

# NEWS

## Educating Behind Bars: From Guantanamo Bay to Canadian Federal Pri

**A**rlette Zinck, associate professor at The King's University in Edmonton, Alta., and a team of colleagues from King's and two other universities in the city, volunteer every week to tutor inmates at the maximum-security Edmonton Institution. Earlier this year they established the Postsecondary Prison Education Foundation, also known as The Prison Project, to help raise money to support inmates' tuition expenses.

For the majority of the faculty from King's, an institution supported by members of the Chris-

tian Reformed Church, the engagement in prison education began at Cuba's notorious Guantanamo Bay detention camp with a young man named Omar Khadr.

Khadr is a Canadian citizen who was held for 10 years at Guantanamo and tried for war crimes he was accused of committing as a 15-year-old involved in a fire-fight with U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.

A relationship later developed between Khadr and students and faculty at King's. Zinck was invited by the U.S. military to develop a curriculum for distance learning that Khadr could follow from his Cuban cell. Many King's faculty became involved. After he was transferred to Corrections Canada federal prisons in Alberta until his release in May 2015, they continued tutoring him. Khadr was able to complete a high school diploma and went on to earn postsecondary credits from King's. "Tutoring him," said Zinck, who visited Khadr several times in person at Guantanamo Bay, was "a gesture of mercy and compassion to a young man who has had precious little of that."

From the outset, King's supported the engagement with Khadr. "They blessed the work," said Zinck. "It stretched King's, but they blessed it. It's implicit that if we are to be Christ's hands and feet, this work matters."

"We were welcomed at the Edmonton Institution with Omar," explained Zinck. "That was a wonderful thing. Within a month, we had a request to teach another student. Since then, we've taught eight men over the past three



**Edmonton Institution, Correction Services Canada's maximum security facility in Edmonton, Alta.**

years." Although they helped Khadr complete high school requirements, the group of educators now offers only post-secondary education. Potential students are identified by Corrections Canada and must have finished grade 12. Zinck interviews each potential student to explore his interest, then asks him to engage in a non-credit interdisciplinary course. The next course may be taken for credit through one of the participating universities. The professors teach one-on-one, wear personal alarms, and are closely monitored by guards. In

spite of this, Zinck said, "We bring our presence and we engage with the prisoners like any other university student."

"I had no interest in prisons," Zinck said of her attitude at the outset. "I couldn't have been more disengaged or uninterested. But the experience of going to the prison did something to me. I think perhaps the best way to talk about it is in terms of call. Now when I walk onto that prison campus—and it's a fairly austere place—for reasons that remain mysterious to me, I feel such a sense of joy. If there ever was a moment in my life when I have felt the presence of the Holy Spirit working through me, it's been there."

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Zinck has dreams for The Prison Project to grow. Her vision is to take this experience and tap the shoulders of colleagues in other cities to which inmates get transferred so that their education can continue. She dreams of a community where there is more support for those who leave prison, and more people willing to engage.

"Here's the heart of it for me and what I want *Banner* readers to know," said Zinck. "That what we preach in our churches about reconciliation is life-giving, not only for those who have offended, but for the entire community." She cited Frederick Buechner: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and

the world's deep hunger meet. For this group of volunteers from King's, it has reconnected us to the central work of the church—to minister to one another. And the experience of doing that is such an incredible access point to renewal and reconciliation that I really do think it can transform the world. This work is critically important at this hour, not just for those who are incarcerated, but for the rest of us."

—Janet A. Greidanus



Rick's Place work team from Second CRC in Byron Center, Mich.

## Helping Returning Soldiers and Their Families Reconnect

More than a decade has passed since U.S. Army Sgt. First Class Rick Herrema died during battle in Iraq in 2006.

But members of Second Christian Reformed Church in Byron Center, Mich., haven't forgotten Herrema's service and sacrifice for his country. This year some of them have worked toward creating a retreat center for military families near Fort Bragg, N.C., named in his honor.



A 56-member team, including Rick's father, Dick, spent a week in early April to establish Rick's Place, a 50-acre retreat center that will offer a place for soldiers returning from the battlefield to reconnect with their families at no cost. About half of that number planned to

return in October to add an obstacle course to the facilities.

Participants had an opportunity to meet some of the military families who are expected to visit Rick's Place. "It gave me a very deep appreciation for military families, the struggle they go through day by day, especially when a member of the family is on deployment," said Kendra Arendsen, one of the church members who took part in the project.

The work team cleared away trees, built a footbridge, two pergolas and benches, and also worked on a playground as part of the week's activities.

Rick's Place is located about three miles from Fort Bragg.



—Greg Chandler

# NEWS


## Pastors, Churches Respond to Charlottesville Protests

This summer's violence in Charlottesville, Va., tied to a protest over the removal of a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee, prompted a strong response by some in the Christian Reformed Church.

One pastor, Meg Jenista of Washington DC CRC, was in Char-

lottesville on Aug. 12, as part of an interfaith group of volunteers handing out bottles of water to people near the planned protest site at Emancipation Park. She said she was not near the site of the crash where one woman was killed and several others injured when an Ohio man drove his car

### Not Following Us on Facebook?

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News and photos of **Exeter (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church's summer soccer camp** with students from Redeemer University College serving as coaches from Athletēs in Action ministry.



Exeter (Ont.) CRC Soccer Camp



Church in the Heart of the Park

Some great photos of an **August worship service in Presqu'île Provincial Park** near Brighton, Ont. where **Rev. Ryan Braam**, pastor of Fellowship CRC in Brighton, took his turn leading the ecumenical Christian service, part of a park program for their several hundred summer campers.

News and a link for the fourth grade class of Lafayette (Ind.) Christian School's fundraiser, in memory of their teacher's son. They sold **Love for Logan** bracelets supporting Sunrise CRC members Lisa and Drew Vanderkleed, whose 2-year-old son died, from injuries in a tragic accident, August 24.



Love for Logan bracelets.

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Madison Church senior pastor **Dave Beelen** (third from left) leads prayer before the rally.

into a crowd of people who had gathered in opposition to the protest. The protesters, chanting racist slogans and displaying Nazi and white nationalist symbols, were eventually barred from the park by police.

Jenista said she met a young person at the event who also opposed the protest. He asked if she was a person of faith, admitting that he wasn't—but after seeing the response of Christians to the protest, he told her he'd consider changing his position.

"It spoke to me about the importance of the church showing up. There are plenty of people out there who have a narrative . . . that the church is irrelevant," Jenista said. "The white supremacists, I imagine, have a narrative that says the church doesn't mind what we're doing, and there's a whole bunch of observers who don't know what to make of faith."

Meanwhile, Madison Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., organized



**Christina Edmondson**, one of the prayer service organizers, leads a responsive reading.

a Churches United prayer service for Aug. 14 in response to the violence and expressions of racism. About 300 people gathered at Madison Church's Square campus two days after the Charlottesville violence. Pastors and laypeople alike prayed for peace and reconciliation, some offering prayer for those who are part of hate groups. At times, the service became highly emotional, with one pastor fighting back tears as she prayed.

PHOTO CREDIT GREG CHANDLER.

Eric Nykamp, a worship leader at Madison Church's North campus, and Christina Edmondson, dean of intercultural student development at Calvin College, put the service together almost immediately after hearing the news of the violence. The service drew not only people from various Christian Reformed churches but also from other faith backgrounds.

"We wanted it to be for the city, not just the church," Nykamp said. "This isn't about politics, it's about heart change, it's about God."

Brad Knetsch, pastor of Madison Church's Ford campus in Grand Rapids, said the service was needed for the community.

"Often times, churches are quite slow in mobilizing to respond to issues that are so pressing," Knetsch said. "People are asking, 'Where is God in this? Where is God at work in this?' That's the big question."

Edmondson reminded participants during the service to see themselves in the light of God's compassion and holiness even in difficult times.

"Our God is bigger and greater, and our God has the final word on bigotry. Reflecting on the goodness of that God helps us go forward," Edmondson said.

Participants from Grace CRC, also in Grand Rapids, were involved in a Sunday night solidarity march and candlelight vigil in the city's downtown area. Grace promoted the two events, organized by other groups in the city, on its Facebook page.

—Greg Chandler

## Two Cultures Worship Together in Edmonton Church

"As a very traditional Christian Reformed church, it's quite unbelievable and certainly an amazing blessing from God what has happened to our church in the last number of years," said Donna Dost, member of Maranatha CRC in Edmonton, Alta. She's talking about the influx of Karen (*Ka-wren*) Christians, originally refugees from Myanmar, that began when the church sponsored one family in 2007, and the subsequent growth of a culture of blended worship at Maranatha.



Baptism and new member welcome at Maranatha CRC.

Ten years after the arrival of that first family, Karen members make up about one-third of Maranatha's membership. Ministries have progressed from English classes and introduction to Canadian life to bilingual music ministry and leadership inclusion.

"We are working to be deliberate in integrating [Karen] cultural expressions into our worship," said Rev. Pete VanderBeek, pastoring at Maranatha as a Specialized Transitional Minister. During a service in July where 20 individuals from the Karen community were accepted as members and three children were baptized, VanderBeek wore a Karen garment over his usual Sunday clothes. He often does this

for joint services that happen once a month. The other Sundays, the Karen people hold separate worship services in the Sgaw language.

Law Ple, a young Karen father who has just become an elder at Maranatha, suggested a further connection for the Sundays the groups meet separately. He asked that Karen worship leaders meet with the leaders of the English service together in the council room for pre-service prayer.

When both groups worship together, two languages are used. There is usually at least one musical number sung in Sgaw, often with projection of the English translation or a brief description. Scripture reading is often read first in English and then read by a Karen member in Sgaw. "Both groups have a rich tradition of singing hymns," said Kathleen Seutter, the church's worship ministry leader. For musical expression in worship, "there is a lot more that is similar between the two groups than is different," she said.



Sunday school children singing at Maranatha CRC.

In Sunday School "we have Karen helpers almost every week," said Brenda Paszek, who has been involved in the Karen ministry for many years. "They are not yet confident to teach in English, but by watching us teach, they are increasing their knowledge of the Bible and learning the basics of teaching it also."

A praise group called FISH ministers to the congregation about every six weeks. Led by Chelsea Dost and including members from both groups, FISH sings in Sgaw and English and has phonetically translated a few songs so the whole congregation can sing together when singing in Sgaw.

The church is "working more on ways where it is not obviously two different groups coming together, but one body of Christ praising God," said Seutter.

—Janet A. Griedanus

# NEWS

## IN MEMORIAM



**Rev. Kenneth Jay Verhulst**  
1940-2017

Ken Verhulst ministered with a passion for social justice spurred on by his experiences as a seminary intern at Manhattan Christian Reformed Church in Harlem, N.Y., and his walk with Martin Luther King Jr. from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. He sought to live out Jesus' call to extend love, justice, and mercy to people who are marginalized. Verhulst died on June 22 from complications related to Lewy body dementia.

Verhulst served Christian Reformed congregations in Alberta, Toronto, and New York. He retired in 2006.

Verhulst was a playful and loving grandfather and an avid lover of music. In Toronto he took up the autoharp so he could help lead the singing during services at The Lighthouse, a Christian Reformed outreach ministry. He sang in choirs in New York until his illness took his voice away. After retirement, Verhulst was an active member of Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. Many there were touched and inspired by his openness and honesty about his disease.

Verhulst is survived by three children and their spouses and by two grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife, Kathy, in 1995.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## IN MEMORIAM



**Rev. Kenneth Vander Heide**  
1931-2017

Kenneth Vander Heide served in parish ministry in several Christian Reformed churches, spent almost a decade in hospital chaplaincy, and filled his retirement years with travel and volunteer work with World Renew's Disaster Response Services. At age 86, he died in the house where he was born in McBain, Mich.

Vander Heide served Christian Reformed congregations in South Dakota and North Carolina and served in hospital chaplaincy in New Mexico. He spent retirement volunteering as a campground host and with World Renew Disaster Response Services.

Able to put people at ease with his engaging sense of humor, Vander Heide enjoyed reading and loved word play. He will be remembered for the way he sang and hummed through each day. His fellow parishioners at Prosper CRC will miss his "hallelujahs" and "amens" during worship.

Vander Heide is survived by Sena, his wife of 66 years; by five children and their spouses; and by 21 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

*Further information on recently deceased ministers is available at [thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org).*

## Alberta Church's Garden: Growing Side by Side



Since 2010, after its city's public community garden was shut down because of construction and underground service work, Brooks (Alta.) Christian Reformed Church has operated a unique community garden that has become an important resource for the church's neighbors.

The Growing Together Community Garden uses a square-foot gardening technique to achieve better yields with fewer resources than a conventional tilled row garden.

"We have raised garden beds that are 4'x8', and they're gridded into one-foot squares. A 4'x8' garden box would have 32 squares in it," said Murray Denoudsten, who oversees the garden project. "[A square-foot] planting guide explains how many seeds of whatever you want to plant in each square. The idea is that you optimize growth, you conserve the amount of seeds you use, and you also economize on water by sim-

**Denoudsten's 10-year-old daughter in the garden in August 2016.**



**Brooks CRC's garden prepped and ready for the growing season.**

ply watering the root balls throughout the growing season."

Brooks CRC's garden started out modestly with 12 garden boxes. An overwhelmingly positive response from the community prompted them to approach local service organizations to raise additional funds to expand. The garden now includes 13 more boxes, a protective fence to keep out wildlife, and heavy-duty weed

# News Digest

## Coffee Connects International Neighbors in Lacombe, Alberta

Rick Abma is a Christian Reformed pastor at Neighbourhood Life in Lacombe, Alta. The opening of Good Neighbour CoffeeHouse earlier this year has offered another place for him to minister. The downtown coffee shop is not just another place to grab a good cup of coffee; its value of direct-sourcing sustainably grown beans is centered around the call to love God and love our neighbor.



This year, Abma will obtain almost 10,000 pounds (4,500 kg) of green coffee beans directly from Honduran farmers. More than 55 farmers are now involved in the Honduras coffee project, with which Abma connected in 2009. Two-hundred-fifty families in central Honduras are benefiting from the project.

## Michigan Church Builds on Ethiopian Development Partnership

EverGreen Ministries, a Christian Reformed congregation in Hudsonville, Mich., has built a partnership over the past five years with a child sponsorship program in Ethiopia called Children's Hope Chest. Recently four EverGreen members visited two of the organization's care point sites in two communities near the capital city of Addis Ababa. They met with families of children sponsored through Children's Hope Chest as well as representatives of the local church they partner with. During their visit, the EverGreen members offered a vacation Bible school-type event for children in Aware, held a feast for families of the children, and discussed upcoming projects with local church leaders, said Jodi Cole Meyer, who organized the visit.



Learning hoop dancing at IFC.

## Indigenous Ministry's Kids Camp Offers Positive Learning

Indigenous Family Centre (IFC), a ministry of the CRC in Winnipeg, Man., completed a seventh season of Kids Camp this summer. The free program provides six weeks of activities, including swimming, paddling lessons, photography workshops, and lessons in hoop dancing and other cultural practices.

"Kids Camp provides a safe place for kids to be for four hours a day, three days a week. Also, our weekly field trips, especially the ones to Bird's Hill Park [a beach near Winnipeg], provide opportunities for positive family time. There aren't many other opportunities or resources for families to be able to do things like that together on a regular basis," said Nathalie VanderZaag, the camp director.

## Michigan Couple Sharing 50 Years of Hospitality

Imagine hosting 35 to 50 people for dinner once a week on a weeknight. That's what George and Mary Lindquist, members of Ann Arbor (Mich.) CRC, have done every Tuesday night of the academic year for 50 years. They began in 1967 by welcoming George's sister and a few friends from the University of Michigan for dinner. Over the decades they've served many more graduate students and others, continuing to host the dinners through three different homes. The Lindquists' current home was designed especially to accommodate the weekly gatherings, now partially supported by the church and a cast of cooks and helpers.

—Banner Correspondents



A group of diners at the home of George and Mary Lindquist.

For more on these and other stories, please visit [thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org).

fabric covered with bark mulch between the garden boxes.

Each spring the church issues a call for applications to use a garden box for the season. It's promoted in the local newspaper, through food coalition networks, and via social media.

"We really have opened it up to the community, so anybody who feels that they perhaps don't have the garden space at their home, or if they live in a townhouse or an apartment where there is no garden accessibility, they're more than welcome to apply to be a gardener [here]," Denoudsten said. From retirees who've returned to the garden for many years, to new Canadians from Brooks' large immigrant population, to community groups, the garden is accessible to a variety of people.

"We frequently see interactions between our garden members who might not otherwise come to know each other. Gardening is one of those neutral things, just like talking about the weather; people feel comfortable coming together and getting to know each other. It's been really interesting to see the diversity and the various service organizations using this as part of their program now," Denoudsten said.

—Krista dela Rosa

# NEWS

## Grant Helps Michigan Churches Expand Water Quality Monitoring

**T**rinity Christian Reformed Church in Grandville, Mich., has worked for nearly a decade to improve the water quality of a creek that runs near its property. A 2017 grant is funding an expanded effort, with Messiah CRC in Hudsonville and Fairway CRC in Jenison partnering in the work. Other congregations are also getting involved, along with public school students from Jenison and Hudsonville.

Trinity CRC members collect samples of insects and other organisms, which are a sign of the health of the creek. Gerry Koning, Trinity's pastor, uses passages from both Genesis and Revelation, as well as from Article 2 of the Belgic Confession, to illustrate the importance of caring for the water that

is part of God's creation. "God gives life to everything, and his means of giving life is a river," Koning said. "Rivers are a metaphor for spiritual life, but also physical life. God has placed his imprint on all that he has created."

Getting more people involved will result in more areas being sampled for water quality, Koning said.

Participants from the three churches attended a training opportunity in June. Biologists instructed them on how to properly collect samples and identify insects, which are then forwarded to state environmental officials.

Melissa Dykema, whose family attends Trinity, says getting involved in the restoration is an important spiritual and biological



Trinity CRC members Melissa Dykema and Kathy Jelsema collect samples from Rush Creek.

PHOTOS BY GREG CHANDLER

lesson for her three daughters, ages 10 to 14.

"If we can be a part of that restoration of God's creation, it's wonderful," Dykema said.

Nate Meldrim, pastor at Messiah CRC, said Rush Creek runs along the southern border of their church's property. The son of a retired environmental scientist who studied water quality, Meldrim says getting involved in the study was a natural fit.

"In participating in the stream study, I hope that as a congregation we will grow in our understanding of the charge to be stewards of creation, and in the process grow in our appreciation for how great God is by looking at the smallest of his creations," Meldrim said.

Fairway CRC pastor Dave Den Haan agreed. His congregation decided to get involved after Den Haan met with Koning last winter to learn more about what Trinity has been doing. "I then shared that information with our people here—our social justice deacons particularly. I used the project as an opening example in a sermon recently," he said.

Trinity CRC partnered with its local township to secure a grant of more than \$13,000 from the state of Michigan for this expanded water quality study on Rush Creek. The creek is a tributary of the Grand River, one of the state's longest rivers.

—Greg Chandler

## Noteworthy

**Neil deKoning**, pastor of Woody Nook CRC, in Lacombe, Alta., has served his city's fire department as **chaplain** for six years. Recently he began serving the **Lacombe police service** as well.

**Eric Boldiszar**, a student of the **Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI)**, created a conference dealing with prison reform that drew 300 attendees and received national recognition. The National Association of Community and Restorative Justice presented him with the **2017 Bert Thompson Pioneer Award for Faith Based Community and Restorative Justice**, based on his efforts. Boldiszar is a member of CPI's inaugural class, entering its third year in the program. *(no online version for this story)*

**Vernon J. Ehlers**, who taught at Calvin College for 17 years and later became a Michigan state legislator and a United States congressman, **died Aug. 15 in Grand Rapids, Mich.** State and U.S. **flags were lowered to half-staff** in his honor, Thursday Aug. 24, the day of his memorial service held at his home church, Eastern Avenue CRC.

*For more on these and other stories, please visit [thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org).*

## More Online

From the online forum *As I Was Saying* and *thebanner.org* news section, you may have missed these stories.

### Faith on Public Trial

Of recent public displays of white-supremacist rhetoric and accompanying violence, Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson writes: "At times, Christian faith is put on public trial. Public events and movements present a direct confrontation to the gospel of Jesus Christ, requiring us to make a clear choice. The confession of our faith is at stake." ([tinyurl.com/thebanner-publictrial](http://tinyurl.com/thebanner-publictrial)).

### Are We Part of the Problem?

*Banner* editor Shiao Chong writes that "the events of Charlottesville should not move us only to make proclamations and denouncements. They should also move us to act: to pray, to examine ourselves, and to work."

([tinyurl.com/thebanner-problem](http://tinyurl.com/thebanner-problem)).

### Piano Teacher's Stand for Justice at Work Goes Viral

On July 31, Marie Strassenburg, a pianist at Hope Community Christian Reformed Church in Riverside, Calif., posted a Facebook video she made just after walking out of a part-time job as a piano instructor at a local music store. Alissa Vernon wrote about Strassenburg's reasons for posting the clip that went viral with more than 9.6 million online views. ([tinyurl.com/thebanner-viralvideo](http://tinyurl.com/thebanner-viralvideo))

## Breaking Barriers to End Hunger

**A**ida Karwani almost lost all hope when the crops in her small garden began to fail. Aida, who lives in a small community in rural Uganda, had cultivated the same plot of land for nearly three decades to grow food for her family. As the years went by, farming on her land became difficult, and the amount of food she was able to harvest drastically decreased.

“My land was exhausted, and I could hardly harvest anything on it,” said Aida. Despite the crop failure, Aida continued to cultivate her land. One harvest after another, she continued to get smaller and smaller results.

Aida’s story of struggle is not uncommon in many of the communities where World Renew has a presence. Families living in poverty face barriers including difficulty finding resources to generate income, challenges in growing food, or lack of access to water. All of these barriers contribute to a vicious cycle of hunger that prevents people from living healthy, joyful lives.

Hunger pushes families into stories underlined by hardship, pain, and suffering. But with God, hard work, and support, barriers can be broken, and these stories can be rewritten into testimonies of hope.

Aida’s life began to change for the better after she heard that World Renew and their local partner, the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church (PAD-KIDO), were teaching conservation agriculture techniques in her community. Desperate for a good harvest, Aida bravely decided to take the time to learn. She gave the new techniques a try even though there was a risk to changing practices that she knew would result in harvest.

This time around she tried using mulch and planted three kilograms of maize. She could hardly believe it when she saw the results: the harvest more than



Aida is happy to show others how tall her maize has grown.

doubled—a success she had never achieved before.

Other farmers in Aida’s community have also been trained in new techniques and then gone on to practice in their fields what they learned. They too have seen amazing results—bigger harvests and more resilient crops.

One farmer, Alice, was able to grow healthy cabbage. Many of her neighbors lost their crops because of low rainfall. But with her new techniques, Alice was able to grow enough cabbage to sell and make a profit.

Alice has offered to help other farmers in her community who want to try the techniques she has learned from World Renew. Her field is open for others to come and witness the work she is doing.

By breaking barriers to end hunger, Aida and Alice were able to grow food and move their families on track to a future without hunger.

### Barriers to Income Lead to Desperation

Mishal is a young girl who lives in a small community in Malawi. Like many other girls her age, she sold items at the market to earn money for her family.

Without the money Mishal worked hard to earn, her mother wouldn’t be able to buy food and their family’s basic needs would go unmet.

One day Mishal prepared a few large donuts to sell at the market. But after selling all of her donuts, she realized that she hadn’t brought in enough money to make a profit.

Worried and unsure of what to do, Mishal turned to one of her friends for help. Mishal’s friend made arrangements for Mishal to sleep with a man to make up the money she had lost. This friend encouraged Mishal to sleep with men whenever she needed money.

World Renew has been working with its partner Word Alive to implement an innovative HIV-prevention project in



Hamida works as a peer mentor in her community to encourage girls to stop engaging in transactional sex.



*You add.  
God multiplies.*

👉👉 Hunger pushes families into stories underlined by hardship, pain, and suffering. But with God, hard work, and support, barriers can be broken. 🗨️🗨️

Mishal's community. Through this program, Mishal and her peers have access to resources, education, and support. Many of the girls are 14 to 21 years old and are the primary breadwinners for their family. With family members depending on them for survival, many have started engaging in transactional sex to earn money.

While the decision to sell sexual favors is never an easy one, many girls in Mishal's community are unaware of the associated risks. Through discussions with small groups and guidance from mentors and peer educators, these girls are learning about the dangers to their health and emotional well-being.

To help educate the girls, a group of older women and female pastors volunteered to assist World Renew. They shared their baking and cooking techniques with 25 girls, and the girls learned how to make new foods to sell at the market. With new skills, the girls can sell more baked goods and earn a living without feeling the need to engage in transactional sex.

For Hamida, another one of the girls in the group, getting involved in the program wasn't easy. She was suspicious of the program and the group that was forming in her village.

She had started engaging in transactional sex to help her grandmother, »

» who had taken in Hamida and her seven siblings after their parents passed away.

Hamida's grandmother made an income by collecting branches from a nearby forest and selling them as firewood. To help her grandmother, Hamida decided to drop out of school and assist with firewood collection and sales.

Although Hamida worked hard, sometimes she wasn't able to earn enough money to buy food for her family. Her siblings had to drop out of school because Hamida did not earn enough to pay for school fees. As men started to approach Hamida for sex, she resisted. Then one

day the desperation for money pushed her to try it. For over four years Hamida gave herself to men to feed her family.

When Hamida met World Renew and Word Alive staff, she was cautious. Through the group that was forming in her community, Hamida was able to meet other girls who had similar experiences. She learned that the group was a safe place to ask questions and get information.

The group encouraged Hamida to get HIV tested and supported her decision to stop engaging in transactional sex.

Hamida later attended a week-long Stepping Stones training organized by World Renew, where she learned how to



Women from the community volunteered to teach baking skills to young girls.

lead small groups. She gained more information about sexual reproductive health and cultural practices that are harmful to girls.

Now Hamida is a peer mentor and leads a group of 17 girls. Her group discusses many of the challenges they face as girls and the pressure to financially support their families. Through their discussions, Hamida is helping more girls to stop engaging in transactional sex.

In addition to breaking down barriers to end hunger in her own life, she has taken an active role in breaking down barriers for others. As a result, more people in the community are finding ways to embrace their God-given potential and become equipped to change their own stories for the long term. ■

### Waging War against the Armyworm

The fall armyworm is contributing to widespread crop failure in areas across Eastern and Southern Africa and pushing impoverished families into a deeper cycle of hunger.

The fall armyworm gets its name from its practice of inhabiting areas in massive numbers in its larval stage in autumn. The caterpillars feed on crops such as maize, soybean, sorghum, and cowpeas. The caterpillars turn into moths that spread to new areas, laying up to 1,000 eggs in their 10-day lifetime.

The insect has already inhabited areas in the Americas, but it's causing concern in its new home in Africa. For areas already struggling through drought and food insecurity, the armyworm is making a bad situation a lot worse. Many families who had very little to eat now have nothing.

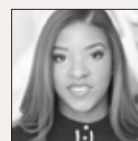
In response to extreme drought, World Renew supplied farmers in Uganda with cowpeas and sorghum. By August many of their harvests had been destroyed, and farmers were beginning to report an infestation of the fall armyworm taking over their fields.

Some farmers reported losing over half of their crops to the insect. Maize was among the most affected crop. The cost of pesticides discouraged many farmers from buying what they needed to control the spread of the bug.

To help prepare for the next planting season, World Renew is distributing sweet potato tubers to farmers in need. The sweet potato is a nutritious root vegetable high in vitamin A that can be used to make bread or be preserved for months. Sweet potatoes are also resistant to drought and the fall armyworm. With a successful sweet potato harvest, farmers can provide healthy food for their families in the short term and also plan for a stronger future.



With crops ruined by the fall armyworm, families are facing hunger.



Taylor Smith is a writer for World Renew.

## Set Free at Strong Tower

**E**rnest Umoh knows firsthand many of the struggles that come with moving to North America. When he saw a growing refugee population in West Michigan, he quickly took the opportunity to respond to a need that often goes unnoticed.

“Here in West Michigan, we have so many Muslim communities,” said Umoh. “People from Sudan, Somalia, Uganda, and Tanzania . . . and no one was really working with them actively, inviting them to Christ, or preaching the Good News.”

Umoh has sensed God’s call to be an evangelist since his time growing up in Nigeria. His fearless attitude of “going where the Spirit leads him” has gotten him into dangerous situations on more than one occasion. His sincere care and giving heart have helped him connect with many Muslim refugees who are not only excited to hear the gospel but also in desperate need of assistance.

“People are coming here from war-torn countries, escaping persecution, trying to learn in a free society,” Umoh said. “In many of the places they come from, they’ve never experienced church.”

Today Umoh pastors Strong Tower Ministries in Wyoming, Mich. This ministry provides services to newcomers in the community, such as driving people to their doctor appointments and organizing Bible studies.

“Our main goal is to show newcomers the love of Christ,” Umoh explained.

Umoh soon realized that his passion for ministry couldn’t keep up with the needs he encountered. When he found himself turning down his own thermostat to free up extra money, he knew he needed more partnerships.

Umoh connected with what is now Strong Tower’s parent church—Trinity CRC in Grandville, Mich.—as well as



**Ernest Umoh, a church planter from Nigeria, reaches out to East African refugees in West Michigan.**

Resonate Global Mission (then Christian Reformed Home Missions). Their financial assistance and coaching from fellow pastors and church planters allowed Strong Tower to continue growing.

“Umoh came knocking at our door, asking for help with the heating bill. Right away we knew that God was calling us to join him in this ministry,” said Gerry Koning, pastor at Trinity CRC.

Since that time, Strong Tower has been able to increase the number of people they greet at airports, teach English to, and worship with on Sundays.

Members of Trinity volunteer at the weekly English classes and help Umoh with benevolence costs. In turn, they have gained a new perspective on what it means to follow the Spirit’s leading as well as a greater understanding of the broader cultural makeup in their own part of the world.

“This has given us the opportunity to interact with the refugee population,

to see the reality of their situation and the difficulties they face,” said Koning. “I think the best way to help is to have churches come alongside them.”

Umoh is excited to see how Strong Tower’s partnerships will help expand and amplify its local ministry to global ministry back in East Africa.

“We can use those who have been led to Christ through Strong Tower as partners in planting churches back in their home country,” explained Umoh. “We want to make sure that Strong Tower is international, not just local.” ■



**Brian Clark** is a writer for Resonate Global Mission.

## Nothing Like This Has Happened Before!

**O**n a recent Sunday morning, during the reading of Scripture, the words from 1 Samuel 4:7 jumped out at me: “Nothing like this has happened before.”

In the Scripture text, this phrase was uttered when the conquering Philistines learned that the Israelites had brought the Ark of the Covenant into their camp. But my mind wandered beyond that text to the times when I’ve heard that phrase in everyday conversation.

Sometimes the focus has been on world affairs: the huge number of people around the world who have been displaced by famine, conflict, and war. Other times, the focus is closer to home: *I can’t believe this is happening!* or *I’ve never seen this happen before!*

It reminded me of a phrase from a T.S. Eliot poem I quoted in this column more than a year ago: “But it seems that something has happened that has never happened before.”

My mind went back 500 years to the Protestant Reformation. Although it wasn’t the first schism in the church (the break between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox church in 1054 predated the Reformation), Martin Luther’s actions still must have had folks saying *Nothing like this has happened before!* Their church was being pulled apart.

Each of these instances—and most other situations where this phrase is uttered—reflects a human tendency to look at what’s happening in the present with justifiable concern.

However, as did the Philistines, we tend to gaze horizontally. We look over to the camp of our enemies or competitors. We watch through the lenses of the media what’s happening in politics. We see the rapidly changing norms of our society, as

evidenced in the actions of the people around us. We look at what’s happening to the church, whether it’s the decline in the attendance by young adults, the divisiveness surrounding same-sex marriage, or the lessening of loyalty to denominations. And we exclaim, *Nothing like this has happened before!*

There’s a word for those who look side to side but fail to look up. You can find it in the Old Testament (Jer. 5:21: “Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see . . .”) and the New Testament (Gal. 3:1: “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?”). Contrast that with the call found in Hebrews 12 to fix our eyes on Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”

Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus doesn’t mean that we fail to see the messes in our world or even in the church. But it does mean that we don’t simply wring our hands in despair. When we are fully attentive to our Lord and Savior, we see both the challenges before us and also the hope that Christ’s transforming power brings.

Nor is it only believers who sometimes forget to look heavenward when we say *Nothing like this has happened before!* Our unbelieving neighbors, nearby and far away, suffer from the same human tendency, whether in times of conflict, as was the case with the Philistines, or while watching along with us events unfolding in government or society.

We are called as Christians to go beyond our human tendency and to show our neighbors, through our words and actions, that we trust in a greater power. Even if we don’t immediately see God’s hand at work, or evidence of his renewal in progress, we are called, in all the messiness of life, to be witnesses to Christ’s redeeming love.

May we be found faithful as we are held in his embrace, welcoming newcomers to his love, and awaiting that great day of Christ’s return when we may truly proclaim, *Nothing like this has ever happened before!* ■



“ Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus doesn’t mean that we fail to see the messes in our world or even in the church. ”



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

You add.  
God multiplies.

## From One Broadcast to a 14,600-Member Denomination

One seed planted through a radio broadcast nearly 40 years ago has grown into a 14,600-member denomination in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Rev. Kalala Kabongo, president of the United Reformed Church in the Congo, represented his denomination as a fraternal delegate to Synod 2017.

As he drove into Palos Heights, Ill., to address the synod held at Trinity Christian College, he said his eyes lit up as he saw the name on the Chicago offices of Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI). He said, "In Africa we always think of our parents, where we are from. Our church started from a Back to God radio program produced in this place."



While in Chicago as a fraternal delegate to Synod 2017, Rev. Kabongo visited the Back to God Ministries International offices in Palos Heights, Ill.

Kabongo contacted Rev. Kayayan and received additional study materials. That led to a 1980 visit by Kayayan to the fledgling group in the DRC.

When Kayayan made a second visit in 1984, "he encouraged us to start a church," noted Kabongo.

Kabongo enrolled in seminary and, after receiving his Th.M., returned to the DRC to serve in the newly established Reformed Church.

"This church in Congo is a miracle for us," he added. "Did you ever think that from one radio program you would get 14,000 people together who call themselves Christ's church?"

"There were no missionaries in Congo to plant churches, but through radio messages and the Holy Spirit's work in their hearts, we are now part of the big family of Christian Reformed churches."

The denomination now includes 181 local churches across the DRC. "But we only have 34 trained pastors," noted Kabongo. "We need prayer. We need pastors." ■

Kabongo said that in 1979, while searching for the news on shortwave radio, he happened upon *Perspectives Réformées*, a radio program with biblical messages by Rev. Aaron Kayayan, BTGMI French broadcaster at that time.

"I grew up in a Roman Catholic home. What caught my attention was his teaching of salvation by grace through faith and the centrality of God's Word alone. I realized that beyond ritual there is a Savior with whom I can be in relationship."

Kabongo invited friends to listen and started a group Bible study based on the teachings in the broadcast. "As we continued to listen, we wanted to learn more about the Reformed faith," said Kabongo.

—Nancy VanderMeer,  
Back to God Ministries International

## SHORT TAKES

### CRC Member Named Acting General Secretary of Canadian Council of Churches



Peter Noteboom, a member of First Christian Reformed Church in Toronto, Ont., and an employee with the Christian Reformed Church in North America, has recently taken on the role of acting general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), an ecumenical council representing 25 denominations in Canada. ■

—Anita Brinkman,  
CRC Communications

### Plantinga Wins \$1 Million Templeton Prize



Relying on his bedrock belief that God is the creator and guiding force of the universe, philosopher Alvin Plantinga made a career of asking hard questions and stating

the case for the existence of God. In doing so, he has won many awards, most recently the 2017 Templeton Prize. ■

—Chris Meehan,  
CRC Communications



### More Churches Join Climate Witness Project

The Christian Reformed Church's Climate Witness Project has been gathering momentum in recent months. More than 70 participating congregations have signed on to the project. ■

—Chris Meehan,  
CRC Communications

### Creating a Community of Servant Leaders

**R**osalba Ramirez, coordinator of precollege programs at Calvin College, said she loves being able to develop young people to serve as leaders.

“Developing young generations not only to be leaders but to be servant leaders is one of my passions,” said Ramirez.

For one month this summer, a select group of high school graduates from around the country experienced college living and learning on Calvin’s campus.

As part of the John M. Perkins Leadership Fellows Program, the high school graduates had a chance to live in the residence halls while completing a three-



Perkins Fellows come to Calvin College to learn about servant leadership.

or four-credit course in a diverse array of subjects.

Through the John M. Perkins Leadership Fellows Program, first-generation college students and students passionate

about helping their communities have a place to develop their servant leadership skills, she said.

The fellows program was created in Fall 2012 and implemented in Fall 2013

### Ann Kapteyn: The Missionary Next Door

**T**he view from Ann Kapteyn’s office at Calvin Theological Seminary is nothing short of peaceful. Filtered sunlight. Mature pines. Busy squirrels.

Just the kind of environment Kapteyn needed after nearly two decades as a Bible translation consultant with Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL International in Brazil and Cameroon.

“Life in Cameroon was challenging,” Kapteyn said, “with illness and civil unrest and life-threatening circumstances.”

Two years ago, she and her husband, Ray, a missionary pilot, decided to leave the field and put down roots in Grand Rapids, Mich., with their three teenage children.

Soon after arriving in Grand Rapids, Ann Kapteyn



Ann Kapteyn with friends in Cameroon.

was appointed to a two-year stint as missionary-in-residence at Calvin Seminary.

“I had lived a communal life in Africa, but my life soon became pretty solitary when I came back to the States,” she said. “As a missionary-in-residence, I’ve gained a sense of community that I lost when I left Cameroon.”

Sharing in daily coffee breaks and visiting seminary classes are simple ways she

said the program has become enriching for her.

The missionary-in-residence program benefits Calvin Seminary too. Kapteyn brings a vibrant cross-cultural perspective to the classes she visits and courses she teaches.

“Basic questions are different in different cultures. The questions we commonly ask in our Western culture don’t get asked in many

other cultures, and vice versa.”

For example, a basic question for some students from African countries is, Are we allowed to eat blood (in meat)?

“I don’t think that’s a question that gets asked very often here at the seminary.”

In addition to teaching, Kapteyn leads English conversation groups and mentors students in weekly Formation for Ministry groups.

“The seminary wants me to be a part of the seminary community to interact with other professors and with the students on a daily basis.”

For both Ann Kapteyn and Calvin Seminary, it’s a good fit. ■

—Don McCrory,  
Calvin Seminary

You add.  
God multiplies.

with the goal of identifying, developing, and retaining students who demonstrate the potential to be transformational leaders for Christ's kingdom, academia, and society, said Ramirez.

The students, who are selected to participate in a series of leadership development opportunities during their first two years of college, take specially designed leadership courses, have dinners with prominent Calvin leaders, and take an all-expenses-paid spring break service trip.

They also participate in an immersive summer experience before they begin at Calvin.

As John M. Perkins, the program's namesake and inspiration, puts it, the leadership opportunity is not about seeking self-recognition and glory, but seeking to serve our neighbors in humility for the glory of God, explained Ramirez.

"This program is not about being a leader by getting up and telling people what to do; it's really about serving," said Alexis Murawski, a student in the program. "I realized leadership is not about you; it's about others."

"It is the goal that at the end of this summer bridge program, the Perkins Leadership Fellows have developed a strong sense of community, have learned academic skills to succeed in their college journey, have identified resources available to them on campus, have grown spiritually, and have developed a strong sense of what it is to be a servant leader," said Ramirez.

"This development will continue throughout the two years of the program." ■

—Hannah Ebeling,  
Calvin College

## Is It Worth It?

**M**irah (name changed) was born into a Christian family. But as she grew up and looked at the world around her, she began to ask herself, "Is this faith really worth it?"

As a Palestinian Christian, Mirah regularly witnessed the pain religion can cause. What's more, many of the questions she had about her faith were going unanswered. All of this led her to renounce her faith in Christ.

Mirah's struggles are common among students at Jerusalem School Bethlehem, a Christian school located in a part of the world that is undergoing a long-standing conflict between Palestine and Israel. Only about 2 percent of the population are Christians.

Today, many of the young people in that 2 percent are asking the same tough question Mirah is asking: Is it worth it?

Kevin and Anna Kornelis—who serve at the K-12 school as missionaries with Resonate Global Mission (formerly Christian Reformed World Missions)—help their Christian students wrestle with this question.

Together with other staff, they offer more than 500 students a safe place to ask questions about the faith they grew up in but don't always understand.

"Our students are counting the costs of what it means to be a Christian," said Kevin Kornelis. "They believe in Jesus, but now they're asking, Is it worth it?"

"A lot of the kids grew up learning that they don't question their faith, they just believe," said Anna. "We have to fight against that idea and help them see the difference that it makes to believe in Jesus."

At the same time, Kevin and Anna's role also includes sharing the gospel with the school's roughly 30 percent Muslim population—and, in turn, with the families of those students. Kevin recalls one class period where he spent much of the time engaged in conversation with one of the Muslim students, helping her understand the idea of grace.

"You could see the anguish in her eyes," Kevin said, "an anguish that said, 'I want to

believe that, but it sounds too good to be true.'"

Mirah, a student in Kevin's class this past school year, was finally able to ask many of the questions that had been on her mind.

"She always pushed back on the discussions in class, but in a respectful way," said Kevin. Despite renouncing the Christian faith for now, Mirah was one of the first students to volunteer to pray in class.

"I don't know if I believe yet, but praying in the name of Jesus gives me comfort in this world," she told Kevin.



Palestinian students gaze at a tall fence separating people.

While Mirah still has many questions about whether faith in Christ is really "worth it," both Kevin and Anna said that is an important part of her faith journey.

"Sometimes it takes pulling away for a while . . . ultimately it brings us a deeper faith when we begin to understand," said Anna. ■

—Brian Clark,  
Resonate Global Mission

Longer versions of these and other stories are online at [thebanner.org/together](http://thebanner.org/together).

## Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the *Solas* in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity

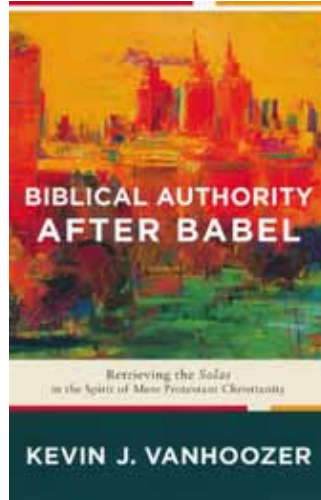
**PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGIAN KEVIN VANHOOZER'S** latest book has been gathering attention; it's an ambitious academic work that retrieves the five *solas* of the Reformation (grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone, for the glory of God alone) as a contemporary challenge to the ecumenical church to be thoroughly converted by the gospel, unified around the gospel, and authorized by the gospel for witness.

A short review can't do justice to the significant argument in *Biblical Authority after Babel* for how the *solas* help keep the church sharply focused on the saving action of the triune God witnessed in Scripture and lived out in the church. Vanhoozer's overall aim is constructive, though he doesn't flinch from current criticisms of the Reformation.

His goal is to see the *solas* and the classic Protestant teaching on the priesthood of all believers provide a pattern for reading Scripture that can enable unity among Protestant churches on gospel essentials and loving fellowship where disagreement over secondary matters exists. "The fruit of the Protestant Reformation is ultimately no anarchy . . . but abundance . . . a rich diversity that makes for lively conversation around the table . . . without breaking table fellowship."

*Biblical Authority after Babel* is not an easy book by any means, with dense argumentation, florid use of metaphor, and the author's highly idiosyncratic style.

**A compelling vision of a renewed Protestantism emerges.**



Reformed readers familiar with the five *solas* of the Reformation might be frustrated by Vanhoozer's often counterintuitive use of them. By his own admission he is "creatively" retrieving them for translation into today's context.

But if one can bear with him, a compelling vision of a renewed Protestantism emerges, where the antidote to our current Babel is "pentecostal pluralism": a global diversity of local churches gathered in Christ by the Spirit around the one Word of life. Here is a book that will surely outlive the Reformation's quincenary in 2017. (Brazos) ■



Todd Statham is a Christian Reformed chaplain at the University of British Columbia-Okanagan.

### READER-SUBMITTED REVIEW



## Border Child

by **Michel Stone**  
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

Hector and Lilia illegally crossed from Mexico into the United States. Hector went first. Lilia followed a while later with their infant daughter, Alejandra. Tragically, mother and child were separated. Now, back in their native village, Alejandra's disappearance continues to haunt Hector and Lilia. When an unexpected clue to Alejandra's possible whereabouts surfaces, Hector goes in search of her. In this gripping story, author Michel Stone reveals the trials and tragedies of a couple living in poverty and longing for a better life for their children. She shows that compassion, community, beauty, love, and faith are not dependent on wealth and prosperity but can thrive in what seems to be the harshest of circumstances. (Nan A. Talese)





## To Have You Around

by Zach Winters  
reviewed by Brian Kelder

Not found on many Christian contemporary music radio stations, Zach Winters provides a contemplative music experience. He uses interesting instrumentation that includes acoustic guitar, ukulele, trumpets, piano, and mandolin interspersed with lyrics that accurately express the Christian life. For fans of Josh Garrels' acoustic fare. Listen for the beautiful folk music, then learn about one man's journey with Christ.

## Still a Family: A Story about Homelessness

by Brenda Reeves Sturgis  
reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema



A young girl and her mother live in a homeless shelter for women and children while her dad lives in a nearby shelter for men. The girl describes her difficult experiences at the shelter, but she's happy because her family is reunited in a park. They share meals together at a soup kitchen. Ultimately, the girl finds her true home with her parents. Christian parents will find this a compassionate resource to introduce their children to the plight of millions of children who experience homelessness. The book can also be a springboard for talking about how God cares for people in need and calls us to serve them, each in our own way. (Albert Whitman & Co)

## A Ghost Story

reviewed by Kristy Quist

Instead of a story about people being haunted by ghosts, director David Lowery has crafted a film about a ghost being haunted by people. Casey Affleck and Rooney Mara, whose characters are given the names C and M in the credits, play a loving young couple. C dies suddenly and becomes a ghost. He stays, witnessing the grief of his widow, portrayed by Mara with mute intensity. C inhabits the house long after M moves on, watching people and time pass. The camera lingers as scenes with little dialogue or action go on for long minutes. Lowery creates an atmosphere heavy with grief and loneliness, but also with a sense of wonder at life, home, and the strong connections we build with each other. At one point a philosophizing hipster carries on in a poor man's version of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes about how

everything we strive for will come to an end; nothing will last, everyone will die. Yet C lingers on. If you enjoy interesting experiments with story and visuals, you might find that this film haunts you too. Rated R for language and disturbing images; on disc this month. (A24)



## THE LOWDOWN: Reformation Celebration

The 500th anniversary has ushered in an influx of new books on the Reformation. Here is a sampling of what's available:



*Does the Reformation Still Matter?* by Karin Maag (Calvin College)



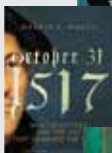
*Katharina and Martin Luther: The Radical Marriage of a Runaway Nun and a Renegade Monk*, by Michelle DeRusha (Baker)



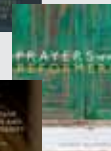
*Katie Luther, First Lady of the Reformation: The Unconventional Life of Katharina von Bora*, by Ruth A. Tucker (Zondervan)



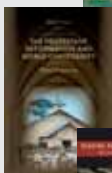
*Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World*, by Eric Metaxas (Viking)



*October 31, 1517: Martin Luther and the Day That Changed the World*, by Martin E. Marty (Paraclete)



*Prayers of the Reformers*, by Thomas McPherson (Paraclete)



*The Protestant Reformation and World Christianity: Global Perspectives*, by Dale T. Irvin (Eerdmans)



*Reading Paul with the Reformers: Reconciling Old and New Perspectives*, by Stephen J. Chester (Eerdmans)



*Reformation Women: Sixteenth Century Figures Who Shaped Christianity's Rebirth*, by Rebecca VanDoodewaard (Reformation Heritage Books)



*Rescuing the Gospel: The Story and Significance of the Reformation*, by Erwin W. Lutzer (Baker)



*Saving Calvinism: Expanding the Reformed Tradition*, by Oliver Crisp (IVP)



*The Whole Church Sings: Congregational Singing in Luther's Wittenberg*, by Robin A. Leaver (Eerdmans)

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