

BANNER

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³² Heaven on Earth
³⁶ More Dreaming

²² 'God Was in
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Cover: The plight of refugees fleeing violence or war, like those pictured on our cover photo in a crowded boat on Lake Tanganyika trying to reach Tanzania in 2009, or the thousands of Syrians crossing the Mediterranean in search of safety whose faces we see in our daily news, ties us to the cries of God's people echoing through the centuries and reminds us of the "gospel that transcends terror."

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Key Features of Reformed Worship

CLAY LIBOLT'S FEATURE ARTICLE THIS MONTH ("More Dreaming," p. 36) suggests that worship is so universal and central to us all that it's the best avenue through which to promote further unity and find a common identity. I heartily agree. It is in worship that the church is constituted, and it is through worship that its people are shaped.

Promoting unity through worship isn't easy. Widely varied forms of worship in local congregations and the huge influence of a generically evangelical form of worship over the last 25 years make the task of rediscovering worship as "our signature as a denomination" somewhat more difficult. But it's not impossible, and it may well prove to be our best path toward a more unified and distinctive denominational identity.

We cannot enter this important discussion without a common understanding of what Reformed worship really is. I would like to suggest two key principles around which we might begin that discussion.

The first principle that characterizes Reformed worship is that it is a gathering before God for **covenant renewal**. Our Reformed ancestors understood that one of the most important biblical patterns for worship is the "solemn assembly" of God's people before the face of God in the Old Testament.

The worship service, then, is essentially a dialogue between God and God's people. God welcomes us in grace; we respond with praise and adoration. God reminds us of his commandments; we offer our confession and seek God's forgiveness in Christ. God speaks to us in his Word; we respond with thanksgiving and prayer. God offers us the new covenant of grace in

Jesus Christ through the bread and wine of communion; we receive it with thanksgiving. Finally, God blesses us to go out and serve in the world as covenant people.

The second principle is that Reformed worship is **trinitarian**. That might sound like a heavy theological category to apply to worship, but just as the Trinity is central to Reformed theology, it's

It is through
worship that people
are shaped.

also central to our understanding of worship. As James Torrance points out in his book *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, some forms of Protestant worship are more unitarian than trinitarian. "Unitarian worship" is primarily the *human* activity of inspiring and encouraging faith, and teaching people about God. Through careful planning we bring people into the experience of God.

Trinitarian worship, according to Torrance, is "the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father . . . through which we know that the living Christ is in our midst, leading our worship, our prayers, our praises." Practically speaking, it means, for example, the difference between beginning our worship with "Let's all greet one another with a hearty, welcoming handshake" or with "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." In the second case, one is immediately aware that this is not primarily about us. We are being invited into the awesome presence of the triune God, through Jesus Christ our mediator, by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

These are two key principles of Reformed worship, though we could add a few more. If we all pay serious attention to these two values, our worship would be transformative, missional, and winsome. What's more, these two features require no particular style of music or architecture, they can be followed within any cultural or ethnic setting, and they fit within congregations of any size and with any level of resources. ■

FOR MORE, SEE
AS I WAS SAYING
at thebanner.org



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Entering the Mystery

THE CHRISTMAS IMAGE of the stable and its inhabitants brings me back 30 years to a small upstairs bedroom where I sat in a big easy chair holding my newborn daughter. There was a deep silence, and I was consumed by unconditional love for this little creature who was soft and warm and smelled of the earth. It was an experience of love that transcended all bounds, of time standing still, of nothing in the outside world coming in to interrupt this deep communion. This memory challenged me to think again of what the Christmas story might be telling me.

My usual point of focus at Christmas is on the details of the celebration: What time is the Christmas service? Who's coming for dinner? When will we exchange presents? This satisfies my social structure but does not leave much room for me to sink into what's really happening. "Dig under stockings, credit card bills, Christmas concert programs," says author Mary Ellen Ashcroft. "Pull off layers of carols, drifts of snow, a gingerbread house recipe"—and find—"oh, my God! A baby!"

Am I even capable of entering into the mystery not only of God taking on human flesh but God presenting God's self (embarrassingly) as one deeply in love with me—and with the whole human race? What if love is the primary message of Christmas? And if it is, can I wrap my head around it—or rather, can I open my heart to it?

Like children, we need to be reminded again and again of God's outrageous, unconditional love for us—love beyond understanding. This love is not limited by the conditions we may put on it. It's not earned by our worth; it's not an assurance of safety and security, giving us health, wealth, and happiness. This love wears down our defenses and seeps into our bones, creating an opening to our heart.

Sometimes, perhaps after a deep hurt or disappointment, we recognize God knocking on the door, asking to come in. Telling us that we are not alone, offering a love where "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from

the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8: 38, 39). This love transforms our vision of ourselves and the world. It transforms the smallness of our hearts into the wideness of God's mercy.

Theologian Richard Rohr observed, "The enormous breakthrough is that when you honor and accept the divine image within yourself, you cannot help but see it in everybody else, too, and you know it is just as undeserved and unmerited as it is in you. That is why you stop judging, and that is how you start loving unconditionally and without asking whether someone is worthy or not."

Advent is a time of seeking so that we may find the gift of Christmas. The cost is to let down our defenses, open our hearts, and let God's love move us into who knows where. ■



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



*Love one another . . .
as I have loved you.*

— JOHN 13:34

Real Love Lost

Jesus' teachings form the root of what real love is.



DUSTIN GAFFRE/FELICKR

WITH THE WHITE HOUSE doused in rainbow colors and people dancing in the streets, proponents of same sex marriage exulted in the U.S. Supreme Court decision earlier this year legalizing same sex marriage. Their triumphant assertion: “Love Won.” But did it really?

For centuries, the commonly held conception of love was decidedly virtuous, calling to mind such things as selflessness, sacrifice, self-control, and a willingness to hold the beloved in high esteem. Understood in this light, love rightfully held the moral high ground.

It was Jesus who said, “Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Likewise, Jesus linked love with moral excellence: “If you love me, keep my commandments.” His followers maintained, “Love is patient and kind. It does not envy or boast. It is not proud, rude, self-seeking, or easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth.” These teachings form the root of what real love is.

No one doubted that real love grows from something more than mere sexual impulses. The two often go hand in hand, but between them love should always hold the reins.

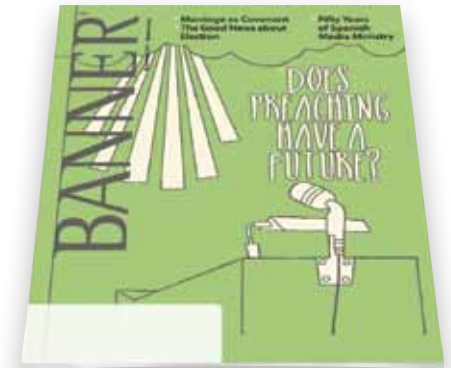
Enter the 1960s: the Hugh Hefners of the world convinced many people that sexual impulses are merely biological inclinations that are morally neutral and separate from the lifelong commitments of marriage. Indeed, this philosophy vilified the teachings of biblical Christianity because it denied us this supposedly simple pleasure—a sentiment captured in the lyrics “If you can’t be with the one you love, love the one you’re with.”

Then modern psychology joined the bandwagon. Seeking physical and cultural explanations for all of humankind’s idiosyncrasies without meaningful reference to the spiritual realm, it made biological urges our defining feature. Our genetic make-up sets the agenda. The alignment of my chromosomes determines who I am. It determines who I will love and how, when, and why I will love. I have no control over it, and neither should anyone else.

There’s the rub. If ever there was a force in the world that needs to be educated and controlled by higher influences, it’s the biological urges and appetites of human beings. Without those controls we eat too much, drink too much, and take in life-threatening toxins for the pleasurable sensations they give us. We regularly educate and control our urges: fear, anger, frustration, envy, and revenge. Such education and controls are at the very heart of civilization. It also explains why the New Testament word for the sin nature is “the flesh.” But for some reason, we’re expected to believe that sexuality is the one sphere in which biological impulses should go unimpeded.

This is not a scenario in which love is the winner. ■

bc Cummings is pastor of Mountain View Christian Reformed Church in Lynden, Wash.



Holy Catholic Church

I so appreciated your editorial “Holy Catholic Church” (Nov. 2015) and your statement that the beauty of Christ is refracted through the lenses of various Christian denominations. I will say, though, that only the Roman Catholic Church claims all the gifts that God wanted to impart to us.

The Roman Catholic Church has the Scriptures, it has the interpretive tradition, it has the Eucharist in which Christ is physically present, it has the sacraments in which Christ makes his life available to us, it has apostolic authority, and it has Mary. Other Christian communities claim some of these gifts, but only one has them all.

—Kenneth Horjus
Zeeland, Mich.

Doctrine Still Matters

I was sad to read the words “But the Bible is not enough” in your recent editorial (“Doctrine Still Matters,” Oct. 2015). God does not need our help to reveal himself to us. The Bible is God-breathed. It is a living, breathing document from which God invites us into relationship with him.

Doctrine is the way in which theologians use their own best human efforts to explain Scripture. We should never, ever confuse the two. I am not suggesting that the church give up on doctrines. I think

TTTERS

they are useful for teaching and for helping us to understand the Scriptures, but to go so far as to say that the Bible is not enough is a gross overstatement.

—Sarah Boonstra
Erie, Colo.

Thank you for your editorial “Doctrine Still Matters.” I am 83 years old and fear our young people are missing the great upbringing we had in our youth through the catechism teaching. Keep up the good work!

—Stan Brandsen
Holland, Mich.

After reading Leonard Vander Zee’s editorial “Doctrine Still Matters,” along with the headlining articles, I was left disheartened. As a catechism teacher of five-plus years, I have seen a pile of old and new Heidelberg Catechism curricula rising two feet high from the council table while discussing the need for new material. From where I sit, if we can’t find it in the pile, we won’t find it in a new resource either.

How about making what’s old new again by discussing and understanding the beautifully crafted Heidelberg Catechism as it is, along with its history? In my opinion, the editor should not only give us the option to vote yes but to vote for alternatives as well.

—Nick Kinkel
Jarvis, Ont.

In response to the call expressed in the editorial “Doctrine Still Matters” for church education materials, note Frederick III, convener of the Heidelberg Catechism authors. In his preface, he wrote, “. . . some, indeed, being entirely without Christian instruction, others being unsystematically taught, without any established, certain, and clear catechism, but merely according to individual plan or judgment; from which . . . the consequence has

endured that they have . . . grown up without the fear of God and the knowledge of his word, . . . or otherwise have been perplexed with irrelevant and needless questions, and at times have been burdened with unsound doctrines. . . .”

We need a viable model expeditiously.
—Shirley Roels
Grand Rapids, Mich.

What about the Belhar?

Since Synod 2012’s decision not to adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession, we have seen undeniable evidence of racism and injustice in Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, murdered and missing Indigenous women) and in the U.S. (Ferguson, Baltimore, the Black Lives Matter movement) (“What about the Belhar?” Sept. 2015).

If we had adopted the Belhar as a confession, we could have vigorously raised our collective voice to call for healing and reconciliation. We didn’t—and so we couldn’t speak it with commitment and conviction.

We, the majority white community, should ask ourselves what our ethnic minority brothers and sisters in the CRC have to say about the Belhar. Does it speak to them and what they face? Does it resonate with their experience? Do they see it as relevant in North American culture? If they do, then we need to reconsider that 2012 decision.

—Jim Payton
Mount Hope, Ont.

Business Matters

The authors were spot on regarding the importance of businesses and how they can be used in God’s kingdom (“Business Matters,” Sept. 2012). Our workplaces can be the most important aspect of our Christian walk. Even secular environments can change lives.

Three companies were listed as examples of non-believers doing business right. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of companies who give back to their communities in powerful ways—a large pool to choose from. The inclusion of Patagonia is perplexing. I can appreciate the quality and function of their products and respect their passion for environmental causes. I cannot, however, understand how they can be referenced as a company that “works for the good of society” when their support for Planned Parenthood is widely known.

—Kevin Champion
Grand Rapids, Mich.

CRC and NIV

Your article on the CRC participation in the NIV (“The Continuing Connection between the CRC and the NIV,” Sept. 2015) neglects to mention that the leader and executive secretary of the original NIV was a CRC pastor, Dr. Edwin H. Palmer.

—Timothy Palmer
Bukuru, Nigeria

Confessions Are Important

Your layout of things we can expect as *Banner* readers was most encouraging (“Call Me Len,” Sept. 2015). I too am concerned that we may be losing some of our rich theological heritage. I realize that the mission of *The Banner* must include articles that weigh in on both sides of controversial issues. But I have often thought that *The Banner* should have a clearly designated segment that teaches what all CRC members profess—namely, our confessions. I am convinced, as you indicate, that such teaching must always come to us in fresh ways.

—Doug Aldrink
Racine, Wis.

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Seafarers Warmly Welcomed to Port of Montreal at Christmastime

Every Christmas, as the cold winds of December blow through the Port of Montreal, arriving seafarers are welcomed with wrapped gift boxes packed with the love of Christ by Christian Reformed people across Eastern Canada.

The seafarers are thrilled to receive these gifts. Since they spend long periods at sea missing important holidays at home, they are grateful that »

Chaplain David Castonguay delivers presents to seafarers on the M.V. Montreal Express.



Church Welcomes Neighbors with Chilly Carol Sing and Cozy Community

Once again this year, children, visitors, church members, and neighbors will meet under open December skies to sing carols, share Luke's account of the nativity, and hear children's Christmas memories. It is Christmas in The Village in Thorold, Ont., hosted by The Village Church, a Christian Reformed church plant.

"Simplifying is what Christmas is all about," Michael Collins told those gathered last year in the parking lot of the town's community center. "It was a simple birth, and we simply want to celebrate, so thanks for joining us." Collins is the pastor at The Village Church.

The Village is "more about meeting people than entertaining people," according to its website. For the past several years, the leadership team has experimented with many types of Christmas gatherings to attract visitors and make new encounters. After the wet, slushy weather of the Christmas parkside service in 2013, last year's celebration was a combined outdoor afternoon carol sing and indoor activities and refreshments. That is the plan for 2015 as well.

"Being at the community center feels right," said the church's worship coordinator and event organizer Erin Knight. "We felt combining indoor and outdoor gave us more flexibility if the weather was to go wrong, and we are also a church that wants to be accessible to the community."

As one worship leader said, "When you have an outdoor carol sing, it's kind of harmless. People feel welcome to come."
—Alissa Vernon



ALISSA VERNON

More Steps toward Reconciliation in Alberta

» strangers think of them. “Sometimes we’ll see them wearing their gifts. Hats and mittens are always appreciated, as the weather in Montreal can be quite a bit colder than many seafarers are used to,” said Michelle DePooter, chaplain for the CRC’s Ministry to Seafarers (M2S). M2S works with other church ministries at Mariner’s House, a seamen’s club that provides physical and spiritual support to seafarers while they are in Montreal.

Each year, M2S delivers more than 1,500 parcels, one for each seafarer who comes to Montreal during the Christmas season. “We rely on the churches for this campaign. It’s a part of our ministry we are excited about because it brings together the churches, mainly across Ontario, who prepare presents year after year to give to all the seafarers,” said DePooter. “And every year, God always provides the number of presents we need.”

The parcels are delivered throughout December and into early January. They contain items like toothpaste, shampoo, hats and mittens, and treats. Each gift also includes a letter from the chaplain explaining why these presents are given. Some years the parcel contains a Bible in the seafarer’s native language. Last year they included a 10-day devotional that shares the meaning of Christmas.

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt



Chief Wilton Littlechild sits on the commemorative bench during dedication service.

The dedication on the commemorative bench at the King’s University.

“I was 6 years old. I recall faintly that it was a cold day, January 6, when my life changed. Some would be allowed to go home for Christmas or Easter, but I was one of the many who couldn’t. As they looked out the window, hoping that their parents would come and get them and they didn’t, they would go back to their rooms and just cry themselves to sleep.”

Those were the words of Chief Wilton Littlechild, commissioner of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), speaking at The King’s University in Edmonton, Alta. His story points to a dark time in Canada’s history when First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children were removed from their families and forced to enroll in boarding schools called Indian Residential Schools. Over more than 100 years, approximately 150,000 children were placed in residential schools. There are approximately 80,000 survivors living across the country.



The TRC was established in 2008 to document the stories of survivors, families, and communities affected by Indian Residential Schools, and to guide Canadians in a process of reconciliation.

Although the Christian Reformed Church was not involved in Indian Residential Schools, when the TRC visited Edmonton in 2014, many CRC-related individuals and institutions were there to offer expressions of reconciliation and make commitments to work toward healing, including representatives from The King’s University.

One of the commitments made by The King’s University was to build a bench and a garden “to be a constant reminder to us of the commitments we have made towards reconciliation.” On September 30, under a cloudless blue

The commemorative bench and garden at The King’s University.



sky, a large number of students, faculty, staff, and guests, including Littlechild, gathered outdoors for a service of dedication of that commemorative bench and garden.

University president Melanie Humphreys reminded everyone of the commitments she made on behalf of King’s. “You said then that you looked forward to the day you could sit on that bench,” she said to Littlefield, “and today here you are.”

“Sometimes we sit to relax,” Littlechild responded, “but sometimes we sit to reflect. And this bench will help us to reflect on what happened to the children, and what happened to the parents that were left behind. . . . When we come and sit and relax on this bench, it will challenge us to sit and think about what we’re going to do about this. What are we going to do about all the stories that we heard? Because we need to take those stories and inform (others) about what reconciliation should look like.”

—Janet A. Greidanus

NEWS

Faith Leaders Call on New Canadian Government to Focus on Palliative Care Instead of Assisted Suicide

The Christian Reformed Church in Canada was among the signatories on a Declaration on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide.

Faith leaders from 30 Christian denominations, along with over 20 Jewish and Muslim leaders from across Canada, signed on to the declaration in late October.

The declaration comes as a response to a Supreme Court ruling earlier in 2015 that struck down laws prohibiting physician-assisted suicide. Members of Christian Reformed churches were

asked then to contact their Members of Parliament and provincial representatives, encouraging them to craft legislation that emphasizes palliative care—including aggressive pain management—but that also strongly protects vulnerable people, including those with disabilities.

The declaration, written by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), reiterates that message. The CRC in Canada is a member of EFC. Canadian Ministries Director Darren Roorda



Aileen Van Ginkel of Evangelical Fellowship of Canada speaks at a Parliament Hill news conference.

signed the declaration on behalf of the CRC.

“We are convinced the only ways to help people live and die with dignity are: to ensure they are supported by love and care; to provide holistic care which includes pain control as well as psychological, spiritual and emo-

tional support; and, to improve and increase resources in support of palliative and home care,” the declaration states. “Health care systems must maintain a life-affirming ethos. Medical professionals are trained to restore and enhance life. They are not trained or expected to administer death. Any change in this regard would fundamentally distort the doctor/patient relationship.”

The Supreme Court has given lawmakers one year to draft new legislation. There are signs that the new Liberal government may ask for a six-month extension.

The Christian Reformed Church addressed end of life issues when Synod 2000 (the annual leadership meeting of the CRC) adopted a resolution urging churches to encourage government allocation of funding for adequate palliative services; encourage government initiatives that allow medical treatment aimed at pain relief, even if that treatment may unintentionally shorten life; and encourage government initiatives that promote life-affirming legislation and oppose legislation that endorses assisted suicide or mercy killing.

—Gayla R. Postma

British Columbia Churches Help Refugees

Two Christian Reformed churches in British Columbia have found ways to bring aid and comfort to people who find themselves far from their homelands, whether they are in B.C. or in refugee camps on the other side of the globe.

A team of 12 members of Nelson Avenue Community CRC in Burnaby recently raised nearly \$3,500 for a local Christian charity called Journey Home in the North America-wide Ride for Refuge.

“Riding with a team is a great way to build community, enjoy nature, get some exercise, and raise funds for a worthy cause,” said team member Grace Kuiper.

Journey Home supports refugee families with transitional housing and resettlement assistance, as well as the relational support they need, to adjust to their new home. Andy Braacx of Nelson Avenue explained that the church’s deacons have been working with Journey Home and coming alongside refu-

gee claimants for the last two years as part of their focus on social justice.

In Langley, the children of Willoughby CRC have



The children of Willoughby CRC assembled school supply kits for refugee children.

been collecting funds for several months to purchase school supplies for children in refugee camps.

“It usually takes about three months of children’s church offerings to buy all the supplies,” explained Liz Tolkamp, Willoughby’s children’s pastor. About 40 kits were assembled by the children; another 30 were

donated by other church members.

The kits are distributed all around the world through a program of the Mennonite Central Committee, going to places like Jordan and Syria as well as Haiti and Honduras. School kits, which include notebooks, pencils, and colored pencils, are meant to help bring normalcy to children experiencing disaster or oppression in their lives.

—Tracey Yan

Fred and Greta Boven (left) welcome Abrahet, Filmon, and Goitom to Canada.



Grieving Infant and Pregnancy Loss

About 35 people gathered in semi-darkness on October 15 to light candles in memory of precious lives lost in pregnancy and infancy. Four people gave testimonies at the service about miscarriages both recent and decades ago, a stillborn child, and a child lost at eight months old. They read from Bible passages including Psalm 139 and the story of Jesus and the children.

The Pregnancy and Infant Loss Memorial Service was the first such event ever held at Grace Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

"Grief can feel very isolating, especially when we are grieving the loss of a child whom others did not have an opportunity to know," said Irene Kraegel, one of those who shared personal stories at the service. "It is so important for us to talk about our grief, to remind each other that we are not alone. The body of Christ is uniquely suited for this kind of mutual support."

Emily Helder initiated the event. Helder and her husband have mourned two miscarriages, and they have found it meaningful to light candles at 7 p.m. on October 15th, along with thousands of people across the country, as part of National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day in the U.S. When Emily had friends experience miscarriage and stillbirth this past summer, she approached her pastor and worship committee with the idea of sharing the practice in a community memorial service. Her friend Ryan Scheiber offered to colead the event.

"One in four women has a miscarriage. Infant loss is less common," said Helder. "But both are not losses that you forget."

Miscarriage can be an especially lonely loss, according to Helder. "Often there is no funeral or memorial service, which leaves an unresolved feeling. Sometimes people don't even tell friends and family. And when they do, it's common to get responses that are trite and unhelpful, such as 'This must be part of God's plan.'"

Church members who want to help should "recognize that the person is grieving," said Helder. "I'm hoping this service could be that community recognition."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Ontario Church Welcomes Refugee Family to Canada

The 125 members of West-side Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Kingston, Ont., had a special reason to celebrate at their morning service on October 25. An Eritrean couple and their 2-year-old son joined the congregation for worship that morning. The refugee family had arrived in Canada on October 22 thanks to the congregation's sponsorship efforts. Pastor Heidi DeJonge had actively prepared the fellowship to welcome the newcomers, even teaching the congregation some words in Tigrinya, one of the languages spoken in Eritrea.

"Our refugee sponsorship started six months ago when my mother, Greta Boven, came up with the idea," explained Gail Power, a member of West-side's 10-member "Friends of Refugees" group. "Right from the beginning, the council and congregation have been right on board, very supportive of this."

Staff at World Renew matched the Kingston

congregation with the Eritrean family: Goitom, 41, his wife, Abrahet, and their son, Filmon, who was born during the four years they spent at a United Nations refugee camp in Sudan.

The congregation set a fundraising goal of \$18,000 and set to work finding an apartment and arranging the support the family needs to start life in their new home.

"We've held a garage sale, a golf tournament, a freewill offering after showing the film 'The Good Lie,' and a Ride for Refugee bike-a-thon in early October. We have already passed our financial goal," Power said. With more fundraising events still scheduled, Power said it is quite possible that they may move ahead with sponsoring more Eritrean refugees.

Many Christian Reformed congregations across the local region have responded to the refugee crisis in Europe by raising funds for World Renew and for The Light-

house, a CRC Toronto-based ministry to refugees and other newcomers to



Two-year-old Filmon at the Ottawa airport.

Canada. Grace CRC recently joined a "better together" group of five evangelical churches in Cobourg, Ont., working to sponsor five Syrian refugee families into their town of 18,000.

—Ron Rupke

NEWS

Highlights of 2015 Fall Classis Meetings

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

Several people were **welcomed into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church**, including seminary graduates Jenna Brandsen, Joshua Christoffels, Bryant DeKruyter, Robert Hoekstra, Mark Langenbach, Mark Mohrlang, Joe Nasvytis, Mary Vanden Berg, Kevin VanderVeen, Philip Vander Windt, Chad Van Ginkel, Ben vanStraten, Scott VanVoorst, Rich Visser, Perrin Werner, and David Zigterman.

Transferred in from other denominations were the following: Revs. King Fai Choi, John Kim, Y-Ming Kao, and Kyung Lok Jang.

Rev. Jong Phil Oh was **loaned to another denomination**.

Revs. Richard Hamstra, Raymond Coffey, Joseph Kim, Sung-Pil Yang, John Koster and Reginald Smith were **released from their congregations**. Isay Alvarez, Richard De Vries, Dae Won Shin, Paul Vanden Brink and John Wilczewski **were released from ministry in the CRC**. Richard Zekveld was **dismissed from ministry** in the CRC.

An emerging church does not have its own council and is under the care of a council of a neighboring Christian Reformed church. An organized church has its own council. The following churches were **organized**: Jacob's Well Church Community (Evergreen Park, Ill.), Orlando (Fla.) Haitian Church, and Hope for Life Community CRC (Watertown, S.D.). Sacred Journey CRC (Providence, R.I.) **reverted to unorganized status**. Good Shepherd CRC and Holy Lord CRC (Anaheim, Calif.) **merged**. Roosevelt Park Community CRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.) and New Covenant CRC (Hampton Beach, N.H.) **closed**.

Classis Ko-Am agreed that **church councils can include ordained Kwonsas** (older women). Classis lakota will **allow female delegates** at classis meetings and Classis Wisconsin **opened all ecclesiastical offices to women delegates**.

Classis Wisconsin established a working group to lead classis in a **study of human sexuality** and in speaking to the denomination. The interim committee of Classis Minnkota will investigate how best to **respond to the hosting of All One Body** by Calvin CRC and Eastern Avenue CRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.) and either advise the churches of the outcome or respond on behalf of classis.

In preparation for Synod 2016, Classes Wisconsin and British Columbia South-East held the **Blanket Exercise**, an activity to help understand the effect of European immigrants on North American native peoples.

—Banner Staff

Synodical Study Committee Reports Released

Three study committee reports headed to Synod 2016 (the annual leadership meeting of the Christian Reformed Church) are now available for study. All of the reports come in response to mandates of previous synods.

The *Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Liberty* was mandated by Synod 2013 to "provide a Reformed framework that establishes a biblical and theological grounding for religious liberty and the injustice of religious persecution and propose individual and group action that empowers the church in our increasingly secularized North American setting to walk alongside and intercede on behalf of those who are subject to religious persecution or denied religious liberty at home or abroad."

The *Doctrine of Discovery Task Force* was assigned by Synod 2012 to "facilitate a discovery process—a learning process . . . to come to a shared understanding of the Doctrine of Discovery and its consequences," including how it came to be and what role the church and European social/cultural attitudes played in its creation and propagation. This doctrine was the belief that North American lands were uninhabited prior to the arrival of European immigrants.

This report was slightly redacted by the church's Board of Trustees. The preamble to the report notes that out of pastoral concern for one of the "storytellers" within the report, the board decided to instruct the executive director to pursue the content of the story

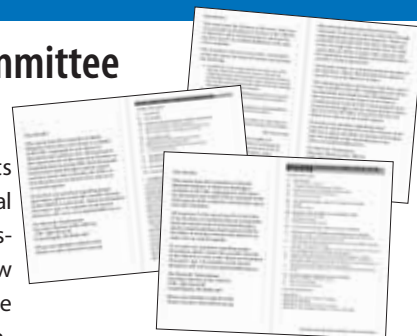
through other appropriate and pastoral channels and to remove it from the task force report. Rules of synodical procedure allow this in certain circumstances. According to those same rules, the original document will be given to the synodical advisory committee that deals with the report at synod. The preamble goes on: "While it is premature to describe how the story's message will surface through other channels at this time, we fully expect that our efforts to utilize other channels will be explained at synod, whether such activities will be partially or fully implemented."

The third report comes from the *Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage*. Two committee members, Jessica Driesenga and John M. Rottman, disagreed on some issues with the majority and wrote a separate minority report on those points.

Responses to study committee reports must come to synod through church councils and classes (regional groups of churches) as overtures or communications and must be received by March 15, 2016, to be included in the synod agenda.

The Banner will publish summaries of the reports and their recommendations in the coming months.

—Gayla R. Postma





Christian Courier past and present.

Canadian Newspaper *Christian Courier* Turns 70

Christian Courier, formerly known as *Calvinist Contact*—and even earlier as *Canadian Calvinist*—marked 70 years of publication this year. The paper's first issue was published in 1945.

Bert Witvoet, a member of Jubilee Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ont., was editor of the paper from 1982 to 1999. He said the paper's founding was an inevitable creation of Dutch immigrant communities "used to having their own political expressions in papers."

The paper at first expressed the desire of the early immigrant community to maintain contact with each other, Witvoet said, noting that in the 1950s much of the paper was written in Dutch and included "articles about each other's experiences." In the 1980s, the paper moved away from its emphasis on "contact" in name and in focus. Witvoet said the editorial board decided that "if we are a Christian magazine, we should really address our own society—the main society—and we should address how we can help develop a society with Christian influence."

The paper became fully English-language by 1983. It has had 12 editors and reached peak circulation of 10,000 subscribers in the 1970s.

Current editor in chief Angela Reitsma Bick, a member of Hope Fellowship CRC in Courtice, Ont., said, "We've definitely retained the Reformed perspective, a willingness to wrestle with hard topics, and a strong sense of community—a kind of a friendship [that has] developed between the readers and the writers," she said.

—Alissa Vernon

Training Youth for Church Leadership

Recently eight leaders and 25 youth gathered at Rosewood Christian Reformed Church in Bellflower, Calif., for the Timothy Project. "The Timothy Project has had a big impact on keeping youth involved in the life of the church as leaders and not just as spectators," explained organizer Carl Kromminga, Jr., pastor of New City CRC in Long Beach, Calif. The retreat was attended by youth from Bellflower, Long Beach, and Artesia.

Since 1999, Classis Greater Los Angeles (a regional group of churches) has been inspiring young people to get and stay involved in the ministry of the local church through weekend retreats that include workshops, worship, and encouragement. For youth not already involved in ministry, a spiritual gifts survey helps them uncover their talents.

Kromminga cited several examples of that impact: the current youth leaders of both New City CRC and Long Beach CRC attended the Timothy Project when they were in high school; another previous attendee is working with people who are homeless and a CRC church plant in Sacramento.

This year's weekend speaker, AJ McCloud, attended the Timothy Project



KEVIN BELL

Time for worship at the Timothy Project weekend.

when he was a student. He now serves as an elder at Los Angeles Community CRC and is in the evangelist training program of the classis, preparing to enter full-time ministry.

"My hope was that those in attendance this year would recognize that our Lord is forever at work in our lives, and that seeking his glory gives us vision and purpose," McCloud said. "Youth and young adults all desire to find their purpose and find where they belong. I truly believe the Lord will provide the 'what' he wants us to do when we seek his face through faith and obedience."

—Tracey Yan

British Columbia Classis Evacuated after Fire Breaks Out



JACQUES ANEMA

Firefighters work to put out the fire at Cornerstone CRC.

On Tuesday, October 20, delegates to Classis British Columbia South-East were just finishing supper at Cornerstone Christian Reformed Church in Chilliwack when the fire alarm sounded.

At first, delegates thought it was a way of calling everyone back to session. Corner-

stone pastor Rev. Bill Veenstra said that was not the case.

Veenstra said the 80 to 90 people in building were all asked to leave. Neighbors had already seen the smoke and called the fire department. It soon became apparent that the fire had started in the Cadet club house. It appears

to have been caused by a short in an exhaust fan.

About an hour later, everyone was allowed back in the building, but classis was adjourned for the evening and reconvened the following morning.

The damage was primarily caused by smoke and was limited to the Cadet room and two nurseries that will need new insulation and ceilings. Veenstra said he expects the repairs will take about two months. In the meantime, other rooms in the building will be used for nurseries.

—Gayla R. Postma



Rev. Lyle Bierma leads a seminar on the Heidelberg Catechism for Korean leaders.

Korean-American Pastors Get Heidelberg Catechism Training

Why is a catechism that was written in 1563 important for faith formation and pastoral ministry? That was one of the questions answered by Rev. Lyle Bierma as he led a seminar on the Heidelberg Catechism for Korean Christian Reformed ministers and lay leaders.

On October 20, leaders from two regional groups of Korean churches, Classis Ko-Am and Classis Hanmi, participated in the one-day seminar led by Bierma, a professor at Calvin Theological Seminary.

More than 50 people gathered at TkoKamsa Mission CRC in Los Angeles. Simultaneous translation was provided by Rev. Ki (Paul) Yu and Rev. Christian Yong Ju Oh.

"I'm so glad to learn this beautiful piece for my pastoral teachings, and I hope that this is important for lay leaders as well as young people," said Rev. O Seog Seoh of Mission Hills, Calif. Rev. Tae Kuk Koh of Buena Park agreed. "I'm glad to be here to overview this great Reformed piece which I learned and knew even in Korea. And I hope that this continues to [be used] in audio or video materials to help current and future Korean-American churches."

—Jonathan Kim

Iowa Church Celebrates 125 Years

First Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa, celebrated its 125th anniversary at the end of September. Current pastor Mark Verbruggen and former pastors John L. Witvliet and John Hellinga were on hand September 29 to take part in the worship services.

Part of the celebration included "Singing Our History," featuring songs that had been sung over the church's history. Songs were selected from each of the CRC's *Psalter Hymnals*, including the first English translation of the *Psalter* published in 1912, the red *Psalter Hymnal* (1934), the blue *Psalter Hymnal*



(L-r) Revs. John L. Witvliet, Mark Verbruggen, and John Hellinga participated in the anniversary celebration.

(1957), and the gray *Psalter Hymnal* (1987).

Verbruggen expressed what the anniversary meant to the congregation. "To use a familiar but true cliché, an anniversary is always an occasion to reflect on God's faithfulness. First CRC exists by the will of God and for the glory of God. God doesn't need us, but God has chosen to bless us for 125 years, and we hope that this will continue for many years to come," he said.

"I think, from its beginning, First CRC has always been a progressively conservative church. It has always strived to be both faithful to the Scriptures and to understand the gospel's place in an ever-changing world and society. Through steady and faithful preachers over the decades, it has been led by a positive vision for the kingdom of God and its coming to this world in Christ."

—Kyle Hoogendoorn

Coffee for a Cause

When Rev. Braden Kok was called as a church planter to Granite Springs Christian Reformed Church in Lincoln, Calif., three years ago, little did he know he would end up running a coffee shop just outside Sacramento.

Origin Coffee and Tea was started several years ago by two local pastors as a way to raise funds for local groups that rescue people from lives of sexual slavery. Sacramento is the second largest hub in the United States for human trafficking.

Kok took over as director of the nonprofit organization last fall and is now in charge of the 120 volunteers who staff the shop each quarter. About a dozen volunteers attend local CRCs, but the rest are from the community. Volunteers rotate every three months and there is



Volunteers offer coffee for a cause at Origin Coffee and Tea.

no shortage of applicants. After a recent closure due to a burst pipe, over 150 people applied for the positions. The reopening also received welcome exposure when it was featured on the local news program "Good Day Sacramento."

What does coffee have to do with church planting? "Origin has allowed us to help meet one of the greatest needs in our community, but it has also given a visible face to the

church we are planting," Kok said. "We are building relationships with more than 100 volunteers every quarter, and more than half of them are not Christian. Origin gives me a way to show them a vision of the gospel."

Volunteer Aubrey Harper of Granite Springs CRC wanted to be part of the team that brings a welcoming environment to the community. "Volunteering isn't simply a four-hour shift for me; it's time dedicated to spreading both love and coffee."

Fellow volunteer Scotty Tang agreed. "It allows me to use my passion for coffee for something bigger than myself," he said.

Kok hopes to launch the new church in early 2016. He is also currently exploring the possibility of opening a second Origin location.

—Tracey Yan



The Christmas Blues and the Gospel That Transcends Terror

A YEAR AGO, during an Advent carol sing, a staff conversation at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship reviewed the many painful tragedies of 2014: the mysterious disappearance of nearly 60 students in Southern Mexico, the kidnapping of 300 Nigerian girls, and terrifying reports of abuse and human trafficking right here in North America.

Before long we found ourselves turning to one of the least-sung of recently published hymns, a hymn reflecting on Herod's terrible "slaying of the innocents." The first verse begins, "Blest are the innocents killed by a tyrant who clings to a throne. Not just by Herod, not just along

ago. Here and today voices cry from below. . . ." (*Lift Up Your Hearts* 108).

Tragically, we woke up the next day to the news about the slaying of 148 innocent children in Lahore, Pakistan.

Later that same day, this same rarely-sung song was being shared on Facebook as a song of lament: "Where is the comfort for those who still mourn? Where is the assurance for those yet unborn? God, hear the blood crying out from the ground. Shine on the shadows where secrets resound" (stanza 3).

2015 has been another year of tragedy for innocent victims: martyrdom in a Charleston, S.C., Bible study; the plight of 60 million refugees worldwide; racial strife in Ferguson and Baltimore;

the continuing tragedy of abuse and trafficking.

All of it causes us to shiver deep inside—a bit like the shiver we feel when watching the White Witch turn Mr. Tumnus into a block of icy stone in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, or when we feel the evil force of Salazar Slytherin's "Chamber of Secrets" in Harry Potter. Only this is a shiver we cannot escape by closing the book or turning off the streaming video.

If you are in 6th or 8th or 12th grade, think about how much of what you study in a history class or discuss in current events or read about in literature is similar to the terror of King Herod. Godly and perceptive children of all ages »

ask, “Why, oh why, do these terrible things happen?”

This side of heaven, no article can give a fully satisfying answer to that question.

But there is a word that can be spoken. Matthew, the Spirit-inspired writer of the first gospel, shows us the way.

The Whole, Ugly Truth

Matthew has the courage to tell the whole story of Christmas, including this part: “When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under . . .” (Matt. 2:16).

Matthew does not offer us a merry little Christmas. He tells a Christmas story with a death scene, an eerie foreshadowing of things to come.

There is no grace in Herod’s heinous act. But there is grace in Matthew’s truth-telling.

Matthew depicts the stark contrast between Jesus and Herod—between humility and arrogance, peace and violence, transparency and conniving coercion, life-giving and death-dealing.

He does not shy away from declaring just how much the forces of evil hate the good news. He is willing to tell us that while Jesus is the Prince of Peace, we must never understand this to be a quick fix.

In his commentary on this text, John Calvin points out that Matthew does what other historians of the period, like Josephus, didn’t do. Calvin comments: “Josephus certainly ought not to have passed over a crime so worthy of being put on record.” Calvin sounds here like a prophet lamenting the thinness of newspapers written for a culture that has little patience for international news. He credits Matthew for telling the whole story.

For the last 20 centuries, the church has not done as well as Matthew in telling

the whole story. It’s nearly impossible to find a hymn about the slaying of the innocents to put in a hymnal.

But there are exceptions. In the Middle Ages, the annual Christmas pageant mystery plays rarely left out Herod. People who live in a fear-gripped world of despots rarely leave Herod out of the story.

They won’t ignore this story in Bethlehem or Syria this year either. Middle Eastern theologian Kenneth Bailey notes that it feels like God’s Spirit prompted Matthew to record this episode for contemporary Bible readers in the Middle East who live with perpetual war, bloodshed, and violence:

A mindless, bloody atrocity took place at the birth of Jesus. After reading that story, the reader is not caught unawares by the human potential for terror that

shows its ugly face again on the cross. At the beginning of the Gospel and at its conclusion, Matthew presents pictures of the depth of evil Jesus came to redeem. The story heightens the reader’s awareness of the willingness on the part of God to expose himself to the total vulnerability which is at the heart of the incarnation. —*Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, p. 58

There is no grace in Herod’s heinous act. But there is grace in Matthew’s truth-telling. Matthew is telling us there is no reason why we should avoid the whole story. We tell it as a candid account of what Jesus came to resolve. We tell it to testify that even this terror cannot ultimately thwart God’s purposes.

Note well: when Matthew tells this ugly part of the story, he does not explain why it happens or how it makes any sense. He is not an all-knowing narrator of the story

with access to the mind of God. He does not know why such evil events happen any more than any of us do.

Sometimes good does come out of evil, and reconciliation and redemption appear in ways that we can perceive. When that does happen, we should testify about it and celebrate it.

But there is also evil in the world that can’t be understood or explained away.

Haunting Lament

Instead of explaining it, Matthew does something different: he lingers and sings the blues. He pauses in the story, and lovingly stitches into his narrative a record of an ancient lament:

“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more” (2:18).

This is no ordinary lament. This is a 500-year old specimen of classic blues. Five hundred years earlier in Ramah, Jeremiah moaned these very words to lament the people being carried off into exile (Jer. 31:15). More than a thousand years before that, Rachel, mother of Joseph, and her husband, Jacob, moaned inconsolably when their son was sold off into Egypt, the future place of slavery.

Thus, as biblical scholar Raymond Brown pointed out, this one haunting song carries with it the memories of Israel’s two greatest nightmares: slavery in Egypt and exile in Babylon.

Deep calls to deep. The ancient cries reverberate through the centuries.

The echoes are a bit like how the hip-hop protest songs of Ferguson, Mo., evoke the marching songs of Selma and Birmingham, which in turn evoke the spirituals of the Underground Railroad and the heart cries of *Amistad*. Visit YouTube and find Marian Anderson singing, “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen . . . nobody knows but Jesus” . . . or “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child . . . A long way from home” to get a sense of the pathos.

In England, the echo of the ancient lament happened when those old mystery

plays of medieval times were revived, along with their haunting lament about Herod known as the “Coventry Carol.” This revival happened just after Hitler bombed out the Coventry Cathedral. Hitler’s bombs woke up the ancient blues.

Matthew’s memory-laden, history-evoking blues is an act of truth-telling, a testament of justice and righteousness. It’s a song that exposes the witless evil of Herod, a song that marks the dignity of those who unjustly suffer.

Matthew concludes, “Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled.” By this he is not merely saying that Jesus’ unfolding biography managed to check another prophecy off the list. Rather, he is saying that the hopes and fears of all the years—even Rachel’s inconsolable weeping—rise to a crescendo and are gathered up in the life in Jesus. Jesus is Israel’s strength and consolation.

The Rest of the Story

Matthew tells the ugly truth and lingers to sing the ancient blues. And then, in the face of evil he can’t explain, he does the one other thing he can do, the one magnificent thing we can do in the face of horrors: he goes on to tell the rest of the story.

Just a few pages later, Matthew records Jesus’ words “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (5:4). A few chapters after that he adds Jesus’ words “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (11:28).

Then Matthew tells us how Jesus healed the sick, welcomed little children, and prophesied the coming day of the Lord, a day of vindication and justice. He tells us how Jesus gave instructions for his followers to share bread and wine as a feast of sorrow and of blessing, a foretaste of a feast to come.

Following that, he unfolds a stark account of another slaying of an innocent: the death of Jesus himself, God’s ultimate answer to violence—a death designed to reverse the power of death, to turn evil back on itself.

In his own way, Jeremiah did the same thing, turning the page. Right after Jeremiah moaned Rachel’s “refusing to be comforted” blues, Jeremiah declares: “This is what the Lord says: Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears. . . there is hope for your descendants, declares the Lord” (Jer. 31:16-17). Even those who refuse to be comforted will, one day, be comforted. The inconsolable will be consoled.

Later in the Bible, Paul picks up this same riff of stark realism and sturdy hope. What better text to gather up our lament and hope than Paul’s magnificent sermon in Romans 8?

The lament is stark and brutally honest: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:22-23).

That lament gives way to some of the most exalted lines in the entire Bible:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 35-39).

As a parent, when I have been asked, “Why do such evil things happen in the world?” I am grateful for the question, arising as it does from a keen sense of justice and empathy. Still, every part of my conflict-avoidant self wants to change the topic, to grasp for explanations that attempt to make sense of it, to hurry on to happier things.

It takes grace to speak the truth about horrors, to admit I do not have answers, to linger in sanctifying lament, and then to testify about ultimate hope.

Let us pray for this grace for all parents—and for school teachers, too, who need to decide how many of the horrors recounted on CNN Student News their students can handle, and then what to say about them.

And what about church life?

As I work with congregations across North America in a variety of denominations, I am stunned by how many churches almost never pray in public about human trafficking and child abuse, the persecuted church in North Korea and Pakistan, the innocent victims of abortion and gun violence, and the victimization of indigenous peoples all over the world.

In a generation or two, historians may well look back on our worship life and find our debates about music style rather uninteresting compared with the sudden abandonment of intercession for the needs of the world in so many churches.

In the last 20 years, some theologians have written a lot about lament, but so few of us have patience to actually do it. I guess we’d prefer to live in our tiny little world of gift catalogs.

All the while, our sisters and brothers in Syria and Charleston long for us to join them in telling the truth and singing the blues, and our own children wonder what we will say about the world’s most heinous evil.

This year, may God’s Spirit spare us from having a merry little Christmas. Rather, may God give us grace to follow Matthew’s lead: to speak of tragedies, to sing the blues lovingly, and then—relying on the power of the Holy Spirit—to press on to receive the news that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



John D. Witvliet is director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, Mich.

A Year of Love

I'LL NEVER FORGET the fear and brokenness in 10-year-old Michael's face the first time I met him one snowy afternoon three years ago. He and his new foster mother—my friend Bethany—had come to visit. I noticed the bruised wariness in Michael's eyes, the desperate-to-be-invisible hunching of his slight body. As I bent to introduce myself, he flinched and shrank away, the telling reaction of a young life that had known more harshness and mistreatment than kindness.

"You could see the pain in his eyes. It was very sad. He was a lovable young boy," Bethany recalled the other day as we shared a pot of tea. Memories of Michael swirled around us like the steam rising from our china cups.

Michael had been a sensitive child—helpful, caring, kind—but also faltering and unsure. "He was very needy, desperate for affection. He wanted to please in the worst way, but didn't quite know how," Bethany remembered.

Like many children in foster care, Michael had endured much. Bethany told me that he had been emotionally and physically abused. He was the scapegoat of his entire family, the child blamed for everything that went wrong. "His mother would often tell him she didn't want him," she said.

It was a heavy burden for a child. And, deeply hurting, Michael began acting out. He craved attention very badly and desperately tried to get it any way he could, including misbehaving. He became defiant and argumentative, even aggressive, in his foster home. He had intense crying meltdowns, especially following supervised visits with his parents. While the long-term goal was always for Michael to return to his family, these visits were difficult.

"After the visits he'd fall apart and sob," said Bethany. "I'd hug him and tell him I loved him, that I accepted him exactly as he was. He was experiencing a safe, loving home for the first time, and I think he was having a hard time wondering why his birth family didn't love him and treat him with kindness too," Bethany reflected.

Day by day she poured her heart into caring for Michael. As winter passed, glimmers of healing began appearing like early garden shoots. The look in his eyes gradually became less guarded, and he began to smile more. As Michael's foster family modeled positive behavior, Bethany saw him pay careful attention. She helped him understand the importance of considering others' feelings and treating others the way he'd like to be treated.




Having structure and a healthy routine for the first time in his life helped immensely too. Little things were especially important—eating supper together every night, playing games as a family, a trip to the lake on a hot summer day. Bethany showed him what a home life should be. He began to develop a sense of both a family and a home, and these things began to make a difference for him. "It was a roller coaster at times, with many ups and downs," said Bethany, "but he was absolutely worth it."

Time flew, and before we knew it a year had passed. Then, with Christmas approaching, came the news that Michael would soon return to his family.

I will always hold close to my heart the last day I saw Michael, standing tall and confident, his eyes sparkling. As we exchanged Christmas gifts, delight wreathed his face brighter than the glittering lights on the Christmas tree.

The transformation was profound. While the road ahead was long and uncertain, written all over Michael's face was the story of healing begun. For a year my friend had persevered



Written all over
Michael's face
was a story of
healing begun.

through challenging days. Through her efforts Christ powerfully touched Michael's life.

The past two years have not been easy for Michael. Just three weeks after moving home, Michael's mother decided she didn't want him. His social worker moved him to a new foster family, which didn't last long. He has since lived with three other foster families.

But Bethany holds on to faith that the year of love her family spent with Michael will make an eternal difference in his life. She continues to pray for him, trusting the promise that God who "began a good work" in Michael will "carry it on to completion in Christ Jesus."

I've long been familiar with Christ's call to lay down our lives for others. But to see it played out in the life of a vulnerable child made a profound impact on me. It made me want to open my eyes to those in need, to the Michaels of the world. Our society often values certain people while disregarding those on the margins, people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged.

We so focus on our own lives that we often remain ignorant of others. I don't want to live like that anymore.

In Canada and the United States alone, over 450,000 children are in foster care. Many of these children are longing and praying for "forever families." While the need for loving foster and adoptive families is staggering, I believe even greater are the opportunities God has placed before us as Christians to step forward in faith to forever change the lives of children.

My friend Bethany will be the first to tell you it isn't easy. She'll also say it's one of the most worthwhile things she's ever done. "I believe God wants us to serve others, and this is my way of serving him," she said simply. "It is truly a privilege to offer to children who have come from severe trauma and neglect a safe place to stay, food to eat, and love."

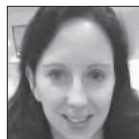
As Jesus said in Matthew, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." ■

Could God be calling you to foster care or adoption?

If you believe God is asking you to consider foster care or adoption, start by gathering information. Contact your province or state's department of children's services for specific information and requirements in your jurisdiction.

- Focus on the Family provides invaluable information about adoption through *Waiting to Belong* waitingtobelong.ca/ (Canada) and *Wait No More* icareaboutorphans.org/ (United States).
- Check out the National Foster Parent Association (nfpaonline.org/foster/); Adoption Council of Canada (adoption.ca/); and AdoptUSKids (adoptuskids.org/).
- *Handbook on Thriving as an Adoptive Family* by David and Renee Sanford has helpful ideas and suggestions.

With God all things are possible! Do not let obstacles such as age, disabilities, singleness, or finances automatically stop you. Remember that government financial support may be available. Bethany is a single mother. The author of this article has disabilities that would make physically caring for a small child difficult, but was blessed four years ago to adopt a (now) 14-year-old girl who is the light of her life.



Jenna C. Hoff is a freelance writer and editor in Edmonton, Alta. She is a member of Inglewood Christian Reformed Church.

‘God Was in My Life from the Beginning’

by Bruce Buursma

Brian Tarpy is completing his training at Calvin Theological Seminary this year as president of the student body. His improbable journey toward ordained ministry in the Christian Reformed Church began with a culturally Catholic childhood spent along the Southern California coast.

“I did the things a good Catholic should do,” Tarpy said. “I went to Catholic school. So I knew about God, just not in a very personal way.”

That changed dramatically when, at the age of 13, he heard Pastor Greg Laurie unpack the parable of the prodigal son at a Harvest Ministries Crusade in San Diego.

“He talked about how Christ wants to have a relationship with each of us,” Tarpy said. “That was transformational for me. I had never thought about faith in that way. I got out of my seat and walked down to the field so I could have a relationship with Christ.”

From that point, Tarpy’s quest for a deeper, more meaningful faith took him to an array of nondenominational churches, leading him to pursue studies first at Calvary Chapel Bible College in California and later at Multnomah University in Portland, Ore.

It was during his time in Portland that his spiritual sojourn led to an initial encounter with the Christian Reformed Church.

“I do recognize that God was in my life from the beginning,” he said. “Calvinism teaches that God comes to us first and we are irresistibly drawn. I realized that this was the more biblical approach.



The Tarpy family on Sunday at Manhattan CRC: Brian, Cassidy, and sons Cole and Bo.

“We knew this is our place to belong and to serve God.”

“So when my wife, Cassidy, and I moved to Portland, we decided to look for a church that was Reformed.”

Neither of them had ever heard of the Christian Reformed denomination, but when Tarpy pulled up Google Maps online and typed “Reformed” and “Portland” into the search bar, the website and location for Parklane Christian Reformed Church popped up.

“We visited Parklane and fell in love with the place,” he said. “They treated us like family.”

Parklane’s longtime pastor, Vance Hays, identified ministry gifts in both Brian and Cassidy. The church hired Cassidy as youth director, and Hays offered Brian encouragement and opportunities to preach.

“Pastor Vance told me that if you have the gifts for the ministry, it often means you have a call to ministry,” Brian said.

Intrigued but still unsure if pastoral ministry might be a fit for him, he and Cassidy left Portland after completing his schooling at Multnomah and moved to Ogden, Utah, where he took a job delivering and installing copy machines.

“I was driving a delivery truck and listening to audio books all day,” he said. “I felt my life was not making a difference. Finally, Cassidy and I decided to respond to the call to ministry.”

He knew of several seminaries in the West, but remembered that Hays had told him about Calvin Theological Seminary.

“We knew it was the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church in North America,” Tarpy said. “We also knew we wanted to be part of the church because of how we experienced people in the CRC at Parklane.



As student body president, Brian Tarpy helps lead a Town Hall meeting for students, along with dean of students Jeff Sajdak (left).



Brian Tarpy leads outdoor worship last summer in Manhattan, Mont., where he served his summer internship.

“It wasn’t just the theology. Our Parklane family considered worship a 24/7 activity. It was a community we were invited into and a welcome that drew us in completely. We knew this is our place to belong and to serve God.”

Since arriving on Calvin’s campus in 2013, Tarpy has experienced a similar

supportive community, along with a bracing and challenging formation for pastoral ministry and preaching.

“It’s been a journey to learn how to preach well,” he said. “The preaching classes helped give me a framework and a starting ground. My professors have shaped me in ways I couldn’t have imagined before coming to Calvin. They’ve helped me look into the text of Scripture and see it with fresh eyes.”

This past summer, Brian and Cassidy and their two young sons, Cole and Bo, lived in Manhattan, Mont., happily serving a summer assignment with the Christian Reformed community there and gaining a foretaste of pastoral ministry after graduation and ordination.

“The CRCNA has a tendency to focus on knowing instead of belonging,” Brian commented. “But we are coming into a time where the emphasis on knowing is not so much a priority.

“As Reformed people, we are body and soul too, not just minds. We honor every aspect of God’s creation.”

As he concludes his final months of pastoral preparation at the seminary, Tarpy looks forward to building a warm and welcoming church community through his preaching.

Just as the parable of the prodigal son spoke a life-changing message to him as a junior high school student, he said he hopes to share the glory of the gospel with the next generation. ■



Bruce Buursma is a freelance writer, editor, and video producer.

Four Pages of a Sermon

All her life, Betsy Hochhalter DeVries has been nurtured in the arms of the church and the worldview framed by the Reformed tradition. Her family tree—parents, siblings, husband, and even her brother-in-law—is deeply rooted in full-time kingdom work.

And so a funny thing happened on DeVries's way to the careers she initially had planned.

"First, I had started college at Azusa Pacific as a viola performance major, but that was a lot of time alone in a practice room," she said. "Then I transferred to Kuyper College for their social work program. I came to find that I wanted to help people, but I recognized that real change comes through a relationship with God, so I switched to pre-sem studies."

Now in her final year at Calvin Theological Seminary, DeVries was invited to preach the sermon at the opening chapel service for the current academic year and earned glowing assessments from Rev. John Rottman, her professor of preaching,



Betsy DeVries preaching at Plymouth Heights CRC in Grand Rapids, where she served her summer internship.

with whom she's worked closely both in the classroom and during a year-long Renewal Lab at Mayfair Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

"She's absolutely terrific," said Rottman, "and Betsy is as gifted as any student I've ever had at using the 'four-pages method' for building sermons."

The Four Pages of a Sermon is the title of a book by Paul Scott Wilson, a United Church of Canada pastor and professor of homiletics at the University of Toronto.

The principles in the book have been embraced by Rottman and his colleague Rev. Scott Hoezee, who directs the Center for Excellence in Preaching.

Each "page" represents a section to a sermon. Where previous generations of seminarians were taught a three-point formula of Explanation, Illustration, and Application, crafting sermons for congregations today follows a four-part course—trouble in the biblical text,

trouble in the world, grace in the text, grace in the world.

"I've embraced the four-pages method," DeVries says. "It keeps me from trying to impose my own agenda on a text. It also keeps me from getting mad at the church. It always ends with what God is doing right. I want people to leave the service having encountered God's grace, and not leave feeling burdened or guilty."

Hoezee notes the structure forces the preacher to "proclaim an active God who's doing something in the here and now, and giving you hope."

If the sermon succeeds in its intent, Hoezee adds, "faith should be thickened or quickened—joy should happen. The Spirit is supposed to do something with the preached Word."

DeVries and her husband, fellow senior seminarian Daniel DeVries, await with anticipation the direction of the Spirit as they stand on the cusp of taking up ministry together.

"We're keeping an open mind to whatever options will be available to us," she said. "But I feel strongly that part of my calling will be into a preaching ministry." ■

—Bruce Buursma



Seminary president Jul Medenblik greets Betsy DeVries, her husband, Dan, and their son Emmett at the ice cream social in September.

You add.
God multiplies.

The Center for Excellence in Preaching

The sermon long has occupied a revered and central place in worship in most churches of the Reformed tradition. Some Reformed pastors, however, are regarded as dutiful but a shade dull in the pulpit—long on information but short on imagination.

Into that gap the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary was launched 11 years ago by then-president Rev. Cornelius Plantinga. Today, the center is one of the largest and most trusted providers of distinctively Reformed sermon resources anywhere.

Much of the center's thought-provoking work is consolidated and available anywhere at any time to anyone with an Internet connection at cep.calvinseminary.edu. The website, recently renovated and reorganized, has become a hive of homiletical tips and sermon starters. Every month more than 13,000 pastors and lay leaders search the site for ideas and inspiration. In the first 10 months of 2015,



more than one million pages were downloaded, double that of any previous year.

"Our founding principle—and President Plantinga's vision—was that the Reformed tradition should continue to emphasize the importance of the preached Word as a key means of grace," said Rev. Scott Hoezee, who has directed the center since 2005.

"We want Calvin Seminary on the map to support good preaching. The second

principle is that good preaching depends on good input. Preaching is output, output, output, so if nothing is coming in, the well is going to run dry."

The center's primary face to the public is the website, but it also cosponsors events such as the annual Calvin Symposium on Worship and the biennial Calvin Festival of Faith and Writing. In addition, it stages small, intensive seminars such as "Imaginative Reading for Creative Preaching" for smaller groups of participants as well as customized individual mentoring experiences.

The development of the center and its resources coincides with a sweeping cultural shift in the way sermons are prepared and how they are received by those in the pew. The three-point expository, authoritative homily of the 20th century has been supplanted by less formal sermons and meditations that lean heavily on local context and anecdotes with which the congregation can identify.

"We increasingly are a missional church, more and more a minority," said Hoezee. "We not only have to be good preachers, we must be good anthropologists. We have to exegete Scripture and exegete context. We have to be good storytellers. You can't just talk ideas and concepts and doctrines. It has to be more nuanced."

The name of the center was chosen carefully and with deliberate consideration, Plantinga said. "I wanted to be sure we all understood that by excellent we don't mean the capacity to dazzle or sermons that blow you away. By excellent, we mean biblically rooted, contextual, life-affirming sermons that present the text faithfully but also engagingly."

Ultimately, Plantinga added, it is the first role of the preacher/pastor to be obedient to the gospel.

"Whether churches wax or wane is really not under human control," he said. "Our job is to be faithful where we are." ■

—Bruce Buursma

The Church at Prayer for Pastors

The faithful prayers of congregations can help pastors be better preachers. Here's a template for praying each day of the week for a pastor's rhythm, especially the recurring task of developing Sunday's sermon. If you know your pastor's weekly schedule, rearrange the days accordingly.

Day 1 (Sunday): Pray that people will hear the gospel, that their hearts will be quickened by hope and joy. Pray that your pastor will give up self for the glory of God.

Day 2: Pray that your pastor will have a refreshing day away from "the office" of church ministry for recreation, family time, personal Sabbath rest.

Day 3: Pray for your pastor's reflection on the text for next week's sermon, for imagination and inspiration, for flow and focus.

Day 4: Pray for your pastor's caregiving to members of the congregation who are sad, sick, suffering, or grief-stricken. Pray that his presence will bless and bolster hearts in pain, with your specific prayers behind the scenes.

Day 5: Pray for your pastor's actual writing of the sermon; that the Spirit will breathe into her awareness the right words and stories and pictures needed to convey the sermon's grace and truth.

Day 6: Pray that your pastor has a mentor or honest pastor friends with whom he can be vulnerable, especially about his own preaching and ministry.

Day 7: Pray for your pastor as she puts the finishing touches on the sermon, that she may be rested and ready to open God's Word to eager hearts.

Longing to Belong

The word *longing* is the root of the word *belonging*. We long to belong.

Advent connects longing and belonging. We long for the coming Christ-child. We long for Christmas because it brings rich family times, meaningful worship, and a renewed sense of God’s gift of his Son. It is because of Christ’s coming that we belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Christmas provides opportunities to remember and celebrate our belonging in Christ. But belonging is also a daily event. The journey of Advent can bring much-needed remembrance, but I hope that living each day as a member of the body of Christ does too.

Do you long to belong to the Christian Reformed Church? Or are denominations just an artifact of a bygone era?

Such questions lead to issues of identity and value. Our emerging ministry plan identifies this desired future: *We understand deeply, embrace fully, and express freely what it means to be part of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.*

It goes on to place that identity not just in a North American context but “as part of Christ’s church worldwide”; a diverse church gathered from “every nation, tribe, and tongue”; a church that is responding to the call to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.”

Our personal identities are not shaped in isolation but by the influence of family and friends, church and school, culture and society. Nor is identity something achieved only by individuals. Denominations need to achieve and sustain an identity marked by fidelity and faithfulness if they are to be used by the Spirit to shape lives and impact society.

In this Advent season, I encourage us—as individuals and as a denomination—to be renewed in our belief, rooting our identities in Christ. May our longing to see the coming of the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven order our every step and our every goal.

And may we fully realize our belonging within a tradition that values a Reformed and reforming witness to a society that desperately needs to know that God so loved the world that he sent his Son.

May each of our identities, as well as our collective identity, point the way to Christ, as did that star of Bethlehem so many years ago. ■



Dr. Steven Timmermans is the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.
El Dr. Steven Timmermans es el director ejecutivo de la Iglesia Cristiana Reformada en Norteamérica.
 스티븐 팀머멘스 박사, 북미주 개혁교회 총무



“Christmas provides opportunities to remember and celebrate our belonging in Christ.”

Querer pertenecer

i Se ha dado cuenta que las palabras *querer* y *pertenecer* se complementan? Queremos pertenecer.

El adviento conecta querer con pertenecer. Queremos la llegada del niño Jesús. Queremos que llegue la navidad porque trae con ella momentos muy enriquecedores que pasamos en familia, porque la adoración cobra un significado mayor y se renueva ese sentido del regalo de Dios en su hijo. Es por la venida de Cristo que pertenecemos –en cuerpo y alma, en la vida y en la muerte- a nuestro fiel salvador, Jesucristo.

La navidad nos da la oportunidad de recordar y celebrar ese sentido de pertenencia que nos da Cristo. Sin embargo ese sentido de pertenencia también es algo que ocurre cada día. La época de adviento puede traer a la memoria ese tan necesitado sentido de pertenencia aunque espero que también nos lo recuerde el vivir cada día como miembros del cuerpo de Cristo.

¿Quiere pertenecer a la Iglesia Cristiana Reformada? ¿O las denominaciones son solo objetos de una época que ya pasó?

Estas preguntas nos llevan a cuestiones de identidad y valor. Nuestro recién creado plan para el ministerio reconoce este futuro que deseamos: *Entendemos profundamente, nos dedicamos completamente y expresamos libremente lo que significa ser parte de la Iglesia Cristiana Reformada en Norteamérica.*

Esto nos lleva a ubicar dicha identidad, no solo en el contexto de Norteamérica, sino “como parte de la iglesia de Cristo en todo el mundo.” Como una iglesia que se ha formado de “gente de cada nación, tribu e idioma”. Una iglesia que esté respondiendo al llamado de hacer justicia, de amar la compasión y de caminar con Dios en humildad.

Nuestra identidad personal no se forma estando aislados, sino por la influencia de la familia y los amigos, la iglesia y la escuela, la cultura y la sociedad. La identidad tampoco es algo que solo los individuos pueden alcanzar. Las denominaciones necesitan llegar a tener una identidad y conservarla, dicha identidad estará caracterizada por la fidelidad y lealtad si es que quieren que el Espíritu Santo las use para moldear vidas y cambiar la sociedad.

Es esta época de adviento, me animo y los animo –como individuos y como denominación– a ser renovados en nuestras creencias, partiendo de que nuestra identidad está en Cristo. Que el querer ver que venga su reino a la tierra como en el cielo, ordene cada uno de nuestros pasos y metas.

Y que nos demos cuenta que pertenecemos a una tradición que valora un testimonio *reformado* y *siempre reformándose* a una sociedad que necesita desesperadamente saber que Dios amó de tal manera al mundo que envió a su hijo.

Que la identidad de cada uno de nosotros, así como nuestra identidad colectiva, apunte hacia el camino que lleva a Cristo, así como hace muchos años la estrella señaló hacia Belén. ■

소속감을 찾아서

갈 망(longing)이라는 단어의 어원이 소속감(belonging)이라는 것을 알고 있었는가? 우리는 어디엔가 속하고 싶어한다.

대림절은 갈망과 소속감을 연결해 준다. 우리는 아기 예수님의 강림을 갈망한다. 우리가 성탄절을 간절히 기다리는 이유는 가족과 누리는 풍성한 시간과 뜻 깊은 예배, 그 아들을 우리에게 선물로 주신 하나님의 사랑을 되새기게 되기 때문이다. 이 날은 - 사나 죽으나 나의 몸과 영혼의 주인이신 - 우리의 신실한 구세주 예수 그리스도가 강림하신 날이기 때문이다.

이처럼 성탄절은 우리가 그리스도께 속한 존재라는 것을 기억하고 기념하는 계기가 된다. 하지만 이 소속감은 날마다 경험하는 것이기도 하다. 그러나 대림절은 우리가 누구에게 속했는지 다시 한번 기억하는 시간이기도 하지만, 나는 우리 모두가 그리스도의 몸의 한 지체가 되어 살아가는 매일의 삶 속에서도 그 소속감을 느낄 수 있기를 바란다.

당신은 북미주 개혁교회(CRC)에 소속되기를 바라는가? 아니면 교단이란 조직은 그저 흘러간 구시대의 유물에 불과하다고 생각하는가?

이러한 질문은 우리는 정체성과 가치의 문제와 연관되어 있다. 우리가 새롭게 세우는 사역계획은 우리가 바라는 미래 - 우리가 북미주 개혁교회(CRC)에 소속된다는 것의 의미가 무엇인지 깊이 이해하고 완전히 받아들이며 자유롭게 표현하는 - 의 방향을 보여준다.

이는 단지 북미주라는 지역적인 상황에서만이 아니라 “전세계의 그리스도 교회의 일부로서” 또 “모든 나라와 족속과 방언”에서 모인 다양한 교회 중의 하나로서, “정의를 행하고 선을 사랑하며 겸손하게 하나님과 함께 걷는 삶”으로의 부르심에 반응하는 교회로서의 정체성으로 이어진다.

우리 개인의 정체성은 고립된 가운데 만들어지는 것이 아니라 가족과 친구, 교회, 학교 및 사회의 영향을 받아 형성된다. 또한, 정체성은 개인들만 확립하는 것이 아니라 교단 차원에서도 신실하고 충성된 정체성을 확립하고 지속시켜야 할 필요가 있다. 만약 그 정체성이 성령의 역사를 통해 우리 삶을 형성하고 사회에 영향을 끼치는데 사용될 것이라면 말이다.

이 대림절 기간에 나는 우리가 - 개인으로서나 교단으로서 - 그리스도 안에 뿌리내린 우리의 믿음이 새롭게 하기 바란다. 하나님의 나라가 하늘에서와 같이 이 땅에서도 임하는 것을 보고자 하는 우리의 열망이 우리의 모든 발걸음과 목표를 정하게 되기 바란다.

그리고 하나님이 세상을 너무나 사랑하셔서 그 아들을 보내셨다는 사실을 꼭 알아야 하는 하는 이 사회 속에서, 개혁된 그리고 개혁해 나가는 증인으로서 살아가는 것에 큰 가치를 두는 개혁교회 전통 속에 우리가 속했음을 깊이 깨닫게 되기 바란다.

또 우리 각자의 정체성뿐만 아니라 우리의 연합된 정체성이 우리를 그리스도께로 이끌어 주기 바란다. 오래 전 베들레헴의 그 별이 그랬던 것처럼. ■

Good News in Nepal

After graduating from Calvin College in 1974, David Kapteyn began a 29-year career with the Grand Rapids Police Department.

When he retired, he went on a number of mission trips and became a motorcycle mechanic apprentice. On one trip he visited the remote village of Simikot in northwest Nepal, where he met young evangelist Philip Shahi.

“So many God-inspired things happened in my time there, and I was so impressed by Philip’s fearless evangelism, that I felt called to help start an organized mission there,” he said.

Kapteyn set up Good News Nepal and took on the responsibility for the organization’s finances.

Meanwhile, he also began assisting another ministry, Compassionate Heart, giving motorcycle rides to kids and families. He met another motorcyclist, Frank Hoogland, a 1975 Calvin alumnus.



Dave Kapteyn, left, and Frank Hoogland in Nepal.

For a special trip, they decided to rent motorcycles in Kathmandu. They saw a lot of the beautiful country of Nepal and eventually arrived in Philip’s town of Simikot.

“It is like stepping back in time because of the remoteness of the place, with yak and mule trains serving as the main sup-

ply source,” said Kapteyn. “But there is such enthusiasm for Christianity.”

Kapteyn continues his efforts of promotion and financial support. Hoogland investigates economic development for the region. ■

—by Michael Van Denend,
 Calvin College

No Longer Lonely

Prakash, an elderly man living alone in a remote village between Jammu and Kashmir, has no family. He can neither read nor write. He was a lonely man—until he experienced God.

Craving connection to the outside world, Prakash turned to his radio, where he discovered a program called *Premey Kanne (With Love)*. Through this program, produced by Back to God Ministries International’s partners in northern India, Prakash found the companionship and knowledge he was seeking.

As he listened, Prakash learned to pray, asking the Lord to be his companion. He gave up idol worship and began praying to the living God, who moved his heart to trust in Jesus.

The Lord also prompted a local pastor to visit Prakash. The pastor befriended him and explained how Jesus loved Prakash.

“In a world where my own family abandoned me, here was someone willing to love and care for me,” Prakash testified.

Through all this, Prakash came to understand the gospel and gave his life to the Messiah.

He still faces ongoing physical challenges along with the difficulties of providing for his daily needs. Though he continues to live alone, Prakash is no longer lonely. He has the friendship of the Christian pastor and the ongoing presence of the Lord, whom he loves—and who loves him. ■

—by Nancy VanderMeer, Back to God Ministries International



Prakash now has the companionship of his Lord and Savior.

You add.
God multiplies.



A member of The Source Church is baptized.

Finding Community in Florida

The Source Church (TSC), mere miles from Miami, is spreading the Word to the community of Pembroke Pines, Fla.

With help from Home Missions, the church and pastor Chris Cassis are connecting through a multitude of community activities, including the city Easter egg hunt and autism walk.

Although the walk was on a Sunday, TSC gathered to worship by participating in the walk. The church has increased in size from five to 80 members.

Cassis left his church in Holland, Mich., and moved to Florida with his wife and others to head the church plant. Two years later, he said he is inspired by the difference they're making.

"People are drawing closer to God than they've ever been before. Now they're actually serving and are a part of a church instead of just attending."

A powerful but sobering example was Jonathan Audain, a new member and a new Christian.

Audain accepted Christ last Easter and began practicing his faith with a passion. But four weeks later, he died in a motorcycle accident.

Still, some good did come out of that tragedy.

Cassis contacted Audain's family and was encouraged when, instead of being filled with anger, his mother became filled with hope.

"Through my son's death," she said, "we've been drawn closer to God and to church."

She now hosts weekly Bible studies that have brought 20 new members to TSC. ■

—Annemarie Byl,
Christian Reformed Home Missions

'Aloha' from Mexico

Many couples in Tijuana, Mexico, would like to go to Hawaii for a honeymoon or a romantic getaway. But low wages in Tijuana make this dream nearly impossible. So Christian Reformed World Missions missionaries James and Barbarita Lee worked with other ministry leaders to do the next best thing: bring Hawaii to Mexico.

Dressed in Hawaiian shirts and leis, the ministry leaders and young couples met to enjoy Hawaiian-themed games, food, and music while taking part in marriage-building activities.

"We had discussions on the roles of a husband and wife [and] how to manage money wisely. Spouses prayed for one another," said the Lees.

Talking with some of Tijuana's youth leaders, the Lees had found that many churches don't have ministries for young couples. What's more, couples are sometimes turned away when leaders find out they are living together before marriage.

In response, the Lees and other youth leaders began this ministry to strengthen young marriages as well as to minister to couples who have left the church.

"It's encouraging when a healthy young married couple can be a role model for these teenagers," said the Lees. ■

—Brian Clark,
Christian Reformed World Missions



Marisa and Edgar were living together and felt pressure to leave their church. Now married, they came to the Hawaiian night because they loved the idea of meeting other young couples who have gone through similar experiences.

Christmas Surprises

What if the whole world was in danger and it was your job to save everybody? How would you do it?

- Would you ask somebody important—like a president or a prime minister—to help you?
- Would you tell someone at the TV station to warn people?

- Would you call on a superhero?

Those are some good ideas. But that's not how God saved the world. God's way was full of surprises.



A SURPRISING Hero

Since almost the very beginning, our world has needed a Savior. And God promised to send one. But when the time was right, God didn't send an important person like a president. Or a superhero. Or a TV person.

Surprise! God sent a baby. Baby Jesus didn't look like somebody who would save the world. He just looked like an ordinary baby. He couldn't hold up his own head at first. He cried when he was hungry. He slept a lot.

But baby Jesus was also God's Son, the Savior of the world. Our hero!

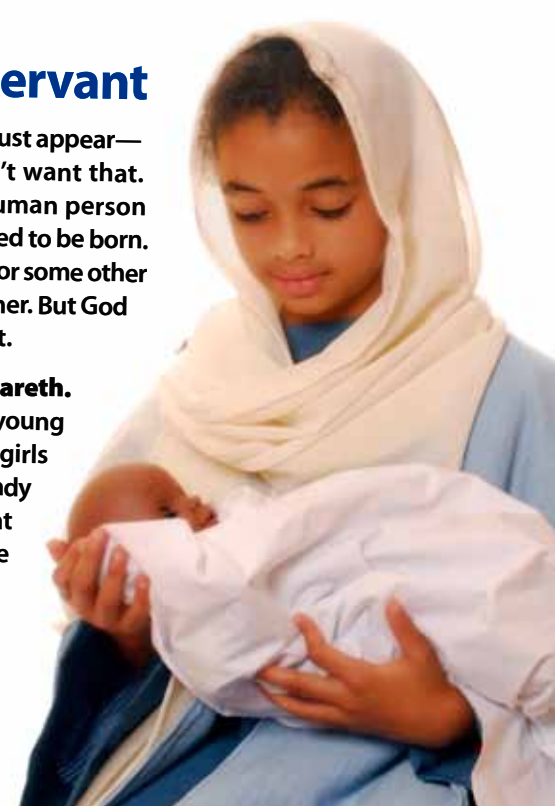


A SURPRISING Servant

God could have made baby Jesus just appear—poof!—like magic. But God didn't want that. God wanted Jesus to be a real human person as well as God's Son. So Jesus needed to be born.

God could have chosen a queen or some other important person to be Jesus' mother. But God didn't choose someone important.

Surprise! God chose Mary of Nazareth. Mary was a Jewish girl, probably a young teenager. In Mary's culture, young girls were unimportant. But Mary was ready to do whatever God asked, and that made her the perfect choice to be Jesus' mother.



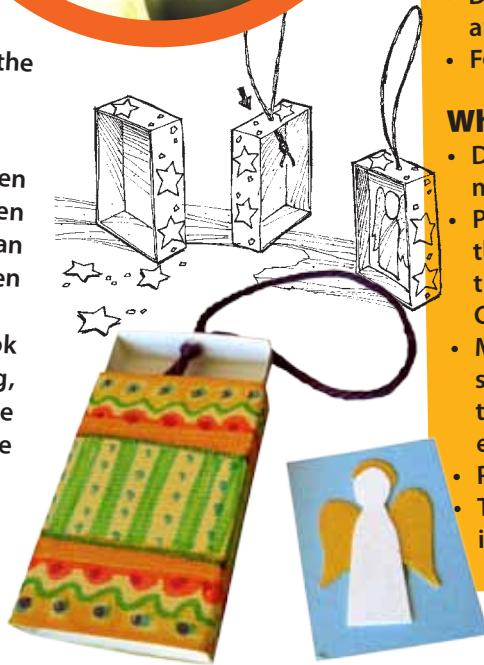
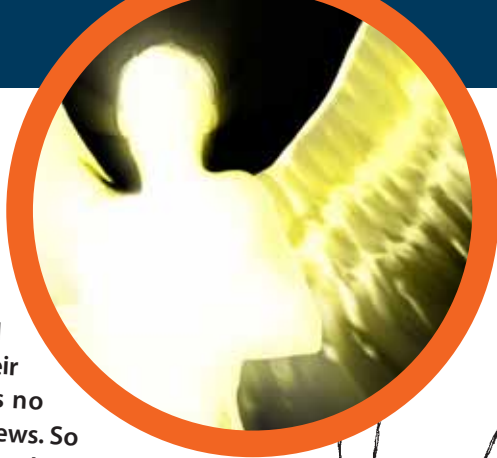
SURPRISING Messengers

After Jesus was born, God needed messengers to tell people the good news that their Savior had come. There was no Internet or TV to spread the news. So how would God share the news about the baby he sent?

Surprise! God chose angels.

Angels don't show up every day, not even in the Bible. Angels show up only when something very special is happening. Can you think of other times in the Bible when angels appeared?

What do you think angels might look like? They probably look surprising, because every time they appear in the Bible they say, "Don't be afraid!" Draw a picture of a surprising-looking angel.



Surprise Christmas Ornaments

What you need:

- Four empty matchboxes or small jewelry boxes
- Tape, if you're using jewelry boxes
- Glue
- Markers
- Decorations like colored paper, sequins, beads, and buttons
- Four 6-inch (18 cm) pieces of yarn

What you do:

- Decorate the outside of the boxes with paper, markers or anything else you like.
- Poke a hole in the top edge of the box and put the yarn through it. Tie a knot in the ends of the yarn so your ornament can hang on a Christmas tree.
- Make tiny pictures of God's four Christmas surprises: baby Jesus, Mary, the angels, and the shepherds. Be sure to make them small enough to fit inside the box.
- Put one picture inside each box.
- Tell someone else the Christmas story by showing them what's inside your four surprise boxes.

A SURPRISING Audience

God had a hero (baby Jesus), a human mother (Mary), and messengers (the angels). But God needed an audience—somebody to hear the good news from the angels.

Surprise! God chose shepherds.

You probably don't know any shepherds. But in Jesus' time there were lots of shepherds. They weren't powerful. They were poor. And people didn't treat them very well.

But God chose shepherds to hear the good news first. In God's eyes, poor people are just as important as powerful people.

Surprise Ball

Here's a fun Christmas gift to make for a friend!

Here's what you need:

- Tiny Christmas ornament or toy
- Yarn
- Ribbon

Here's what you do:

- Wrap the toy tightly with yarn until it's completely covered.
- Keep wrapping until the yarn ball is as big as you'd like it to be. When you're done, tuck the end of the yarn into the ball.
- Decorate the ball with a ribbon or Christmas bow.
- Give the ball to your friend and watch him or her unwind the yarn to discover the surprise!



Sandy Swartzentruber is a school library aide and a freelance writer. She attends Sherman Street Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and she likes surprises.

Heaven on Earth



WHETHER IT'S A SERIOUS ILLNESS, chronic pain, mental anguish, family crisis, or job loss, life on planet Earth is sometimes difficult. Even miserable. One typical response to such problems is to long for escape. Christianity is all too frequently portrayed as the religion that exists primarily to sustain us through a difficult, temporary life on this earth until we can finally go "home" to live forever with Jesus. After all, to attain our heavenly home is the real purpose of our lives. Perhaps the old gospel song expresses that conviction best:

This world is not my home.
 I'm just a-passin' through.
 My treasures are laid up
 somewhere beyond the blue.
 The angels beckon me
 from heaven's open door,
 And I can't feel at home
 in this world anymore.

But if that is really the case, I have to ask this question: Did God make a huge mistake? If the world is not an appropriate place for people to live, then why did God put us here in the first place?

Genesis 1 describes how God carefully fashioned the earth as a suitable place for people to inhabit. God created time marked by light and darkness, the rising and setting sun, and the moon and stars to distinguish months and seasons and years. He created space between the heavenly and earthly waters, and he separated the waters from the dry land so that people would have a place to live. Then God furnished the world he'd made with vegetation for people to eat and animals for companionship. And after God had finished creating the world, he called it good.

All of that was ruined when humanity fell into sin. Human sin, we read in Genesis, perverted and corrupted the beautiful world God had made. God's curse on Adam and Eve made it clear that the earth, after the fall, had become

an enemy rather than a nurturing friend. Thorns, thistles, sweat—and eventually death—became the destiny of men and women on this earth. Their only hope, it seemed, was an escape to a totally new existence.

But God had not given up on planet Earth. Far from it.

The hope and promise of salvation in the Old Testament are centered in a renewal of creation, not an escape from it. Think of the picture of shalom painted in Micah 4:4:

Everyone will sit under their own vine
and under their own fig tree,
and no one will make them afraid,
for the Lord Almighty has spoken.

Or imagine the even more dramatic picture presented in Isaiah 11:6-7:

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling
together;
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

The point isn't whether or not we should interpret these prophecies literally. At the very least, it's clear that the prophets are envisioning some kind of earthly renewal rather than an escape to an other-worldly existence.

But what about the New Testament? some might respond. Isn't the focus of the New Testament a more spiritual one?

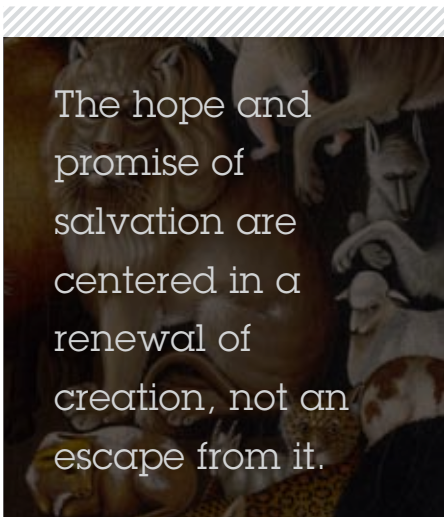
First, notice that Jesus spends a lot of his time healing people of their diseases. He preaches about the kingdom of God that is coming to earth through his ministry. Also notice that the decisive event in the New Testament story of Jesus is his bodily resurrection from the dead. This shows that salvation is for the body as well as the soul. And the New Testament closes with the book of Rev-

elation, which describes a new heaven and a new earth, a new Jerusalem and a new garden.

I'm not sure how and when Christians became so preoccupied with the idea of going home to heaven. But to me the promise of a new earth sounds a lot more exciting and a lot more consistent with our call to be Jesus' disciples. Those who hold to traditional Reformed theology talk about an intermediate state in which the disembodied soul exists until the body is resurrected on the day of Christ's return. It's a reminder that our primary focus is on our final state—life on the new earth—rather than a temporary sojourn about which we know very little.

I enjoy studying history, and I love traveling to historical places to get a better understanding of different peoples and cultures. But I will never have the time or money and energy to explore all the interesting historical sites on our planet. I like to imagine that the new earth will be restored in such a way that I will be able to visit a fully restored Roman Colosseum—dedicated now not to some gruesome display of human and animal cruelty but perhaps instead to a pageant celebrating the great creatures from various eras in history. Imagine being able to see a real *Tyrannosaurus rex* brought back to life! And maybe in a renewed earth I'll be able to visit the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico and discover the ancient Mayan temples and sports arenas and marketplaces restored to their former grandeur, and dedicated to the glory of the God who now illumines it with his light (see Rev. 21:23).

Maybe what I imagine will never come to pass. But I'm pretty sure my dreams are consistent with the biblical evidence. God created a beautiful planet to be a home for the people he made. I don't think God is simply going to destroy it and start all over on the day when Christ returns. I believe God is going to renew the earth he created and restore it and make



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it even more wonderful than it is today. And I believe it will be the perfect place for our resurrected bodies to live.

If salvation offers a spiritual escape from a physical world, if our world is going to be destroyed anyway, then our present stewardship of the earth doesn't seem all that important. But what if a building you helped design or build will be included and restored in the new earth? What if a recipe you concoct will someday be used to serve thousands of the saints in a holy feast? What if a song you compose will be sung by a countless multitude of the redeemed in the presence of the Lamb of God?

Some of our present actions may have everlasting results. That means we'd best be diligent and conscientious as we carry out our daily work. Don't count on leaving all your present projects behind forever! Maybe some of them will be there to greet you when you finally go home. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



Daniel Boerman is a member of Forest Grove Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Mich. He writes, maintains a large garden, and, with his wife, visits his four grandchildren as often as possible.

Telling the Story to the Next Generation



KEVIN DEYOUNG'S NEW BOOK, *The Biggest Story* (Crossway, 2015), offers yet another take on the Bible storybook for children. It may also be the shortest telling of the biggest story. Subtitled "How the Snake Crusher Brings Us Back to the Garden," it tells of the promised snake crusher who will deliver a rebellious and sinful people.

DeYoung, a pastor, originally wrote the text for a Christmas Day sermon. The story of Genesis through Revelation is told in 10 relatively short chapters interwoven with the theme of a disobedient people in need of a promised and prophesied Deliverer. The emphasis is on God as a promise maker and keeper.

The chapters may be short, but the text is rich and dense. Unlike more traditional tellings, DeYoung often uses irony and surprise, inviting conversation by what is left out, in and between the chapters. Those who know the biblical story can fill in the blanks. For older readers and listeners who do not know the stories, it could be an entry into a more traditional reading that will fill in the context and details. Unfortunately, the story leaves out any mention of the deep love for the world that motivates God's plan of redemption from the beginning.

Don Clark's vibrant illustrations are powerful, imaginative, and abstract, with

dark undertones. They support the sweeping nature of the storytelling. At first blush it seems to be a storybook for young children, but the text and artwork make it be better suited for children ages 6 to 10 and even older.

By contrast, *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (ZonderKidz, 2007) by Sally Lloyd-Jones points the reader to the promised baby through every story with whimsical and gentle illustrations intended for younger children. It also serves as a good Bible for children in the early stage of reading independence.

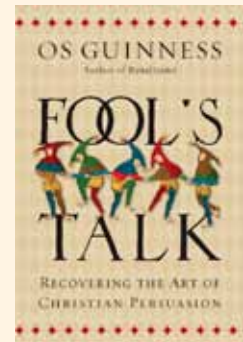
There is an important place in this genre for a book that stays as close to the biblical text as possible. *Theirs Is the Kingdom* (Eerdmans, 1986), a volume of New Testament stories cowritten by Lowell Hagan and Jack Westerhof, held promise for a whole telling of the story. Unfortunately the Old Testament segment never made it to publication. Some older publications may still be the best for a straight telling of God's stories.

Choose wisely the texts and illustrations through which you will share the most precious story with those most precious to you. ■



Jenny deGroot is a member of Willoughby CRC in Langley, B.C. She is an assistant principal and teacher/librarian.

Choose wisely.



Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion

by Os Guinness

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Os Guinness attests that, because of globalization and mass communication, "we are in the grand secular age of apologetics"—although most people don't know about or understand the role of Christian apologetics and are simply concerned with self-promotion. Guinness challenges Christians by asking if we are ready for this new age of apologetics. His repeated emphasis on two biblical truths—that God seeks us first and that only the Holy Spirit can open our eyes to sin and our need for salvation in Christ—will encourage Christians to speak and live boldly for the One we love. (InterVarsity)





Hold Tight, Don't Let Go

by Laura Rose Wagner
reviewed by Adele Gallogly

In the chaos of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti that killed over 230,000 people and displaced 1.5 million more, 15-year-old Magdalie endures the disaster that will claim both her home and the life of her beloved aunt. Homeless, grieving, and vulnerable in a setting of desperate survival, Magdalie questions the role of God's will and the future of her country. Wagner has written a captivating coming-of-age story that awakens readers to the realities of disaster and poverty without minimizing the resilient dignity and potential that lives inside every child of God. *Note:* This book is classified as a young adult novel but is recommended for ages 14 and up because of its disturbing situations and graphic scenes. (Harry N. Abrams)



The Shed That Fed a Million Children: The Extraordinary Story of Mary's Meals

by Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow
reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow was inspired to create Mary's Meals, a Scottish-based charity that aims "to provide one good meal every day in a place of education, for hungry impoverished children." With self-deprecating humor, humility, and deep reverence for God's work in response to the prayers of his people, MacFarlane-Barrow shows how, with the help of an army of volunteers, Mary's Meals has grown into a worldwide movement. (William Collins)



Beautiful Offerings

by Big Daddy Weave
reviewed by Paul Delger

Big Daddy Weave's *Beautiful Offerings* lives up to the album title: it is simply beautiful. Their solid pop sound, with hints of folk and bluegrass, supports lyrics that revolve around Jesus, his kingdom, and his return. The band doesn't settle for making only "happy" Christian music or treating God as a good buddy—a criticism sometimes raised against contemporary Christian music. The uplifting "My Story" is probably the best song on the album; it includes part of Fanny Crosby's "Blessed Assurance." (Fervent Records)

THE LOWDOWN

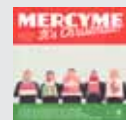
On Loss: In her book *A Long Letting Go*, writer Marilyn Chandler McEntyre offers 52 meditations for those who love someone with a terminal illness. (Eerdmans)



Religious? Gospel star Kirk Franklin challenges the cultural status quo with his latest album, *Losing My Religion*. (RCA)



Wake Up! For the few who haven't already heard, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* comes to theaters this month. (Lucasfilm)



Yule Cheer: Fans of the Christian band MercyMe (or those who've never heard of them) should check out the review of their Christmas album, *It's Christmas!* at thebanner.org. (Fair Trade)

Shaun the Sheep

reviewed by Otto Selles

Life at Mossy Bottom Farm has gotten tedious. As leader of the flock, Shaun the Sheep devises a plan to give the entire farm a day off, a scheme that goes totally awry. The general silliness that fills the movie is delightful. And while it doesn't have a terribly deep message, it offers a warm take on friendship. With no real dialogue other than grunts, bleats, and various mumblings, the film resembles at times a silent movie, with the advantage of a great soundtrack and vibrant color. On disc now. (Aardman)



MORE REVIEWS
ONLINE



MORE DREAMING

CAN the Christian Reformed Church present a vision of the Christian faith so compelling, so honest both to its roots and to Scripture, so faithful to its Lord, so distinctive in grasping the heart of the gospel, that in the welter of denominations and churches in the 21st century it is worth paying attention to? Can it be at its core not so much an institution as a movement that catches anew what reformers like John Calvin had in mind in the 16th century?

These are the sorts of questions that we as a denomination should be asking. The question is not whether the CRC *will* survive as an institution; the question is whether it *should*.

I briefly raised questions like these at the end a previous article, “Grand Rapids Dreaming” (*The Banner*, May 2015). Let me pick up the conversation where I left it. The earlier article reviewed a report to Synod 2015 from the imposingly-named Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture (TFRSC)—a report that begins by suggesting that its proposals mark a defining moment that will carry “this move-

ment to new levels of faithfulness and fruitfulness.” In my earlier article, I noted that reorganizing denominational ministries is unlikely to be anyone’s defining moment and that, in any case, the denominational ministries are not the church.

The TFRSC report was about agency centralization. It raised the question “Should the denominational ministries (excluding World Renew, Calvin College, and Calvin Theological Seminary) be brought under a single board and a unified administration headed by the executive director?” Synod 2015 answered yes and adopted the TFRSC proposals

entire. The debate is over—for now. We will see in the next few years what this reorganization looks like and how well it works. But even if the new structure works as advertised, it's the wrong fix to the wrong problem.

The Wrong Fix

What makes us Christian Reformed? We could point to our history and certain fundamental commitments summarized in our Reformed confessions. Or to our ecclesiastical institutions. This is all well, but there is another kind of identity. Call it a missional, forward-looking, working identity. It's what we do together now and in the future as we bring the good news of Jesus to our broad and varied cultures and places. It's this sort of dynamic identity that is at stake in the CRC.

The policy of the CRC for many years has been to find its missional identity in denominational efforts—our agencies and denominational ministries. Call this “Denomination” with a capital “D.” The model is for Christian Reformed congregations to send large amounts of money to the denomination, and for the denomination to turn this money into mission. The TFRSC proposals adopted by Synod 2015 are simply a redo of this old model. Its report brims with assumptions about how the mission and the dynamic unity of the denomination depend on direction from the central office. But this model has not worked, and I suggest that it will not work in the future.

Check out a few denominational statistics. First, membership. The overall trend is down: from 2005-2015, down by nearly 20,000 members. From 1992 to the present, down by 67,000 members. Judged by this standard, the current model is not working.

But this is not the only number to pay attention to. More worrisome is the size of congregations. There has been a near linear increase in the number of congregations in the CRC. In 1963, when the denomination was about the same size as it is today, the average congregation had 437 members; today, the average number of members is about 229. Clasis Pacific Northwest, where I now serve, has 45 congregations averaging 140 members. There are a few bigger churches and lots of small ones, many of which were founded in the past decade.

Why is the size of congregations important? Because of the way the CRC funds its ministries. Perhaps the most important number at Synod 2015 was \$339. This number represents the per-member dues—ministry shares—assessed on congregations. In the world of denominational finance, it's a high number; does any other denomination have dues this high? Collecting ministry shares has been defended for years as an efficient way to raise money for denominational ministries, which it is. But it's no longer the only way the ministries collect money. Denominational ministries also have active and expensive fundraising offices.

This money flows from the congregations—some congregations, that is; many pay less than the assessed amount—and into denominational mission. Some of this money comes back to the congregation in the form of services congregations need, such as a Safe Church office and training for clergy. But much of these funds go into missional efforts that are increasingly disconnected from the congregations that fund them—like more and more small churches. Anxiety about this issue frequently appears in denominational reports, which often speak of serving the congregations, coming alongside them, and listening to them. But the problem is not a lack of effort on the part of the agencies; it's structural.

We can and should do things together—denominationally—but before we can do things together, there has to be a “we.” There used to be a “we,” of course, based in family and ethnic identity. These bonds both included and excluded. We can be grateful that in many ways the CRC has grown and continues to grow beyond them. The CRC has never been so diverse, for which we should thank God. But where now is the “we”?

I do not believe that we can find our unity in the denominational office or in denominational ministries. We can take pride in what these ministries have done in the past and continue to do, but they are not and cannot be the church. The church lives and breathes locally, in congregations. Mission is always local (which is the central insight behind the new union of Home Missions and World Missions). Our current model disconnects congregations from mission with results that are written in the numbers. It's time to change the model.

Changing the model is not rearranging offices in Grand Rapids and Burlington. Changing the model requires rethinking how we fund mission. My proposal—and not just mine; an overture is circulating to radically rethink the ministry share system—is to cut denominational ministry shares in half over a period of time, say, a decade. This would encourage growth in and through the congregations rather than denominational agencies. But that's only half of the problem.

A New Conversation
The other half is finding new ways to a new “we.” Conversations about denominational structure are distracting. They assume that if we get the lines of authority in the denominational buildings right, we'll become more united. But there is no reason to believe that this is true. If we are to find a new “we,” it will require a long and deep conversation among the congregations and members of the CRC. How can we begin this conversation?

For such a conversation to take place, we need to find two things: core unity, »

WHAT IN OUR DIVERSITY DO WE PROCLAIM GLADLY AND LOUDLY TOGETHER?



and grace that permits us to differ on many things, even when we think those things are important. What is required is a denominational union strong at the core and flexible at the edges. If we are to be truly healthy, we need more of both: core strength and flexibility in other things.

We need this, in part, because we disagree about many things. Whether women may serve in all of the offices of the church is one issue that has seriously divided the denomination. There are and will be others. If we make the things that divide us into absolutes, permitting no negotiation, then there will be no basis for unity. There will be only winners and losers, and in the end, we will all be of one opinion or the other. Everyone who disagreed will have left.

But this you-must-agree-with-me-on-all-points unity has never been the way of the church. Paul and James differed on what was required of converts. What held them together was the core confession that Jesus is Lord and more—a “more” that can be expanded into the size and shape of, say, the Nicene Creed. A core.

But this core, if it is to provide dynamic unity, must be about what’s central to our life and mission. It must be good news, an alternative to all the bad news of our time and every other time. It must be alive, Spirit-filled, missional. How can we find again a “we” that comes from our shared joy in the Lord?

My suggestion is that we can find it in a conversation about worship. Why worship? Because worship is affirmative, local, missional, and an area in which we already have great resources. Let me unpack that a bit.

There are other areas of Christian life and thought about which we could engage in conversation. Church doctrine, for example. We have always been a doctrinal church. But in the case of doctrine, we not only disagree about some impor-

tant things, but we may lack the language to understand each other and to be understood. We need to get to this important discussion eventually, but it’s not the place to begin.

Or we could have—and probably will have—long contentious discussions about the social issues that divide us and our nations. Synod 2015 had a bit of discussion about same sex marriage. It didn’t go very well. There will be more discussion at the next synod. These discussions tend to push us apart. We can only have such discussions if what holds us together is stronger than what divides us. It’s the core we are looking for, the “we.”

Unity in Worship

Compared to these, worship is positive. Worship is what we affirm together before our God. It’s a good place to begin. Worship is a place to declare what we believe (our core beliefs) and what we stand for (justice)—not in opposition to others but together. We stand shoulder to shoulder before our God.

Worship is also local, which means it expresses our diversity. Worship must always take account of the context in which we find ourselves. We get that, I think. We are looking for unity in worship, not in a slavish sameness but in discovering the core principles worked out in a variety of local contexts. The question to ask is, “What in our diversity do we proclaim gladly and loudly together?”

Worship is missional. The church is never the church so much as in worship. Joyful worship is infectious and energizing. It speaks to a joyless and angry world of the grace and goodness of God. People who worship well are transformed and bring the transforming power of the Spirit to every part of life.

Finally, worship is an area of Christian life in which we as a denomination already have great resources: the Calvin

Institute of Christian Worship; the journal *Reformed Worship*; a history of hymnals, including the recent *Lift Up Your Hearts*; and thinkers and theologians centered on worship, including Nicholas Wolterstorff and James K.A. Smith.

At Synod 2015, two moments stood out for me and, I think, for many others. One was a meditation by Heidi De Jonge of Kingston, Ont., a meditation much quoted in the synod. Rev. De Jonge gave synod language through which to understand the world. The other was a prayer by Stedford Sims on the occasion of the killing of nine people in a church in Charleston. Rev. Sims began his prayer by repeating over and over again in a voice strangled with emotion a single word: “Jesus.” Both were worship. Both brought synod together.

What if, instead of another round of strategic planning or another structure study, our synod set worship at the center of its agenda, and sought in the ensuing discussion a new and dynamic unity based not in the denominational offices but in the practices of our congregations? What if synod sought to find a common proclamation in our varied worship? What if to such a synod we invited our best thinkers, our finest musicians, and our poets and artists, as well as pastors and elders and deacons? What if we began to create a CRC way of worship that would be our signature as a denomination? “Do you know those CRC folk? They have such powerful worship.”

To such a synod I would gladly go. And such a denomination I would gladly embrace. ■



Clay Libolt lives in the Pacific Northwest, where he is interim pastor at Sonlight CRC in Lynden, Wash.

FAQs

Ethics

Q When may Christians engage in civil disobedience? The Bible clearly says we ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19-20). I don't want my tax money supporting state-funded abortions. And I cannot support same sex marriage legislation.

A The same Peter who wrote those words in Acts 4 also wrote in 1 Peter 2:13-16: "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority"—including the pagan Roman emperor and his governors. The apostle Paul gave similar commands in Romans 13:1-6. Paul even asked Christians to pay taxes, knowing very well that those taxes funded the building of temples to the Roman gods, even though Scripture explicitly forbids idolatry.

In the Old Testament, Daniel and his exiled friends became high government officials in the pagan Babylonian and Persian empires. But when commanded to bow to idols or stop praying to God, they disobeyed. On the other hand, Naaman was forgiven for aiding his king's idol worship, acknowledging that his bowing before the idol was perfunctory (2 Kings 5:18-19). Clearly this is no simple matter.

Let me suggest some questions for considering civil disobedience: Is it truly based on honoring God or based on our outrage? Do we have a healthy or faulty view of God's truth and grace in this matter? Does this law truly attack the core of our faith? Does it harm innocent people, so that Christians must act to love their neighbors? Have we exhausted constitutional and legal means of protest before resorting to civil disobedience? Are there nonpolitical ways to creatively address this issue? Will our civil disobedience cause harm or injustice to innocent parties? Are we fully willing to suffer the legal consequences of our civil disobedience? Is there a specific and realistic end goal for our civil disobedience? Finally, will God be glorified in this civil disobedience?

I pray for God's wisdom in deciding this complex question.

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

Clearly this is no simple matter.

Church

Q Is it time to change our system of calling? Ministers are staying much longer than they used to—sometimes against their own and/or their congregation's will. It also seems that forced separation via Article 17 is occurring much more frequently than in the past. Would it not be prudent to make pastoral exchanges possible?

A At first the CRC was unwilling to try that as a matter of principle. Synod 1934 said it would not be "in keeping with Reformed polity." In other words, it would be an illegitimate excursion into an episcopal form of church government. Four decades later we changed course and thought it could be done in a Reformed way. Synod 1976 authorized a procedure that involved two "single nomination calls" to be approved at congregational meetings of two churches at roughly the same time. If one such vote were to fail, the other church's call would be nullified. The "Ministerial Information Service" would shepherd the deal. So it wasn't a matter of "placement by bishops"—just a minor tweak.

This arrangement was reviewed by Synods 1978, 1980, and 1983. The latter ended the possibility of such swaps. The reason? Synod was informed that it had been tried only three times in seven years, that the concept "has many built-in problems," and that it "does not seem to have much chance of success at the present time." In other words, in real life it was found to be unworkable.

Since times have changed and many new problems have appeared on our horizon, perhaps it's time for another experiment. We could try something a little different, maybe, yet short of a bishop showing two ministers the exit door. Anyone with a plan?

—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)*.

Relationships

Q Why is pornography wrong?

A Pornography is wrong because it embraces a view of sexuality that seeks to bypass the need for sexual expression within the context of a relationship that is faithful and enduring. In other words, pornography is a shortcut. It provides sexual release for someone without the richness and meaning of an intimate relationship in which one is known and yet loved.

Pornography is damaging because it allows one to be self-focused and isolated from others. It can help to bring a quick release or provide comfort, but, like all shortcuts, it cannot truly satisfy for long. Unfortunately, in Western culture pornography addiction is rampant because it has been legitimized.

It is important to remember that the experience of sexual attraction itself is not wrong or bad. God is not a prude. The belief among Christians often seems to be that God is ashamed of our sexuality. But read again the Old Testament Song of Songs. In it sexual attraction between the "lover and the beloved" is described and celebrated in great detail. Shame accompanies sufferers of all the varied addictions, but those struggling with sexual addictions in particular are often harshly judged by others as well as themselves. Hence the fear of exposure invites secrecy.

Sex is both private and powerful and is fueled by a need as strong as the need for food. However, in the same way that our normal and healthy need for food can be derailed into an addictive craving for junk food, so too a normal and healthy sex drive can be subsumed by an addictive need for pornography. That is why pornography is wrong.

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

ADS

Deadlines: Jan. 2016 issue is 11/30/2015; Feb. issue is 1/4/2016. Details online.

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

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Denominational and Classical

Financial Aid

STUDENTS PREPARING FOR MINISTRY in the Christian Reformed Church from Classis Heartland may apply for aid to assist them in their study for the 2016-2017 academic year by contacting Rev. Loren Kotman; 1111 5th Street, Hull, IA 51239; (712) 439-1123; pastor@hull1stcrrc.com. The deadline is February 1, 2016.

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS ZEELAND will meet on Thursday, January 21, 2016, 4PM, at Gateway Community CRC in Zeeland. Agenda deadline is December 10. Rev. Ronald J. Meyer, S. C.

Congregational

HIGH RIVER CRC announces, with grateful hearts, that Rev. David Swinney has become our Pastor. We look forward to growing in grace and knowledge, serving God together with Rev. Swinney and his family.

Church's 50th Anniversary

NORTH HILLS CRC, TROY, MI will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2016. All friends, former members and others interested are invited to celebrate with us at a banquet on April 16, 2016 and a celebratory worship service on April 17, 2016. Please send us your contact informa-

tion so that we can give you further information. Contact Rev. Randy Engle at randyengle@aol.com or his administrative assistant, Susan Ballard, at admin@northhillscrc.org. Telephone: (248) 645-1990.

General

MARANATHA COMMUNITY CHURCH CRC The Maranatha Community Church CRC will meet at Farnsworth Hall, 6159 University Drive, Mesa AZ from Dec thru 2nd Sunday in April at 10:00 AM Visitors are welcome.

PHOENIX/SUN CITY, AZ West Valley Christian Fellowship (Reformed Faith) welcomes you to visit this winter. Our services are at 10 AM and 6 PM on Sundays. 12649 N. 105th Ave Sun City, Az. Call 623-810-5201 for more information.

LK ALFRED FLA. MINISTRY -140 Mallard Rd. 33850 near Winter Haven & Orlando Rt. 17/92. Home Phone 863-422-6442. Preachers: Jan. 2016 Rev. Dale Cooper; Feb Rev. John Witvliet; March 6 to April 10 Rev. Ron Noorman.

100th Birthday

HELENA (VAN ALLER) GRIMBERG will celebrate her 100th birthday on December 9, 2015. Her children (John and Evelyn Kirchgessner, Rich and Judy Ozinga, and Gordon and Tillie Grimberg), grandchildren and great grandchildren thank God for her continued good health. She resides at Peace Village, 10300 Village Circle Dr. Palos Park, IL 60463. Family and friends will gather on Dec 5 for an afternoon of celebration.

Birthdays

90th Birthday

REV. HARRY G. ARNOLD will celebrate his 90th birthday on Dec. 27. His wife, Kay, and children Becky Furlong (Bob), Tom (Cathy), Sarah Douma (Bob) and Steve, as well as 5 grandchildren and 2 great-

granddaughters wish him a happy and healthy birthday. He plans to retire from preaching at this time and is thankful that he has been able to serve his Lord for over 62 years in the ministry.

MARVIN BRINKS will celebrate his 90th birthday on January 1, 2016. His 7 children with spouses are Joseph and Linda, Gordon and Judy, Paul and Leah, Ellen and Bill Stroo, Sharon, Calvin and Marcia, and Joyce and Bob Cornelisse. He has 21 grandchildren, 39 great-grandchildren, and 1 great-great grandchild. His family is grateful for his faithfulness to God, family and work. His address is Marvin Brinks, 725 Baldwin St., Rm 290, Jenison, MI 49428.

NELLIE NYDAM DEVRIES November 7. We thank God for our beloved Oma and her 90 years of faithful life, demonstrating God's love in her words and deeds. Her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. 343 Williams St, Uxbridge, MA 01569-1181

BENNIE GROEN of Renville, MN celebrated his 90th birthday on November 2nd. Celebrating God's grace and goodness in his life are his wife, Adeline, children: Dave and Arlene Groen, Roger Groen, Mary and Kevin Koppendrayner, Carol and Carl Veurink, Steve and Karen Groen, Doug and Anne Groen, 19 grandchildren and 30 great-grandchildren.



ANNETTE (VAN ZWOL) KRUIS wife of Peter J. Kruis (d. 1992), celebrates her 90th birthday on December 15. She is a devoted follower of Jesus, and has been a member of Christian Reformed communities in the states of Washington, Michigan, Montana, and Illinois-Indiana. She continues to be

a great blessing to her children: Phil & Linnae Kruis, Corliss & Jim Mock, Stan & Bessie Kruis, Pat & Mel Tellinghusen, 12 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren. Every Sunday she initiates a lively exchange of family news by email. She currently resides in Eagle Point, Oregon. Cards can be sent to her c/o Corliss Mock, 871 Isaac Way, Central Point, OR 97502.

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LOIS (DEKKER) RITZEMA of 961 Parmelee Ct. NW, Grand Rapids, MI will celebrate her 90th birthday on December 27, 2015. Her 3 children, 8 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren give thanks to God for her abiding faith and abundant hospitality

VIOLA VANDERLENDE turns 90 on Dec 4! Her family is thankful for her love and faithful prayers. Cards would be cherished and adored. 1450 E Fulton NE Grand Rapids MI 49503

Anniversaries

70th Anniversary



BELTMAN Henry and Marian of Grand Rapids, Michigan will celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary on January 1, 2016. Their long life together has been filled with abundant blessings. Thanks be to God. Their children- Bruce and Dot Beltman, Tom and Betsy Bloom, Mark and Sara Stadt, and

Charles and Lorilee Beltman- are grateful for the love, support, and guidance their parents have provided over the years.



LAPPINGA Harold and Florence (deLange) of Ontario California celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary on December 22. They and their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren praise God for His faithfulness.

65th Anniversary

WALTERS Harold and Genevieve (Hamberg) 4618 New Holland, Hudsonville, MI 49426 Married on November 24, 1950. Their family: Ron (deceased) Sharon, Linda and Phil Stegenga, Dick and Doreen, Bob and Jackie, Tom, Doug and Lisa, Steve and Amy, Garry and Mary, Mike and Jennifer. 22 Grandchildren, 1 deceased Sarah, and 16 Great Grandchildren, 1 deceased Madelyn. Thanking God for His faithfulness

during the last 65 years and the many blessings God has given to them, their children, Grandchildren and Great Grandchildren.

60th Anniversary

DUYST Pete & Jo (Zegers) will celebrate their 60th Anniversary on December 28, 2015. Their son David; daughter-in-law Vicki (Daniel) and her husband Randy Van Wingerden; grandchildren Heather & David Breen; David & Jodi Duyst; Erica Duyst; Tiffany & Clark Seaman; and U. S. Army Spc. Tim Duyst; and great-grandchildren Rachael, Ashleigh, and Cassandra Duyst all thank God for their Christian support, encouragement, and love.

ROELS Ed and Bertie (Klamer), 2805 E Fulton, Grand Rapids, MI 49506 will celebrate their 60th Anniversary on Dec. 16, 2015. The families of their 5 children, 12 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren thank God for his faithfulness and blessings over the years. We love you and are so grateful for your Godly example. Ps. 103:17-18

50th Anniversary

KUIPER Bob & Marj (Pessman) of Crestwood, IL celebrated their special day on November 26, 2015. Thanking our Great God with them are: Dean & Lisa, Melissa, Rebecca, Angela, Benjamin. Dwayne & Deb, Shannon, Austin, Jady. Darrell & Kim, Megan & Chucho Bustamante, Natalie, Olivia, Paige. Jim & Dawn Lyle, Christopher, Brian.

Obituaries

BRANDERHORST Donald, age 90, of Holland, MI, moved to his heavenly home on October 18, 2015. He is lovingly remembered by his wife of 63 years, Sue; his children Scott (Sue) Branderhorst, Joy (Jeff) Groenhof, and Jill (John) Dykhuis; 12 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren; sisters Ellen Boss and Arlene Christian. He was preceded in death by great grandson Jadon Jasper, brother Harold, and sister Joyce DeHaan. "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

DEVRIES Joanne of N. Olmstead, OH, was called home on October 17, 2015 after a multi-year challenge with cancer. She was the daughter of Thomas E. and Sophia (both deceased) and sister of Thomas E., Jr. and Richard. "Aunt Jo" was widely known for her award winning teaching skills in the Rocky River, OH elementary school system as well as her generous gifts of time and talent to a wide variety of spiritual and secular causes.

OOSTEN Henry, age 75, of Grand Rapids, MI went to be with his Lord September 4, 2015. He is survived by his wife of 51 years Annette; three daughters Sharon (Jim) Apol, Sonja (Ross) DeJong and Donna (Scott) Snyder; and grandchildren Aaron and BJ Apol, Jessica, Jacob and Jordyn DeJong and Kate and Alex Snyder.

Church Position Announcements

PASTOR NEEDED IN CALGARY, AB Just east of the beautiful Rocky Mountains, in the diverse city of Calgary, Emmanuel Christian Reformed Church is seeking a Pastor of Preaching and Administration. We are an active, large church family with a full range of ministries including contemporary Reformed worship and an active community development ministry. We are looking for an inspiring, motivating leader able to apply Scriptures to our contemporary lives and to work collaboratively with our ministry leadership and staff. In a city that offers everything from sports to arts and prairies to mountains, we invite you to consider helping us build a body that is alive in Christ. If the Lord is leading you to hear more about our current pastoral vacancy we invite to confidentially contact a member of the pastoral search team at pastorsearch@emmanuelcrc.org. Church profile available from the Ministerial Information Service at CRC's Pastor Church Relations.

LEAD PASTOR: Charlottetown CRC, Prince Edward Island, Canada is seeking full-time Lead Pastor to provide biblical preaching and pastoral care to our congregation. Should be able to work effectively and meaningfully with our ministry staff and congregation through the church's vision and programs. A Church Profile is available at the Pastor-Church Relations Office or contact search committee at peircsearch@gmail.com.

PASTOR First Christian Reformed Church in Kingston, Ontario is seeking a full-time pastor to lead our multigenerational congregation. For more details about our church please visit www.firstcck-ington.ca. To receive a copy of our church profile please contact Lawrence Vandermeer at lawrencev@bell.net.

PASTOR Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church, located in the heart of the beautiful Blackstone Valley, is seeking a pastor to shepherd our congregation in Whitinsville, MA. We are praying for a man of God who will share our love for the gospel, as expressed in the historic Reformed confessions, and will be an effective communicator of that gospel to our multi-generational congregation, as well as to our larger community. The successful candidate will have a thorough grounding in, and commitment to, the Reformed faith, as well as relevant training and experience in preaching, teaching, leading worship, fostering spiritual formation, providing pastoral care, administrative oversight, and outreach to the community. M. Div. is a requirement. Please send a resume, references, and inquiries to: Search Committee, Fairlawn CRC, 305 Goldthwaite Rd., Whitinsville, MA 01588, or searchcommittee@fairlawncrc.org.

SENIOR PASTOR -Shalom CRC of Sioux Falls, SD is seeking a senior pastor to lead our congregation in a growing union with Jesus Christ

and expression of God's grace in our church, community and world. Shalom is an active and engaged church in a rapidly growing city with many opportunities to make an impact for our Lord. You can view our church profile at www.crcna.com or our website - www.shalomcrc.com. Interested candidates can submit their profiles to office@shalomcrc.org or contact Dan Harmelink, search committee chair, at dan.harmelink@woodsfuller.com

PASTOR: New Life CRC in Guelph, Ontario, Canada is a church that embraces gift-based ministry, community involvement, children's programs and worship arts. We are seeking a relational, creative and experienced leader who can walk with our congregation as we seek to follow Christ. With a focus on a Reformed, missional expression of faith, the pastor will be a collaborative leader who encourages and coaches members to develop and express their faith. The job description can be found www.newlifecrc.net. For more information and a church profile, please contact Kevin Klein-Geltink at pastorsearch@newlifecrc.net.

IMMIGRANT/REFUGEE MINISTRY Do you have a passion for the immigrant and refugee population? Are you excited to lead others to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ? New Roots Ministry in Sioux Falls, SD is looking for such a person to be their new Director. People from all over the world make Sioux Falls their home. New Roots Ministry builds relationships among the immigrant community and serves as a bridge to the local culture and resources. This position also serves half time as a chaplain at a local company that employs over 3,000 people from 50 different nations. If you are ready to see the world in one community and help them come together in Christ, please contact us at sfnewroots@gmail.com for more information.

PASTOR First CRC in Chatham ON is currently searching for a pastor for its growing congregation. We are a loving and faithful church who is looking for the individual God has selected to pastor us. For more information, please contact Tim Bishop at (519) 354-8983 or tbisschop@hotmail.com

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRIES Faith Christian Reformed Church, Elmhurst IL, is seeking a Director of Youth Ministries (DYM) to direct and coordinate ministry for the youth of our church. The DYM is a full-time position with primary focus on middle and high school ministries, as well as some responsibilities for children's and young adult ministries. For further information about the DYM profile and qualifications, please send a letter of introduction with resume to dymsearch@faithelmhurst.org or contact Ray Middel at 630-862-1861.



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PENNING, Dale, age 80, of Grand Rapids, went to be with his Lord on Friday, October 16, 2015. He is survived by his wife, Ruth (Boshoven) Penning; his children and grandchildren, Tom & Laura Penning of Elmhurst, IL (Matt, Emily, and Luke), Nancy & Eric deNijis of Richmond, VA (Paul, Melissa, Daniel), Jon & Jen Penning of Grand Rapids (Alyssa and Daniel McElheny, Kimby and fiancé Andre Otte, Carlie), Mark & Susan Penning of Grand Rapids (Jake, Courtney, Jessie); his brothers, Bob (Helen) and Dwight (Elayne); and sisters-in-law, Pearl Boshoven and Jerre Boshoven.

STAM, Henry, Entered into eternal rest on October 2, 2015 at 88 years of age. Beloved husband of Cornelia Stam and the late Alida Maria (nee VandenBerg-1977). Loving father of Johanna, Hank and Lydia. Step-father of Carol, Nancy, Patricia and John. Treasured Opa of Alida, Miranda, Daniel, Jacinta, Hannah, Karlie, Alia, Emma, Hendrik, Ken, Benjamin, Lara, Rachel and Joel. He is also a Great- Opa to five great-grandchildren. Dear brother of Betje, Gijs, Jo and the late Anton and the late Kaatje. Also survived by many nieces and nephews. Henry was a wonderful husband, father and grandfather who valued his family very much. He was a friend to many. He loved to travel and had friends throughout Canada, the United States and the Netherlands. You could always count on his amazing smile and his sincere joy in meeting new people. He is deeply missed. He was a dedicated member of the Essex Christian Reformed Church since its inception in the 1950's. He was a volunteer with the Alzheimer's Society for many years. Hank worked as a Forester for Ontario Hydro for over 30 years in Essex County. Special thanks to the members of the community of the Town of Essex who assisted in supporting our father's ability to live independently throughout his senior years.

TAMELING Marie, nee Essenburg, went to be with her LORD, October 13th, 2015, 1620 Westview Ave, Lombard, IL, 60148. Beloved wife of the late Henry Tameling; loving mother of Ticks (Roger) Groenboom, Ben (Corrie) Tameling, and Leona (Roger) Boerema; devoted grandmother of 9; great-grandmother of 30; fond sister of Sarah DeVries, Pastor Ben (Grace) Essenberg, Mariella (Peter) Ven Housen, and preceded by 2 brothers and 2 sisters; aunt of many nieces and nephews.



STOUB William F (Bill), with his wife at his side, his children singing hymns around his bed, and his pastor praying, slipped into glory on July 23, 2015. He was in his 100th year. Loving husband of Fennetta Kuiper Stoub, nee Doornbos and the late Anna Stoub, nee Van Oosbree (1998).

Loving father of William (Elaine), John (Marcia), Marie (Jack) Klein, Marvin (Barbara), Muriel (Gerald) Mulder, Lois (Ronald) Speelman, Vernon (Evelyn), Roger, late Nancy (Arnie (Barb) Stolte), Marcia (Rodney) Krosshell, Linda (Donald) Parrish, and Donald (Lisa). Fond stepfather of Barbara (Ken) Grimburg, Dorie (late Howard) Kuiper, Theresa (Leonard) Boer. Cherished grandfather of 52, and step grandfather of eight. Dearest great grandfather of 128. Great great grandfather of 5. Survived by his brother Ed Stoub and sister Betty VanBruggen. Memorials to Roseland Christian Ministries 10858 S. Michigan Ave Chicago, IL 60628

TOPP Carol Joyce (Pothoven) passed away on October 25, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husband of 56 years, Dale Topp. Carol is survived by her brothers, Ron (Iris) Pothoven, Ken (Betty) Pothoven; and her sister, Marcia ; her in-laws Robert F. (deceased) and Ella Topp, Howard and Jean (deceased) Topp and Ruth Anne VanZanten; her children Michael (Lynn), David (Liz), Belinda Kelley (Stephen), Jill Veltkamp, and Karen Ring (Jeff); twelve grandchildren; and seven great grandchildren

VAN BEEK Marlys (Weg) Van Beek went to live with her Lord on October 20, 2015 at the age of 76. Beloved mom, grandmother, aunt, sister, sister-in-law, and friend was born in Worthington, MN and passed away in Denver, CO. She left this earth too soon but praise God she lives eternally in heaven. Donations can be made to Rehoboth Christian School or Wounded Warrior Project.

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VAN REKEN Rozena "Rose" Van Reken, nee Poortenga, age 96, went to be with her LORD on October 22nd, 2015; 1508 Sequoia Rd, Naperville, IL, 60540. Wife of the late Everett Van Reken; mother of David (Ruth), Marjorie (Jim) Bogdalek, Calvin (Rosella), Rosemary (John) Strodtman, and Philip (Kandace) Van Reken; grandmother of 16; great-Grandmother of 28; sister of James (the late Vonnie) and the late Howard (Ruth) Poortenga; aunt of many nieces and nephews.

VISSER Theresa "Terri" Visser, nee Meyer age 96, went to be with Our Lord on October 20th, 2015, 184 S. Wood Dale Rd, Wood Dale, IL, 60191. Beloved wife of the late John Visser; loving mother of Betty (the late Lewis) Clark, Cheryl (John) Landefeld, Joan (Bastian) Knoppers; devoted grandmother of Jennifer DeVries, Julie (Paul) Strauss, Kirstin (Todd) Cooper, Kelly (Jason) Cooke, Traci (Sean) Stevenson, Alexis (Mike) Alles, Jessica (Chris) Valdez, Elizabeth (D. J.) Asad; great-grandmother of Joshua, Madeline, Connor, Cody, Kaden, Jax, Sophia, Sam, Teá, Grayson, Oliver, Keaton, Emerson, and Charles. Fond sister of Catherine Vanderhoven, and preceded in death by 4 brothers; aunt of many nieces and nephews

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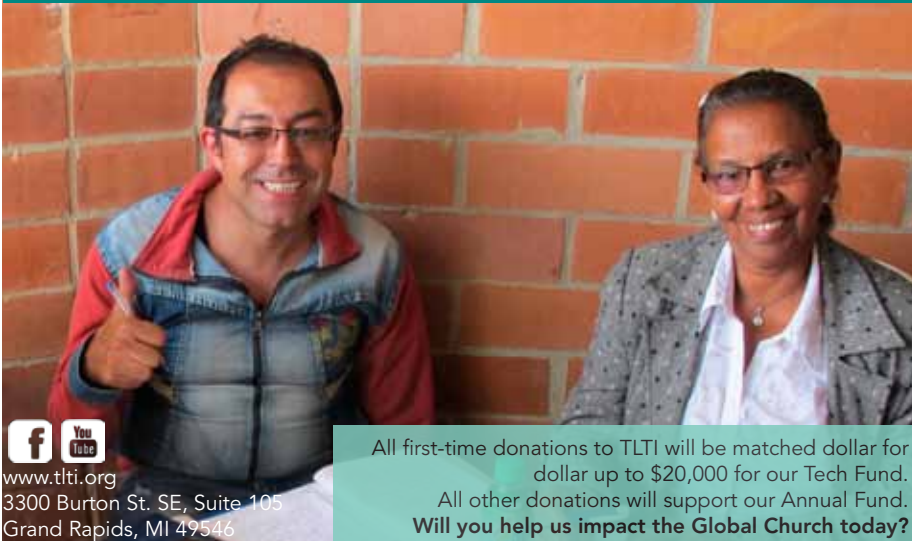
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- The Parables (Greek required); *Professor Dean Deppa*
- The Life and Thought of Augustine; *Professor David Rylaarsdam*
- The Theology of Worship and the Sacraments; *Professor John Witvliet*

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- Medical Ethics and Pastoral Care; *Professor Lauris Kaldjian, M.D., Ph.D.*
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- Evangelism and Cross-Cultural Ministry; *Professor Cory Willson*
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Punch Lines

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

I was taking care of my 3-year-old granddaughter when she gave me a present, a book she had made herself. There were pictures on some pages and letters on others. I said, "Oh, you wrote your name on this page."

She looked at me in surprise and said, "Grandma, you really should learn how to read!"

—Gladys Gritter

Much of the exterior of First Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa, is unadorned concrete. Hull, the neighboring town ten miles to the north, has a cheese factory with a similar concrete exterior.

Driving past the cheese factory one day with my friend Steve, I joked that if it ever went bankrupt, First CRC could buy the building to start a sister church.

"Yes," said Steve. "It could be a church for those who have lost their whey."

—Cal Hoekema

Following a discussion about miracles, the teacher took her class to the zoo. Walking along, they saw a lion and a lamb in the same cage. As they stood in amazement, the zookeeper heard them saying, "That is a miracle."

The keeper answered, "Not really. Every day I put another lamb in the cage."

—G. Lieuwen

A young man was Facebooking in church. The usher passed by and whispered, "You better be texting heaven."

—Dick Bylsma

My 4-year-old granddaughter was practicing a Bible verse with her mom. She confidently recited: "If I remember, I will keep your commandments."

This is the same girl who belts out the song "Great is my faithfulness."

I guess she has a few things to learn—don't we all?

—Roseanne Eising

A rubber band pistol was confiscated from algebra class. It was a weapon of math disruption.

—Jay Hardy

I was reminded recently of one of our old family rituals on departing:

Me: Celery go?

Wife: Lettuce leaf.

Son: O Kale!

—Rudy Ouwehand

My husband and I were reading Matthew 7:6 for our after-supper devotions: "Do not throw your pearls to swine."

"I'm not quite sure I'd put it that way," my husband said. "I was

planning to give you a pearl necklace for our anniversary!"

—Linda deBorst

Conversation with my 4-year-old granddaughter at church during the Lord's Supper: "What's that, Oma?" she said, pointing at the bread.

"That reminds us that Jesus love us so much that he wants all of us to live with him in heaven," I replied.

"What's heaven, Oma?" she said.

"Heaven is where we are going to live forever, praising God," I explained.

"But Oma, I don't want you to live in heaven. I want you to stay in your own house!"

—Linda Drost



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