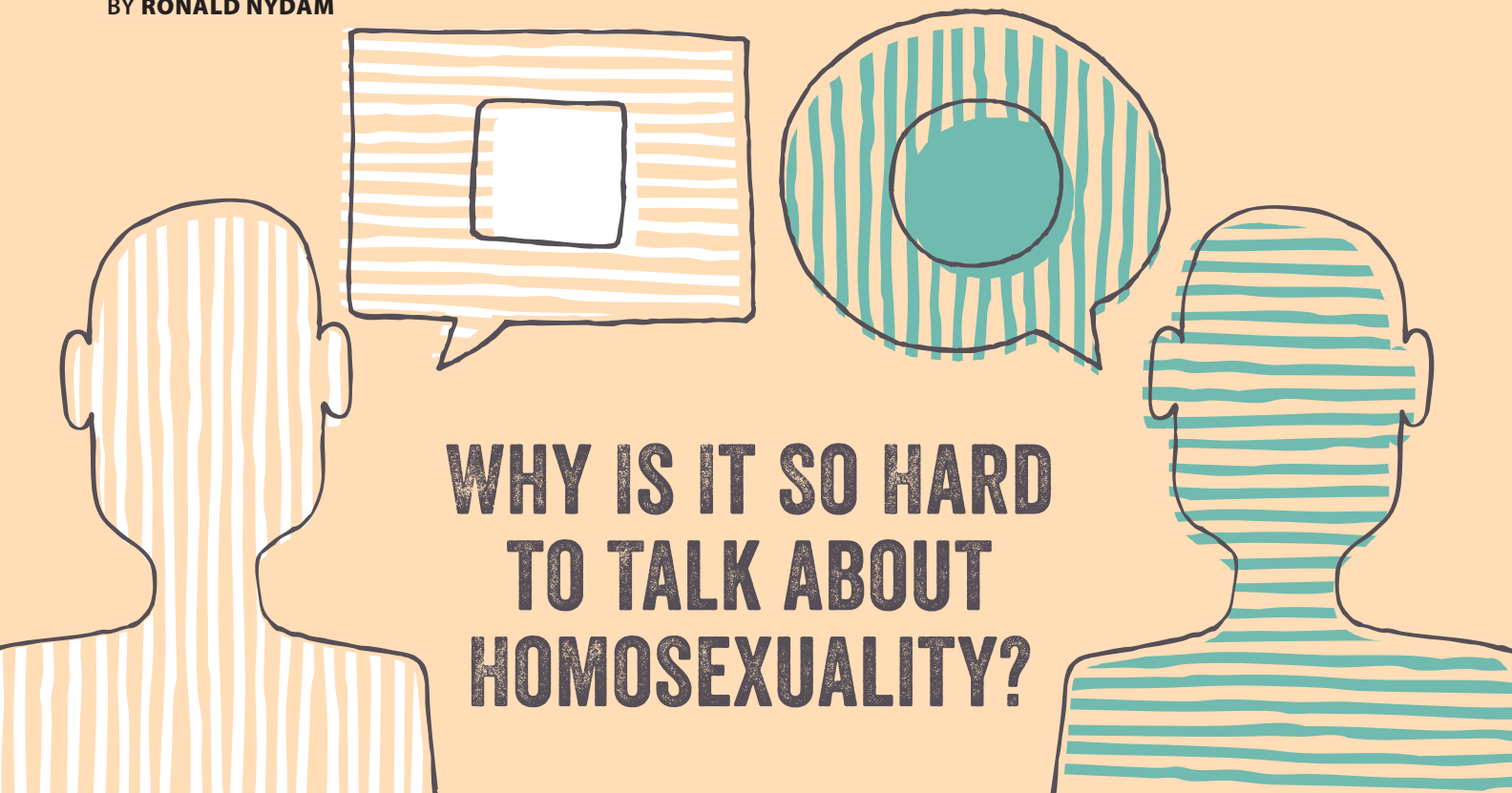
We all know that eating plants is healthy. But here's a way to make it fun too! Try this the next time you have friends over for lunch.

On one half of a toasted English muffin, spread hummus or another veggie spread. Then add slices of carrots, cucumbers, black olives, red peppers, and other veggies to make funny people and animal faces.



Sandy Swartzentruber is a freelance writer and a school library aide. She attends Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., and knows where to find skunk cabbage.





WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TALK ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

IN JUNE 2016, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church will receive an important report from a study committee. That committee is tasked with providing pastoral guidance to churches, pastors, church leaders, and members on appropriate ministry and expectations in a culture where same-sex marriage is increasingly legal and common. We should add bisexual and transgender people as well, since their pastoral needs may be quite similar. To use “person first” language, we can simply speak of people with same-sex attraction and people with opposite-sex longings, meaning persons who wish to be the opposite of their given sex.

In the four sentences above, the anxiety of readers in the heterosexual community has probably already emerged into the light of awareness. What will this writer say? Will his words be biblical? Will he hold the line against the attitudes of North American society that are accepting of homosexual and transgendered presentations of gender identity? Will he truly appreciate the struggles of those in the gay community? So quickly the lines

are drawn in the sand. This topic has the power to bring strife and division to families and friendships as well as congregations and denominations—instead of bringing the *shalom* that we are called to seek in our fellowship together.

But why is this conversation so difficult? In this article we’ll consider some possible reasons why people in the heterosexual community may struggle to address this issue wisely and biblically. To be clear, this article is not intended to address the ethical issues around sexual behavior. Instead, it is written to our heterosexual community, and it intends to examine some possible reasons for such high anxiety. Our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender members are invited to listen in.

To begin, we are people of the Book. We live *under* God’s Word. For this reason we carefully hold our interpretations of Scripture as foundational for our understanding of our triune God and our understanding of ourselves. Scripture must guide our behavior—in this case, our sexual behavior. If there is even one verse in the Bible that speaks a certain word, we take that word seriously. We are protective of our understandings of bib-

lical truth. Understandably, anxiety arises when it appears that Scripture may be interpreted in new and different ways.

But there is much more that confronts us. This has to do with “the beam in our own eye” (Matt. 7:3) when it comes to our anxiety about our own sexuality. In this very broken world, all of us struggle to some degree with our sexuality. Managing sexual feelings is often a challenge in our Christian living. Consider our unusually harsh responses to sexual sinners in general. We say that one sin is as bad as another. And yet, when it comes to sexual sins such as committing adultery or viewing pornography or feeding sexual compulsions, our response within the Christian community may be especially punitive.

As heterosexual persons, we consider ourselves “straight,” fitting the creational norm; we think of those who struggle with same-sex attraction and opposite-sex longings as obviously “crooked.” But this use of language both protects us and betrays us. Calling ourselves “straight” certainly makes a clear distinction between those who are heterosexual and those who are other. But it may also lend itself to heterosexual pride—the sin of

self-righteousness. Better that we recognize that, along with our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender neighbors, we are all pretty “crooked.” But once again, this reminder may cause anxiety.

Consider also how homophobia, which is so present in our gay-unfriendly culture, is, in part, the stepchild of patriarchy. As long as the so-called “masculine” is valued more than the so-called “feminine,” we will continue to push away, disown, and even condemn men who are identified with “feminine” traits. This reaction is what caused two young men to pistol-whip Matthew Shepard to death on a fencepost outside of Laramie, Wyoming, in 1998. I say “so-called” because our cultural definitions of “masculine” and “feminine” are so different from biblical understandings of gender and what it means to be a man or to be a woman. Playing football or sewing are best thought of simply as *human* activities. Now, this only explains homophobia in part. Only when women are valued equally with men will homophobic fear of the “feminine” within men, subside. Otherwise, homophobia is pretty much locked in place both in church and society.

In Matthew 7, Jesus draws quite a contrast between the beam in our eye and the speck in the eye of another. Our Lord calls us to the discipline of careful self-examination. This includes owning our part in the bias and painful discrimination against those who struggle sexually in ways that are different from our own sexual difficulties. Especially as we approach the table of the Lord, we are called to see “if there is any sin within us.” And, of course, there is. Naming that sin is the first step in receiving forgiveness and disciplining ourselves to move beyond bias and rejection to inclusive care of people who struggle with different sexual identities. But this is a very difficult spiritual challenge.

Such spiritual discernment would inevitably lead us toward becoming friendly with fellow parishioners who struggle, often in silence, with same-sex attraction or opposite-sex identification. Yes, we will become “gay person-friendly.” To be like Jesus is to be especially attentive to any who are outcast—the marginalized of Jesus’ day or those within the LGBT community today who are pushed away.

“All are welcome in our worship and our fellowship” must mean what it says. Unless there is a relationship to build upon, sharing our own biblical understanding is experienced as exclusion and condemnation. But within a relationship, such sharing may lead to inclusion and reconciliation. In this sense, we are all called to be gay person-friendly. Otherwise, the love of God never quite gets to them as God intended.

So as we approach further conversation in the Christian Reformed Church about pastoral ministry among the LGBT community, how can we best prepare ourselves? Several recommendations come to mind.

AS HETEROSEXUAL PERSONS, WE CONSIDER OURSELVES “STRAIGHT,” FITTING THE CREATIONAL NORM; WE THINK OF THOSE WHO STRUGGLE WITH SAME-SEX ATTRACTION AND OPPOSITE-SEX LONGINGS AS “CROOKED.” BUT THIS USE OF LANGUAGE BOTH PROTECTS US AND BETRAYS US.

First, we must continue our commitment, once again together, to a careful, thoughtful hearing of the biblical text. Scripture must speak to us. We must not give in to the temptation, the exegetical error, of reading our wishes or beliefs into the text. The ongoing challenge is to hear the Scriptures tell us God’s truth. On both sides of the conversational fence we must seek to hear God’s Word spoken to us. Short-circuiting this critical commitment will keep us in a quandary.

Second, we must affirm a biblical appreciation for human sexuality. As children, many of us were taught a negative view of sexuality that cannot be corrected in the moment of a marriage ceremony. Often because of the fear and anxiety that surrounds sexuality, we push it away. Becoming more comfortable with our own sexuality from a positive biblical perspective may redeem our responses.

Third, we need to allow the Scriptures to shape our understandings of gender instead of the culture’s twisted understandings of gender. Our society teaches that men are “strong” and women are “weak”; men are “hard” and women are “soft.” Yet in Galatians 5:22, where Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit, notice

that clearly it’s a package deal. Through the Holy Spirit, all nine of these descriptors should be present within each of us, regardless of gender.

Fourth, we must learn more about homosexuality in general. People may choose behavior, but usually no one chooses to be gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender. It has become increasingly clear that genetic influence has much to do with homosexual gender presentation. For the rest, we are simply not sure. Much of it may have to do with prenatal biological development that further facilitates a genetic predisposition. We ought never blame parents for the experience of having children with same-sex longings

or opposite-sex identification, as if somehow they had failed as parents. Not true.

Fifth, those of us who are heterosexual must imagine what it is like to be gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender. This has to do with our capacity for empathy. Walking in others’ shoes, imagining what it is like to be what some people hate, is the beginning of good pastoral care in the direction of the LGBT community. It is no accident that so many young gay men and lesbian women consider suicide to escape the suffering they experience.

Sixth, we must practice the spiritual gift of hospitality. We do well to seek friendship at some level with someone we know to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. “I would like to get to know you” is a good beginning. For many this is well beyond our usual comfort zone. But let’s consider what Jesus would do. Certainly we all fall short of our Lord’s reaching out for hurting people on the wayside of life. The challenge is to try. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



Rev. Ron Nydam has served as professor of pastoral care at Calvin seminary for the past 16 years. Before that he was a pastoral counselor for Denver, Inc., and a pastor at Third CRC, Denver, Col.

Going with the FLOW



WE ARE IN THE WORLD, but not of the world, like exiles in a foreign country. Heard that before, right? But how does a Christian's status as an "exile" translate to daily living? Do we separate ourselves from the world? Fight against it? Or simply blend in?

In the seven-episode series *For the Life of the World: Letters to the Exiles* (Flannel/Acton Institute), also presented as *FLOW*, Evan Koons and a wildly creative group of thinkers and artists offer a "new perspective" on what we must do with our lives once we know we have been saved.

FLOW stars Koons as Evan, who lives in an idyllic country home crammed with bric-à-brac and antique technology. Evan is unhappy with how Christians treat the world but doesn't know what to do.

A group of friends appear to help him understand the idea of *oikonomia*, a Greek term used to refer to "God's economy of all things." In God's economy, everything is a gift, and it is our responsibility to make God's gifts flourish.

While this spiritual idea of "economic responsibility" sounds terribly abstract, each 15- to 20-minute episode (perfect for a small group or adult education class) bursts with humor and creativity, giving life to topics such as marriage, work, knowledge, beauty, and the church. ■



Otto Selles teaches French at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., and attends Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

Each 15- to 20-minute episode bursts with humor and creativity.



Otto Selles had an opportunity to interview Evan Koons, the star and one of the writers of the *FLOW* series. To read more of that interview, go to thebanner.org.

Q. The series centers on the term *oikonomia*, which is described in the first episode as meaning "God's economy of all things." Could you unpack that idea? It's all a bit Greek to me.

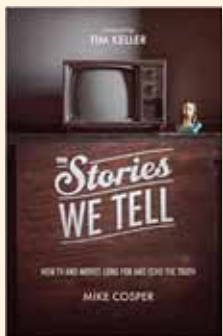
A. Ha! Yeah, truth be told, I'm still figuring out what it means too. Right now I see *oikonomia* as God's song for all of creation. It's like there's a tune God is playing in everything, and he wants us to harmonize with it. If that tune had a name it would be "All Is Gift."

In a very 30,000-foot approach, *FLOW* is about reminding Christians of God's song and inspiring them to tune their lives to it.

Q. Could the series be viewed as an introduction to a Reformed worldview?

A. Absolutely. It could be an introduction to any Christian worldview. Accompanying the series, we have primers for a bunch of denominations: Baptist, Pentecostal, Wesleyan, and Reformed. Fast fact: the writing team consists of an Anglican, Catholic, Protestant (me), and Evangelical. The scholars and laypeople in the film are from the Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical traditions. Many colleges are using it in their classrooms today, too, from Calvin to Regent to Trinity and Wheaton.

Note: *FLOW* is available as a combined DVD and Blu-ray set or as a download from flannel.org/store/films/flow.



The Stories We Tell: How TV and Movies Long for and Echo the Truth

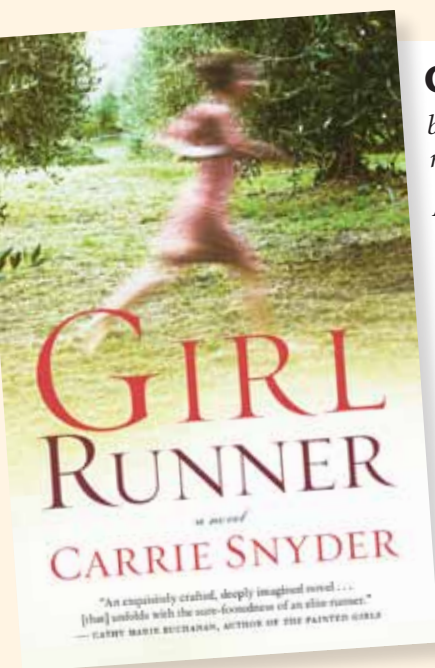
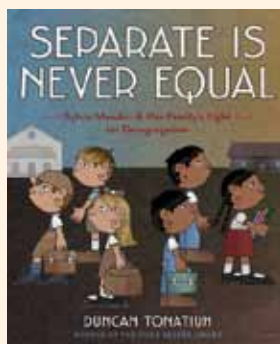
by **Mike Cosper**
reviewed by **Robert N. Hosack**

In *The Stories We Tell*, Mike Cosper, a self-confessed TV and film addict, paints on a media canvas “the Big Story of the Bible”—showing how the themes of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation regularly surface in television and movies. Cosper contends, “Many Christians were raised to be suspicious of Hollywood entertainment.” Swimming upstream against this Christian subcultural tide, he explores the connection between our stories and the one great Story, helping readers to better grasp the longings of their hearts and to thoughtfully engage with today’s popular films and TV shows that capture our imaginations. (Crossway)

Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez & Her Family’s Fight for Desegregation

by **Duncan Tonatiuh**
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

Young Sylvia Mendez, an American citizen, was eager to attend the third grade in her local school. But in 1944, California public schools refused to open their doors to children of Mexican descent, forcing them to attend inferior segregated schools. During a time when signs at public pools declared, “No dogs or Mexicans allowed,” Sylvia’s parents courageously chose to file a lawsuit. Based on interviews with Mendez and on court transcripts, this stirring children’s picture book portrays a family and community who refused to bow to injustice. Ages 6 and up. (Abrams Books)



Girl Runner

by **Carrie Snyder**
reviewed by **Jim Romahn**

Aganetha (Aggie) Smart won gold at the 1928 Olympics, the first Olympics to include women. Now at age 104, she sits in a wheelchair in a nursing home. Author Carrie Snyder of *Waterloo*, Ontario, deftly weaves flashbacks to various stages of Aggie’s life to explore her joy in running, her determination to compete in the Olympics, her muddled relationships with her family, her companion in training, and her team escort. Finishing with a burst of unexpected revelations, it’s a great read. (Anansi Press)

THE LOWDOWN: GRAMMY EDITION



While some of our reviews make it to print, many are online only. Here are excerpts of our online reviews of Grammy-nominated artists’ projects; go to thebanner.org to read the full reviews.



Nickel Creek: “This trio plays bluegrass music that has as much in common with modern folk and pop as traditional bluegrass.”



Angélique Kidjo: “Kidjo sings here exclusively in Beninese languages, but her soaring voice crosses all boundaries.”



Coldplay: “Overall, a goodbye, a lament for something precious that is gone.”



Natalie Grant: “Based on three years of personal and family struggles, Grant’s effort provides solace for the heart and the ear.”



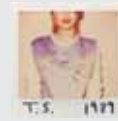
Crowder: “Will leave you thankful for God’s majesty, his forgiveness, and his hope.”



Imogen Heap: “Reminds us to take a look around and take notice of both the world we are in and of what we are creating for ourselves and future generations.”



alt-J: “They might be influenced by C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*.”



Taylor Swift: “Swift also hasn’t changed her notion of what love is, a gooey, over-romanticized head-over-heels emotion.”

MORE REVIEWS ONLINE

Preaching Peace

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace. . . .”

—Ephesians 2:14-15

A WEEK AGO I stepped out onto our front porch, looking for a change of scenery with our baby, Leo. My neighbor Armando across the street was stirring a kettle over a makeshift grill built of broken concrete blocks and found stones. The aroma of grilled meat signaled a possible and very welcome invitation. He spotted me on the porch, “*Kuuurt! Vente para acá!*” Confirmation.

Leo and I went over while Leo’s brothers ran circles with the neighbor kids. As I sat among old friends eating tacos laden with meat worthy of a Levitical sacrifice and my baby in the arms of eager Mexican mothers, I took deep pleasure in watching Armando at his craft. Through smoke and burned fingers, it was as if he were conjuring up memories of the old country. He had this look of derangement and delight, this rudimentary fire, an exile’s protest to stainless steel and liquid propane. He looked at home in his new home for the first time in a long time, and it gave me great satisfaction.

A little while later, Alejandro from next door showed up and I overheard their conversation. Armando told him, “You know Kurt and Emily, they’re from a different class, but you wouldn’t know it. They’re educated. They’ve got some money. But they’re here with us, you know? They’re not like other *güeros*. They could be living in other places among different people, but they’re here with us. That’s why I like them. They’re one of us.” It was a moment that validated our efforts of downward mobility.

The immigrant experience is often marked by feelings of being unwanted, second-class, perpetually catering to someone else’s desires. It’s a lonely life—alienating, isolating, and anti-shalom. But Armando was seeing the temporary rules of the world suspended as in our neighborhood we put aside what divides us. Together we preach peace to one another and taste a new kind of humanity.

The week after Mike Brown was shot in Ferguson, Missouri, I was fixated on social media. The protests and marches had become about so much more than taking sides on Mike Brown’s presumed innocence or his guilt. It became the epicenter of racial pain in the United States. On social media the pain and the raw emotion poured out, unedited, from people of color in a way that I had never experienced before.

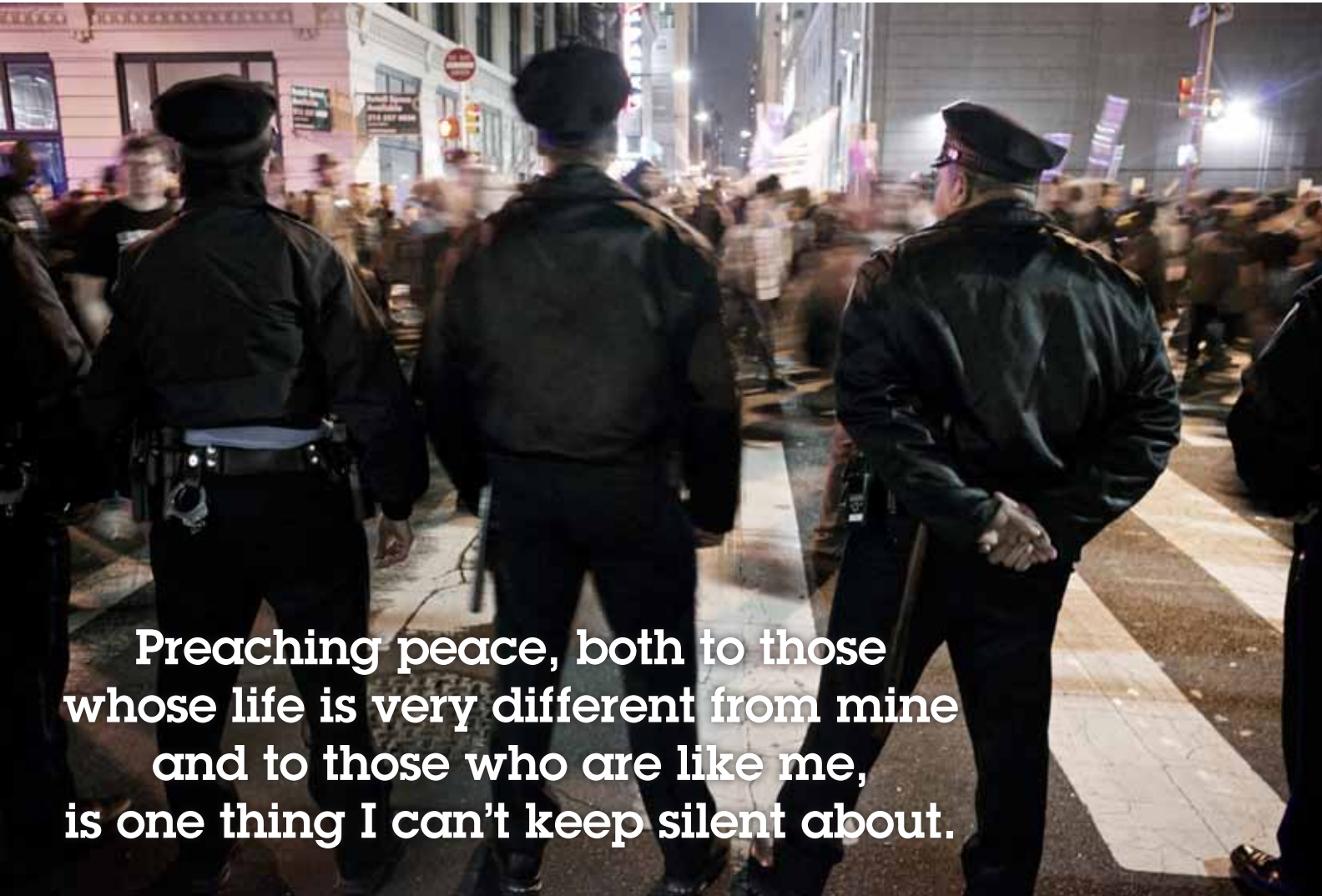
Some of the most recurring, frustrated cries were the ones that asked why their white brothers and sisters were so silent, echoing Dr. King’s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* a generation before. One reporter asked someone how he felt about Mike Brown’s death, being a young black man himself. His response cut right to the very alienation that was embedded and invisible within the question. “I don’t know, how do you feel about it *as a human?*” At their core, the marches and protests were about people of color looking for validation, emotional bids burdened by a desire to know they’re not alone. They wanted someone to acknowledge that their pain is real; to tell them they’re not crazy and that their frustration is not unwarranted.

The Sunday after Mike Brown was shot, I called up a few friends and we went to Ferguson, not to take sides but to walk with people and tell them they weren’t alone. When we walked up Florissant Avenue for the first time, we were the ones who felt alone. It seemed the only other white people were either police officers or the media. Soon we stopped to talk to a few people—friends of the Brown family, as it happened. They welcomed us in and shared some of their stories. They found out we were from Kansas City and they thanked us for coming down and joining them. They took away our anxiety and displacement and, from their response, it seemed that their sense of alienation subsided as well by our standing with them. If only for a moment, and if only among a handful of people, the usual dividing wall of hostility was set aside, and we experienced the new humanity that Jesus came to bring.

A few months ago, Sarah Bessey, a Christian writer and blogger, wrote a brave piece about how the world traffics in fear of the other and the unknown and how evil and hatred is propagated by fear:

Be afraid, the world tells us. And now, sadly, it seems many of our [Christian] media outlets and leaders are telling us the same thing. Be afraid. Be afraid of money, be afraid of losing “the fire,” be afraid of education, be afraid of theology, be afraid of growth and change . . . be afraid of the news, be afraid of Islam, be afraid of the President, be afraid of the UN, be afraid of immigrant children, be afraid of other churches, be afraid of the Pope, be afraid of socialism, be afraid of the government, be afraid of the world, be afraid be afraid be afraid.

Yet we know that there is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear. Throughout Scripture, it seems that every angelic or divine encounter is prefaced by one message—*don’t be afraid*. When Israel lived in terror in Egypt, they cried out and God listened. When they were scared and helpless during the period of the judges, God didn’t abandon them. When they were living



Preaching peace, both to those whose life is very different from mine and to those who are like me, is one thing I can't keep silent about.

in fear under Roman occupation, God did not remain distant. Instead God took on flesh and moved into the neighborhood.

When the world ran from lepers, Jesus ran toward them. When the Jews flanked Samaria, Jesus cut through it. When the temple cordoned off the Gentiles, Jesus invited them for dinner. Do not be anxious about tomorrow and do not be afraid, says Jesus, for there is not one square inch of creation that is not mine.

God has given some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Sometimes I'm not sure if I fit any one of those categories as cleanly as I, or others, might like. But one constant message that God keeps surprising us with is that the world is not such a scary place

after all. Preaching peace, both to those whose life is very different from mine and to those who are like me, is one thing I can't keep silent about. For it is Jesus who cast off fear like he cast off demons, showing the world for the first time what it truly means to be human, what it really means to live, what it really means to love. Without fear, one new humanity. ■



Kurt Rietema and his wife, Emily, and sons Luke, Perkins, and Leo live in Argentine, a diverse, under-resourced neighborhood of Kansas City, Kansas, where Kurt leads Christian community development efforts for the CRCNA and also leads Youthfront, an organization dedicated to bringing youth into a growing relationship with Christ.

My Only Comfort—Really?

MY ONLY COMFORT IS “that I’m not my own but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.” So begins the first answer in the Heidelberg Catechism.

When we read these words, we revel in the mesmerizing sound of “my only comfort.” It washes over us like we’re getting a spiritual massage.

But let’s face it—we don’t totally buy that answer, do we? We certainly don’t live it. *My only comfort* . . . really? Not a chance. Sure, the notion smells like a Sunday afternoon pot roast simmering in the oven, but do we ever actually sit down to eat?

Certainly most Christians would be quick to affirm that yes, Jesus is our comfort. Likely he is even our chief comfort, our highest comfort, our most valuable comfort. But our *only* comfort? There’s the rub. That small word—*only*—raises the bar pretty high.

There are times when Christians experience Jesus as their only comfort. This feeling seems to arise most often when they are stripped of all other consolation. For example, Christians experiencing intense persecution in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq probably don’t have many other comforts to lean on except Jesus.

This observation seems consistent with the historical framework in which the Heidelberg was written. In those days, life expectancy was low; half of the babies died before the age of 2. The ravages of war were always imminent, and diseases like the Bubonic Plague decimated populations. Again, there wasn’t much to cling to *but* Jesus. This close proximity to suffering is why some catechism scholars prefer the translation “consolation” rather than “comfort.”

Don’t get me wrong.

I’m not saying that modern American Christians don’t love Jesus. I know we do. But more often than not, Jesus just isn’t enough.

Let’s be honest for a moment. Isn’t it true that we want Jesus, but we want

Jesus *and* our health?

Jesus *and* a comfortable retirement?

Jesus *and* our kids to go to church?

Jesus *and* our deceased loved one back at our side?

Jesus *and* our church to play the right music?

Maybe we do love Jesus, but we also want more. And that means he’s not our only comfort in life and death, is he?

But perhaps there is another way of looking at that high bar these words set for us.

Perhaps “my only comfort”
is the assurance of things
hoped for and the conviction
of things not yet seen, and
we get the best glimpses of
Jesus in the midst of suffering.

In this life, maybe “my only comfort” is more of an article of childlike *faith* and less of an experiential *fact*. Perhaps “my only comfort” is the assurance of things *hoped for* and the conviction of things not yet seen, and we get the best glimpses of Jesus, our only comfort, in the midst of suffering.

In that case, confessing “my only comfort” lies at the very heart of authentic faith formation. And yet I believe there are times, in spite of all our other “comforts”—and contemporary life is certainly choking us with its comforts—when we do “get it,” if only for a fleeting moment.

Maybe “my only comfort” is our North Star that shines all the brighter in the storms and as our life’s journey draws closer to the other side. I’ve heard it said that getting older is a relentless series of losses. And yet, as these losses accumulate, the ship gets lighter and frees our love for Jesus to accelerate and soar.

So when we can’t sleep at night because we long for Jesus *and* our health, *and* our kids’ obedience, *and* our spouse’s presence, may we also rest our head on our pillow captivated by the rapturous hope of him whom we *believe* to be our only comfort, feasting on the promise of his own dear presence.

My only comfort? Yes, really. ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



H. David Schuringa is a Christian Reformed minister who serves as president of Crossroad Bible Institute.

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!

Arriving at church one Sunday evening, I backed into a space in front of some trees. I had been listening to a Christian radio station on my way to church and forgot to turn off the radio before turning off the car. It was very dark outside when I got back to the car. After starting the engine, there was a pause on the radio station. Then a deep voice from the back-seat speakers said, "You're not alone." I spun around to see who was there and was relieved to find that the back seat was empty!

—Robyn Lilek

On the way to church, our son Nathaniel asked, "Are they going to have appetizers?" I told him no, because an appetizer is something you eat before your meal, like bread or chips and salsa.

He rolled his eyes and said, "I mean when they put water on someone's head at church!"

—Kristin LaBelle

While singing "When Peace Like a River" at bedtime, my son burst out laughing. "Who pees in the river, Dad?"

—Kevin Eastway

Out for lunch with my daughter, son-in-law, and grandkids one day, I prayed silently before the meal. My 4-year-old grandson, staring intently as I opened my eyes, asked, "Gram, what were you doing?"

"Praying," I replied.

His quick response: "When we pray, we say stuff!"

—Dorene Eggink

One Sunday in a Midwest city, a young child was acting up during the morning worship service. The parents did their best to maintain some sense of order in the pew, but were losing the battle. Finally the father picked the little fellow up and walked sternly up the aisle on his way out.

Just before reaching the safety of the foyer, the little boy called loudly to the congregation, "Pray for me! Pray for me!"

—Clarence Wildeboer

We asked our 3-year-old daughter, Sophie, if she wanted another sibling. She said no. When we wondered why, she explained that there are already two kids in the family. If we have one more baby, the bathtub won't be big enough for all three of them.

—Xiaohong Zhou

A couple arranging for their wedding asked the bakery to inscribe their wedding cake with the text "1 John 4:18," which reads, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."

The bakery evidently lost, smudged, or otherwise misread the note, and beautifully inscribed the cake with "John 4:18" instead. That text reads: "For you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband."

—Sue Lauritzen

When our great-granddaughter was 3, I tried helping her fly her new kite, but it kept falling to the ground. My husband held the ball of string while I went to pick up the kite. Jessica was watching, and yelled out, "Grandpa, don't fly Grandma!"

—Simon and Sharon Hilbrand



"I stole it from the library."