

BANNER

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No Words Fall

2017 Year-End

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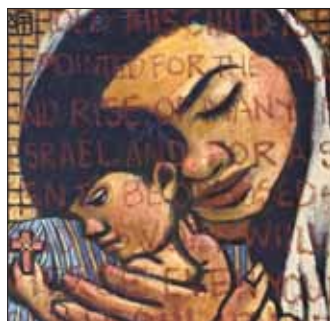
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The *Banner* wishes
its readers a
blessed Christmas.



Cover: *Madonna & Child, Luke 2* (2016) by artist Wayne Forte. wayneforte.com

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Thanks and Changes Ahead

I BELIEVE IT WAS MISSIONARY THEOLOGIAN LESSLIE NEWBIGIN who said that the incarnation—God coming in the flesh in Jesus—was God’s great missionary act. Jesus came as a baby on a mission to save us and to proclaim God’s good news to the world. Christmas, therefore, celebrates God’s mission to reconcile to himself all things through Jesus Christ. Christ’s mission began not with pomp and power but with his birth as a vulnerable baby.

When I was a campus missionary at a secular university, I had no standing, privilege, or power. The university was wary of our presence as religious clergy. Most students regarded Christianity as either irrelevant or as a barrier to progress. I did not have an office, let alone “a ministry center.” I did not have a team of staff or volunteers. I was marginalized and vulnerable. But I drew strength and courage from Christ’s example and, by God’s grace, over the course of 15 years developed relationships, networks, volunteers, and credibility.

In an increasingly post-Christian culture, perhaps we need to learn how to bear witness not from a position of power and strength but of weakness and vulnerability.

I want to take this opportunity to thank our readers and donors for responding so generously to our annual appeal. As of the time of writing, total donations have exceeded our \$300,000 goal by almost \$86,000, an amount that also exceeds last year’s total. Your generosity means that we need to draw less funds from ministry shares, freeing up those dollars for other ministries that might need them. Your gifts, therefore, benefit more than just *The Banner*. We are truly grateful.

Around this time last year, we also sent out a readers’ survey to measure how well we are doing. Over 1,200 of you completed that online survey. Nearly 80 percent of respondents were either very or somewhat satisfied with *The Banner*. You told us why you read *The Banner*, which sections you read the most, what you value, and where we are lacking. I thank you all for sharing your opinions.

The survey results helped us to see how we might improve *The Banner* to serve you better. And indeed, we’ll be making some of those changes to both print and online versions for the new year. In January 2018 we are launching a revamped *Banner*.

This new *Banner* will have fresh content and a fresh look. There will be new columns, including “Cross Examination,” which will focus on why we believe what we believe. Based on the survey results, the third-most read column, after the features and the editorial, is the “Frequently Asked Questions” column. In the new format, this column will be expanded from its present three questions to four questions over two pages and will get a new name: “Big Questions.” No doubt there will be some fine-tuning and adjustments over the course of 2018 as we live into this new *Banner*. You can see a sneak peek of the new *Banner* on the next page.

We are excited to present these changes. But our goal is still the same: to be your trusted source of news on the Christian Reformed Church and of thought-provoking ideas to stimulate conversations for spiritual growth.

Thank you, and may you have a blessed Christmas. ■

P.S. We pray for the victims and families of the November Texas church shooting and pray for the spread of violence to end.



Shiao Chong is editor-in-chief of *The Banner*. He attends Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Toronto, Ont.

Christ’s mission began not with pomp and power but with his birth as a vulnerable baby.

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Empty Jars, Empty Hands

I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN that you can't get cleaned up for church, so to speak; the cleansing comes after redemption and not before. And I've always known that I could never bring something fit for my King. But I've brought many a gift wrapped in good intentions, wanting to be accepted, despite the fact that I was trying to win something I had already been given.

The Lord keeps bringing me back to the story of a widow whose husband left her in debt; a debt not procured by his idleness but by his faith, because he would not comply with the king's way of worship. A woman whose sons were about to be enslaved by a creditor, who was about to lose everything. A woman who was left with only a jar of oil.

I'm sure she stood there for agonizing moments, not knowing what to do. Wondering why the Lord didn't somehow bring about deliverance.

This widow, she cries out to Elisha the prophet, the voice of the Lord, for help. He tells her, "Go around and ask all your

neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few." And when she returned with the jars, she was to shut her door and pour out her oil into the empty vessels (2 Kings 4:3-4).

The widow doesn't contemplate whether or not to obey. She doesn't consider the absurdity of the request. She's desperate. So she sends her sons out to collect empty jars from their friends and neighbors. And pretty soon the room is filled with empty earthen vessels.

There she stands, this woman and her sons, surrounded by borrowed emptiness. She begins to pour from her small jar of oil. One by one, all the empty jars are filled. She goes running back to Elisha; he tells her to sell the oil, pay her debt, and live with her sons on the rest (2 Kings 4:7).

I can't stop wondering what she did at that moment when her sons were saved and their future was secured. Did she weep? Did she dance before the Lord? Did she stand in that room with those jars full of oil, speechless?

I stand here contemplating the difficulties of the year that has just passed and

wonder what may come in the new year—what joys and what tribulations.

I think about what was required for the widow's miracle, and what is required for mine. I look at these empty hands, lifted up before God with no good gift to bring. And I remember how the widow was scared, how the creditor was coming and those boys were looking at their momma with fear. How, in desperation, she began to set out jars in anticipation of the Lord's filling.

So I begin to set them out, one by one—empty jars. Not just a few. Until there's room for no more. For my needs are many and varied. I shut the door and wait.

I turn over my uplifted hands so that anything left of me can spill out on the floor. I empty myself before Christ—empty myself of seeming control and earthly efforts, of doubt and unbelief—so that he can fill me with his grace. ■



Sindy Fields is a high school teacher and adjunct professor at Mountain Empire Community College. She is a member of First Baptist Church of Pennington Gap, Va.

Sneak Preview

Coming next month: a new and improved *Banner*. Fresh look. Fresh content. Same trusted source for features, opinion, news, and shared ministry. Look for it!



Open Letter to My Pastor

I'll learn your hobbies and passions outside of the ministry, your favorite kind of music, and your favorite meal.



Dear Pastor,

I appreciate your dedication to bringing the Word every Sunday. I appreciate your willingness to respond when there is illness, family discord, celebrations, and even death. I appreciate your thankful heart toward our congregation of servants and all that takes place in our church.

I've come to realize that as a council member I've gotten to know you as you've fulfilled your pastoral role, but I have not gotten to know *you*. Going forward, I will make an effort to get to know you as a person. I'll learn your hobbies and passions outside of the ministry, your favorite kind of music, and your favorite meal.

While serving on the council, I've focused too much on evaluating your pastoral performance while ignoring things you think are working well. I will begin to discover what recharges you and what you see as your sweet spot—so we can celebrate.

What would help you better fulfill your calling? In what areas would you like to have your load lightened or your responsibilities modified? What aspects of your job drain your energy?

I hope you'll be honest and practical with your answers. For example, could

you use new tools for your job? Could you use better equipment like a cell phone or computer? Additional training? Opportunities to nurture your soul, such as attending a retreat or devoting a day to solitude and prayer?

I want you to dive deeper in your walk with God, grow wider in your knowledge of him, hold fast to what you know to be true. If you struggle to carve out the time, let me know. I'll work with the council to help you set it aside.

I hope you'll never be in fear of the council—instead, I want us to be your greatest support system and trusted team. My hope is that we will appreciate one another more with each passing season of ministry.

I'll be honest . . . so often I've said that I will support you in prayer, and I didn't. I'd ask you to call me if you need anything and then hope my phone didn't ring. I'd pray for all the things around you, but rarely prayed for you and, more rarely still, with you. I am committed to change this so I am more available to you.

I am here to love you better and help you flourish as our pastor . . . and as a child made in the image of God. Sometimes I forget that's who and what you are. One of us. A brother. A friend. So I ask, with sincerity, what can I do for you today?

Sincerely,

Council Member ■



Gary Miller is a healthcare professional serving as an elder and council chairperson at Covenant Christian

Reformed Church in Appleton, Wisc.



A New Reformation

Bless your heart, preach it! (“We Need a New Reformation,” Nov. 2017). Thank you, Lord! I am laughing and crying at the same time . . . and thanking God that I’m seeing this in black and white in a CRC publication. I think this is amazing (if not a miracle!) and a huge answer to prayer. Yesterday I was just reading an article on God’s presence, and one of the key things we can do is pray and ask God to pour out his Holy Spirit. So this is going to be our focus at a prayer gathering later this week based on Luke 11:11-13: “. . . how much more will our Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Oh, and someone shared with me that the first reformation with Augustine emphasized God the Father; the second reformation with Luther emphasized God the Son, and so I am thinking the third reformation will emphasize God the Spirit!

Bev Sterk (online comment)

The conclusion of Chong’s October editorial was “right on” from my perspective as a follower of Jesus more than being a follower of myself (“We Need a New Reformation”). Indeed, the church needs its members to be fully reliant on God’s Spirit in all of our circumstances rather than our first reliance being on our limited wisdom, insight, and energy.

That conscious shift of how we live our lives will surely solidify/renew the biblical

TTERS

reformation in our churches. I'm delightfully beginning to experience it personally in my elderly years.

*Charles Miller
Willmar, Minn.*

Chong had a very interesting editorial ("We Need a New Reformation"). I wonder if he would provide us with his 95 theses that might include such terms as *risks; flexible; freedom; messy*. It would be entertaining reading. And contain some pearls of wisdom, I am sure.

*Harry Boessenkool
Surrey, B.C.*

You said it well: "This internal tension was part of Calvin's genius" ("We Need a New Reformation"). All good theology has an element of tension to it. Calvin is full of tension (Book III of the *Institutes* is one of the best examples), and this is what makes him such a preeminent theologian.

It is easy to pigeonhole churches as needing to be "more flexible/experiential" or "more rigid/ rational"; we all have a bad habit of doing that, both those of us on the right as well as those on the left. What Calvin is calling us to be is "flexible experiential rigid rational" all at once.

I'm not sure a "new" reformation is what's needed. I think it would be better to characterize our need as a "refamiliarization" with the tension evident in the teachings of the Reformation and our confessions, along with a recommitment to the true understanding of *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*.

Chad Werkhoven (online comment)

Robed in White Apparel

Thanks to Gordon Van Zanten for the very real, tender, emotional, and authentic childhood story of the loss of his brother Roger ("Robed in White Apparel," Oct. 2017). What an encouraging and uplifting story!

*Jolene Visser,
Brinnon, Wash.*

Right-Sizing Your Work

Thanks for the article "Right-Sizing Your Work," (Sept. 2017). I'm a lawyer, having practiced for 38 years now. I've never doubted that it is a vocation (and one of several that I have).

I've had many clients over the years who are the same, even if of a different vocation. Some produce food, some homes, some education, some healthcare, some financing, some counseling, some pastoring. Indeed, our vocational choices are many, assuming our perspective as to the reason we do things is an obedient one.

Doug Vande Griend (online comment)

Emotional Lives of Men

An interesting, well-argued article ("The Emotional Lives of Men," Sept. 2017). I understand why the author has written it. However, he writes about "culturally defined gender roles, norms, and expectations in which boys and girls are raised. These role expectations can prove to be obstacles to our development."

Henry Higgins' song in *My Fair Lady* comes to mind: "Why can't a woman be more like a man?" Amusing answers, but containing an element of truth. Modern culture seems to posit a different question, "Why can't a man be more like a woman?" The creation/fall narrative clearly establishes the God-defined distinctions between the sexes and their intended relationship to one another. Such teaching, of course, is anathema to many, possibly the majority, in today's society.

Norm Ross (online comment)

While I don't agree with 100 percent of the points made by the author ("The Emotional Lives of Men"), I am grateful for a place to begin this conversation. It is vital. The question now is, "What are we going to do about it?" This isn't something for which we need to create a committee for further study. We need to take action. We are excellent as a denomination at studying

and learning and discussing different ideas. Time for study is over. Let's step forward and act. I will. Today. Will you?

Rick Theule (online comment)

Aliens Among Us

A sad tale of man's inhumanity to fellow humans ("Aliens Are Among Us," Sept. 2017). If the perpetrator was a Christian, his actions were certainly not. We don't know what drove this man to this deed. Or rather, yes, we do. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches us that it comes naturally to human beings to hate God and our neighbors.

*J. Vanderheide
Lindsay, Ont.*

Resonate

I'd like to say I'm excited about the new name Resonate Global Mission ("A New Name for a New Agency," Jul./Aug. 2017). The way to judge a Christian missions agency is not by the precise placement of the word "Christian." It should be judged by how well it does the job of carrying out the Great Commission in culturally sensitive ways, something it will be even more capable of with its collaborative resources. Much of the good work believers are able to do on this globe comes by partnering with local and like-minded agencies, as I hear regularly in reports coming out of World Renew.

*Harriette Mostert
Kitchener, Ont.*

[MORE ONLINE](#)

Correction

The article "Thanksgiving Ice Cream" (Oct. p. 21) should have included the following opening sentence: "When our pastor, on Thanksgiving Sunday, mentioned ice cream in her message, I was flooded with memories." We regret the omission.

NEWS

Remembering the Reformation

Congregations and communities of believers from all over the Christian Reformed church commemorated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in various ways. These are some that came to our attention:

Two churches and a Christian school received visits from Martin Luther. “Luther” preached at Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church in Leduc, Alta., perhaps looking somewhat like pastor Jason Dalhman. He also led the November 1 chapel service at West Side Christian School in



Rev. Roger Groenboom, visiting West Side Christian School as Martin Luther.

Grand Rapids, Mich., this time resembling Rev. Roger Groenboom, pastor of Faith Community CRC in Wyoming, Mich.

Classis Grand Rapids South published a 30-day devotional on its website called “Always Reforming: Celebrating 500 Years of Being Made New” with a focus on prayer and reflection. The regional group of churches closed the month with a joint worship service at Cutlerville East CRC.

In British Columbia, two regional groups—B.C. North-West and B.C. South-East—hosted a joint worship service at the time of their regular classis meetings, welcoming Jim Payton, retired history professor from Redeemer University College, as speaker.

Many regional groupings of Christian Reformed churches came together in joint services on Reformation Sunday, October 29. Classes Heartland and Lakota gathered at Western Christian High School in Hull, Iowa.



About 3,000 people attended Classis Zeeland’s Reformation Sunday service at Unity Christian High School.



Pastor Jason Dalhman as Martin Luther with replica doors at Ebenezer CRC in Leduc, Alta.

Classis Zeeland invited Classis Georgetown and nearby regional groupings of Reformed Church in America and United Reformed congregations to join its service at Unity Christian High school.

For a Holland, Mich., community-wide worship service held at Christ Memorial Church, the hymn “The Church’s One Foundation” had a meaningful ring. John Witvliet, director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, preached to the assembly of Roman Catholic, Reformed, Baptist, Episcopal, Christian Reformed, Congregational, Lutheran, Pres-

byterian, and Methodist Christians.

Christian Reformed churches in four Ontario communities joined together at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont., hearing reflections on the five *solas*—central affirmations of the Reformation: Scripture alone, faith alone, Christ alone, grace alone, and glory to God alone—by the pastors of the participating churches.

Redeemer’s own recognition of the Reformation was a series of short talks and panels focused on the Kuyperian tradition. “Abraham Kuyper Today: A Celebration of the Reformation” was held at the end of September.

The King’s University in Edmonton, Alta., hosted “Does the Church Matter? Navigating Divisions 1517–2017,” an Interdisciplinary Studies conference focused on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and its legacy.

—Banner Staff

For more news about the churches and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church, visit thebanner.org. Or get the free app by searching for “CRCNA Banner” in your app store.



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Celebrating Interracial Friendships in Black and White

"Friends in Jesus Christ," an exhibit created by photographer Dan Davis for Church of the Servant, a Christian Reformed congregation in Grand Rapids, Mich., captured moments of relationship between friends of different cultures within the congregation.

Displayed in the church during August and September 2017, the 20-image exhibit featured people from 16 countries, including Sudan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Iraq.

They all connected through the church—many of those coming from outside the U.S. attend the congregation's Basic English Service—but the relationships are varied and deep.

"If you see two people in a relationship on film, you start to feel that relationship as you observe the picture," said Davis, who has created three such exhibits for the church.

—Greg Chandler

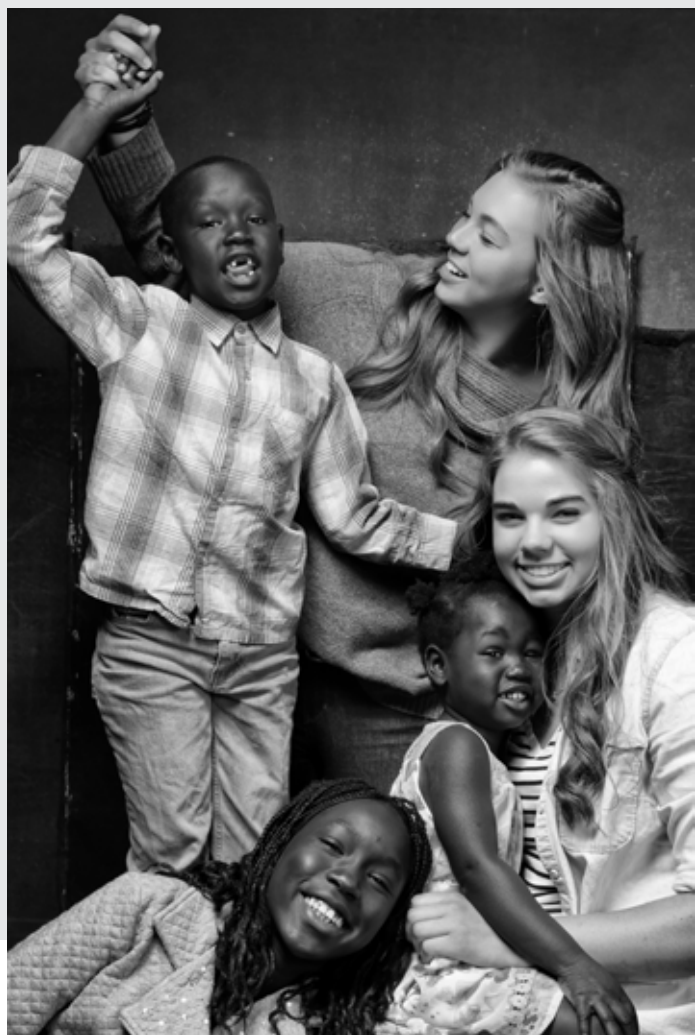


PHOTO CREDIT: DAN DAVIS



(top) Buddi Subba, a former refugee from Nepal and a recently naturalized U.S. citizen, received a kidney from donor Susan Cleveland, a prison chaplain.

(left) Teen sisters Abi and Annaka babysat Deng, Abiei, and Grace—the children of Mary Tit, immigrated from South Sudan—while their mom worked overnight hospital shifts.

(above) Carpool buddies: Gladys Verhulst drives Congolese brothers Benedi, Rex, Elysee, and Francisco to and from church each week.

NEWS

Christmas Comes Early for Ontario Church College Students

College and university students affiliated with Jubilee Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ont., have come to expect an early Christmas present from their church family in mid-December, just at the peak of exams.

Begun 10 years ago by Mark Vandendool, then serving the church as a youth and young adult elder, the tradition has grown in the last several years to include handmade items from the crafty members of the congregation.

Jocelynn Veldboom, a 2017 graduate of Redeemer University

College in Ancaster, Ont., said receiving these gifts throughout her years of schooling often turned a long and stressful day around. "One year I received a bunch of drawings from children in our congregation and handmade slippers. The intentionality and thoughtfulness behind these packages drives and pushes students to the finish line and reminds us that our congregation is with us even if we are away," she said.

Families, individuals, and small groups choose to select one or more students and provide a card



Handmade caps tagged with the church's logo for 2017 gift packages.

to accompany the gift as well as the funds to purchase and ship the packages in the first week of December. In 2016 the congregation sent gifts to more than 40

students at institutions across Canada and the United States.

—Alissa Vernon

Taking Time to Taste and See During Advent

As a way to tangibly experience the period of Advent—waiting expectantly for Christ's birth and his second coming—Grace Community Christian Reformed Church in Oak Lawn, Ill., marks the season with a weekend of Advent prayer stations.

Each year, worship coordinator Diane Ritzema organizes nine prayer stations for church and community members to go through at their own pace. "Each station has to do with waiting or what we can be doing now in the time until the second coming," Ritzema said.

The stations are set up in classrooms in the church. Each focuses on a different sense: maps as a visual for praying for the world, salt to taste as a reminder to be the salt of the earth, audio recordings of the song of Mary. At each station, people are invited to pray and reflect.



Visitors were invited to pray for the world using maps as visual prompts.



Visitors were invited to light three candles and then put a pot over one flame, a glass over another, and leave the third alone to see how each flame was affected.

John Rosier, a member at Grace Community Church, finds visual cues helpful as he worships and prays. "For the first 70 years of my life, there were very few visuals [in church]. So much of what you learn is visual. That's one of the reasons Advent prayer stations are good," he said.

The use of ordinary, commonplace items in the prayer stations is deliberate. "When we see those items in our everyday lives, we might remember the prayer station and how we used that item to pray," Ritzema said.

In 2017, the stations are open December 7-9. The church also hosts prayer stations during Lent and other times during the year.

"Those who come feel so blessed by it," Ritzema said. "Some people come stressed and hurried, and they leave calm and at peace."

—Lori Dykstra

Niagara Churches on Parade

Two Christian Reformed congregations in the Niagara, Ont., region are walking and rolling along their cities' Santa Claus parade routes again this season, inviting parade-goers to their community-centred Christmas events and living into a calling of giving generously.

Members of the Village Church in Thorold, Ont., mingle among the parade crowd.

"This way we had more time to chat and connect with people we might know along the parade since we didn't have to keep up with [a] float," said coordinator Hilda Vanderklippe.

For Mountainview CRC in Grimsby, Ont., a musical float is a rolling billboard for the church's free community event, Jingle Jam: The Big Give.

Christine Winter, children's ministry director at Mountainview, said, "These events provide us an opportunity to go into our little corner of creation, into our local community, and build relationships, meeting people where they are." —Alissa Vernon



Village Church 2016 parade route walkers (l-r) Erin, Alex, and Rachel.

When Christmas Isn't Merry



Pastor Mike Vandyk lights candles of remembrance.

The pressure to have it all together or to appear happy can be both overwhelming and downright disheartening for many people at Christmas time. Rev. Mike Vandyk, pastor of Grace Christian Reformed Church in Welland, Ont., takes care to incorporate a worship service for hurting people wherever he is serving.

In 2016, while pastor of Bethel CRC in Lacombe, Alta., he led "Blue Sunday," acknowledging that for many who have experienced loss in their lives, Christmas can amplify feelings of grief, sadness, and even despair.

"We thought we could do this service to especially encourage people, to acknowledge and bring those concerns before the Lord," VanDyk said.

The hour-long service, held near the beginning of Advent, included a few familiar carols, lighting candles of remembrance, responsive readings, Scripture readings, and an encouraging meditation from the pastor. Worshipers were also invited to come to the front of the sanctuary to write a name or a concern on a gold star, which was then hung on a Christmas tree.

The stars remained on the tree right in front of the cross through the entire Christmas season so that when people came to other services, the mark of loss was there. "It's the reality [that] the Lord also carries our suffering . . . there's always that recognition of the Lord speaking into [our] lives and the reality of the struggles [we] face," VanDyk said.

This year's service at Grace CRC follows a similar liturgy, "though I do switch some things up every year," VanDyk said. He suggested others might reference *Reformed Worship* (Issue 125) for an outline of a similar service from Washington D.C. CRC, called the "Longest Night" service.

—Krista dela Rosa



Choir members from Jarvis churches joined together to lead carol singing at the town's annual Advent service.

Everyone's Invited to Ontario Town's Advent Service

For the second year in a row, members of Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church, with help from Jarvis Lions Club, have made sure nearly every household in the town of Jarvis, Ont., received a personal invitation to come and celebrate the birth of Christ.

The hand-delivered cards invited townspeople to a December community Christmas carol service organized by the Jarvis ministerial association. The invitation also listed the Christmas celebrations and worship service times held at every Jarvis church throughout the season.

"So many were thankful for the invitation, and the kids especially jumped for the candy canes we offered," reported Rev. Daryl DeKlerk, pastor at Ebenezer CRC. "A few good conversations sprung up about the meaning of Christmas too."

In 2016, more than 400 people attended the community carol service held at Ebenezer CRC, packing the pews on the first evening of Advent. Young pianists gave a special Christmas recital as people arrived. Choir members from the Jarvis churches joined together to lead the service with familiar carols while others led in Scripture readings and times of prayer.

Attendees appreciated this ecumenical gathering. One woman said, "This is the way that the Lord prepares [my] heart for Christmas." Another attendee commented on how this annual service really speaks to the unity of the body of Christ, that in coming together, this is the church.

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

IN MEMORIAM



Dr. Simon J. Kistemaker

1930-2017

A New Testament scholar, professor, and accomplished author, Simon “Sam” Kistemaker was noted for his kindness, modesty, and gentleness of spirit. For 52 years he taught thousands of students both at home and abroad. Kistemaker, who lived in Largo, Fla., died on September 23.

Kistemaker studied at Calvin Theological Seminary and at the Free University of Amsterdam where he received a Doctorate of Theology in 1961. He served one Christian Reformed church in B.C. before teaching at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, and Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Miss., and Orlando, Fla.

One of the greatest privileges in Kistemaker’s life was to continue the 12-volume *New Testament Commentary Set* begun by Dr. William Hendriksen.

Kistemaker also enjoyed gardening and shared his wisdom as a faithful Sunday school teacher for many decades.

Kistemaker will be lovingly remembered by Jean, his wife of 61 years, and by seven children and their spouses, 22 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Further information on recently deceased ministers is available at thebanner.org.

B.C. Churches Unite for Youth-Focused Evening Worship

Twilight is the quiet beauty between sunset and dusk. It’s also the name given to an evening worship gathering, an initiative of four Christian Reformed churches in British Columbia.

Fleetwood, Hope Community, Immanuel, and Willoughby CRCs have partnered in their vision for a youth-focused evening service. Individually the four churches have long abandoned or have never held a Sunday evening service. This new venture, billed as a contemporary liturgical service, came out of the churches’ youth pastors combining their efforts and talents.

Although the focus is on teens and young adults, people of all ages are invited, welcomed, and represented. “We want to create a service that is relevant to our youth and young adults and still have the similar feel to their Sunday morning experience. In the liturgies we want space for confession and assurance and a message centering on the Word,” said Curtis Meliefste, youth pastor at Willoughby CRC. Kevin Lobert, youth pastor at Immanuel CRC, brought the inaugural message, the first of a planned series on the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. Following the formal worship, small groups met with leaders to continue a conversation on the sermon.

Jenna Rodermond was on the worship team and is a member of Willoughby CRC. “As I was singing, I was struck by the beauty of a young community,” she said.

—Jenny deGroot



Young worshippers gathered at the inaugural Twilight service.

Council of Delegates Holds Inaugural Meeting

The Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church held its first meeting October 11-13, 2017, in Grand Rapids, Mich. Its 52 members represent the 48 classes (regional groups of churches) in the denomination plus four at-large delegates. The council replaces the 30-member Board of Trustees.

The council acts on behalf of the CRC’s annual synod when it is not in session; much of its work is assigned by synods.

One of those assignments came from Synod 2016, which asked the Board of Trustees “to evaluate and prioritize all existing programs and ministries with the goal of reducing the institutional footprint.” (See “Synod Rejects Ministry Shares Increase, Wants System Overhauled,” July/August 2016, pp. 28-29.) To help fulfill the assignment of prioritizing minis-



The Council of Delegates executive committee (l-r): Tim Bosscher, Tong Park, Paul De Vries, Susan Hoekema, Beth Fellingner, Andy de Ruyter, Ashley Medendorp, and Bernie Bakker.

tries, delegates to Synod 2017 were asked to fill in a survey prior to synod. At synod, delegates held table discussions and reported those results.

The council committee that reviewed those results noted that “current ministry shares distributions among Back to God Ministries International, Calvin College, Calvin

Theological Seminary, Congregational Services, and Resonate Global Mission reflect generally what responses seem to suggest.” It also asked executive director Steven Timmermans to bring to the council data regarding administrative versus ministry costs.

An assignment from Synod 2017 followed synod’s adoption of

Noteworthy

Lou Kok, clerk at Bethlehem Christian Reformed Church in Thunder Bay, Ont., was inducted into the **Northwestern Ontario Sports Hall of Fame**. He was recognized for his accomplishments in wrestling.

The Barnabas Foundation, an affiliated agency of the CRC that provides Christians with financial guidance and assistance with charitable giving, reached **\$600 million in distributed gifts**.

Abygale Ahn, 16, a member of **Elmhurst (Ill.) CRC** took **third place in girls doubles tennis state finals** with **Cassandra Lee**, 15. The girls are students at Timothy Christian Schools of Elmhurst, Ill.

— Banner Staff

For more on these and other stories visit thebanner.org.

the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony. Synod instructed the executive director to facilitate the addition of footnotes to the Belhar “to provide biblical and confessionally grounded clarity to the parts of the Belhar that are widely recognized to cause disagreement and alarm.” (See “Belhar Confession’s Status Changes to Contemporary Testimony,” July/August 2017, p. 18.)

The council heard that an *ad hoc* team has been appointed for that task: Lyle Bierma (Calvin Theological Seminary); Andrew Beunk; Jim Payton (chair of the CRC’s ecumenical and interchurch relations committee); Reginald Smith (director of the offices of Race Relations and Social Justice); with research assistance from Jessica Joustra.

In other actions, the council

- released a statement lamenting recent tragic events, both



Lou Kok



Abygale Ahn (left) and Cassandra Lee

natural disasters and human-caused tragedies (tinyurl.com/thebanner-tragic-events).

- reviewed the results of a survey of synod delegates regarding the relationship between the CRC and the Reformed Church of America. It was noted that there is “no compelling vision” for creation of a new denomination together (tinyurl.com/thebanner-RCare-relationship).
- decided to hold Inspire conferences every other year based on positive responses from attendees to the 2017 conference. (<https://tinyurl.com/thebanner-inspire>).

— Gayla R. Postma

Highlights of Recent 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 classis meetings of the past several months.

Several people were **welcomed into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church**, including seminary graduates Patrick Anthony, Josiah Bokma, Laura de Jong, Trent Elders, Kendra Ettema, Ryan Hoekstra, Grant Hofman, Eunjun Jeong, Moses Kang, Tim Kooiman, Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, Dena Meyerink, Brian Na, Cory Nederveld, Arek O’Connell, Juli Stuelpnagel, Greg Vander Horn, Brian White, Johnlo Xu, and Coby Zuiderveen.

Ministers **transferring from other denominations** were Revs. Sung Joo, Sung Woo Jang, David Cho, Mickey Choi, Jin Young Lee, Dae Hoon Kim, and Paul Nam.

Revs. Josiah Chung, Jack de Vries, and Moses Kang were **loaned to other denominations**.

Ministers released from a congregation: Revs. Joshua Benton, Hernan Zapata, Robert Wafula, bc Cumings, Laurie Zuverink, and Phil Covert.

The following were **released from ministry in the CRC:** George Cooper, John Noordhof, Il Hyun Nam, Sung Chul Yoon, Pil Hwan Whang, Peter (Nak Young) Ryu, Sung Ho Jung, Yo Sug Chung, Bryan Berghoef, Michael Boerkoel, Erik Kamp, Abe KuGyong Koh, Jimmy Han, and InHwah Kim.

Esteban Lugo and Braden Kok were **released as one deposed.*** Nicolaas Cornelisse was **deposed**.

**This is the designation given in those situations when ministers resign under discipline or to avoid discipline.*

New Ministries and Ministry Changes

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:** Jesus Heart Church (Los Angeles, Calif.); Jesus Love Church (Gardena, Calif.); Encounter (Kentwood, Mich.); Harbor Church (Seattle, Wash.); West Olive (Mich.); and CentrePointe (Plainfield, Ill).

Three Rivers (Mich.), Abundant Life (Los Angeles, Calif.), and Chin Christian Church (Syracuse, N.Y.) were declared **emerging**.

Friendship Chapel (Jenison, Mich.), Dwell (New York, N.Y.), New Beginnings Fellowship (Roslyn, Pa.), Sung Lim, (Eastampton, N.J.), and African Christian Ministry (Plymouth Meeting, Pa.), and Hmong CRC (Santa Ana, Calif.) **closed**.

Other

Classis Pacific Northwest added the position of **Korean clerk**. Classis Muskegon received a presentation on **church safety in relation to active shooters** entering a church.

— Banner Staff

NEWS

News Digest

Edmonton and Ontario Youth Engage with Anti-Poverty Campaign

Participating in a project spearheaded by Dignity for All: The Campaign for a Poverty-Free Canada, students from Edmonton (Alta.) and Smithville (Ont.) Christian High schools, joined communities across Canada to draw attention to poverty and hunger.

Asking students to “Chew on This!,” volunteers disseminated lunch bags and materials printed with facts about poverty in Canada and called for action toward its eradication.

Ontario Church Hosts Racial Justice Film Week

Grace CRC in Toronto, Ont., joined the CRC’s Office of Race Relations in hosting Racial Justice Film Week on September 25-29. Three films curated by Race Relations and the church were shown with a guest speaker and discussion following each film.

“I think film is very accessible, easy to take in, and it brings community together with the same starting point,” said Emily Smit, one of the week’s organizers.

Grant Helps Chicago Church Explore Communion in Context

Members at Loop CRC in Chicago, Ill., received a 2017 Vital Worship grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship to explore how the practice of communion intersects with the social and political realities in their city.

On September 29-30 they sponsored “Communion and Context: Eucharistic Liturgies for Living in a Broken World,” a workshop at Chicago’s McCormick Theological Seminary.

Cree Pastor Leads Worship Workshop

Harold Roscher, a Cree commissioned pastor in the CRC and director of the Edmonton (Alta.) Native Healing Centre, introduced the Standing Stones ceremony at a CRC justice conference in Toronto, Ont.

Developed by Roscher in collaboration with a Cree leader within the Anglican Church of Canada, the ceremony is Christian worship rooted in the sounds, smells, and movements of traditional Cree rites.

—Banner Correspondents

For more on these and other stories, please visit thebanner.org.



Students with the Chew on This! campaign.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Harry Boonstra 1935-2017

Bible scholar, writer, pastor, and theological librarian Harry Boonstra was a wise, gentle, caring man. In the days right before his death, he was still walking to Calvin College to have coffee with his buddies. He died on October 23 following a brief illness.

Boonstra, his wife, Thelma, and three daughters lived many places over the years. After Boonstra earned a Ph.D. in the Netherlands, they were short-term missionaries in Peru. Boonstra subsequently taught at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Tenn., and Hope College in Holland, Mich. They returned to Grand Rapids, Mich., where he became theological librarian at Calvin College.

Ordained in 1992 at age 50, Boonstra preached in churches from Indonesia to Grand Rapids until he retired in 1999. He was also an associate editor for *Reformed Worship* magazine for 12 years.

Boonstra had a heart for immigrants and refugees and anyone he thought might feel like an outsider. He watched “Murdoch Mysteries” and read spy novels. He enjoyed writing a history of Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church, where he was an active member.

Boonstra will lovingly be remembered by Thelma, by three daughters and their spouses, and eight grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus



Chaplain Harold Roscher of Edmonton, Alta., leads a Standing Stones Ceremony at a justice conference.

PHOTO CREDIT: NANDY HEIJLE

More Online



As I Was Saying is an online-only forum for a variety of perspectives to foster faith-related conversations among our readers. Here are some of the most recent posts:

Trusting God in the Midst of Violence

In part, editor Shiao Chong writes: “Let us not trust in guns or weapons to protect us. Violence begets violence. Let us put our trust in the Lord. Can we, with the psalmist, say that the Lord will keep us from all harm, and watch over our lives? (Ps. 121:7).” (tinyurl.com/banner-chongviolence)

We Too

“Sexual abuse is not exclusive to Hollywood, the sports world, the political arena, or other secular institutions,” shares a guest writer. “Whenever an imbalance of power exists due to gender, social group, or position of authority, there is potential for abuse.” (tinyurl.com/thebanner-wetoo)

FAQs

Church/Doctrine

Q What is the role of an interim pastor? Is it to maintain the status quo or to “clean house” to prepare for a new pastor?

A One thing we have learned over the years—too often the hard way—is that in many situations “interim pastors” should really have specialized training and expertise if they are successfully to lead a congregation through a time of transition. The denomination’s Pastor Church Resources ministry has begun to offer such training and refers to those who have participated in it as Specialized Transitional Ministers. In its words, which you can find on the CRCNA’s website, “congregations are not always aware of the level of training or expertise that a minister does or does not bring to the transitional situation facing a congregation.” So now that website lists 17 persons who have developed the necessary expertise in training and subsequent experience. They can “provide strategic assistance when churches need help with both regular pastoral duties and the processing of key systemic dynamics in preparation for calling a new pastor.”

Churches that have seen their minister depart are free, of course, to “maintain the status quo” as you put it. They might decide to give themselves two years to find just the right preacher for the years ahead and, for that interim period, extend a call to a person for a specified term of service. Our Church Order has regulations for that kind of situation in the Supplement to Article 8. You then have an “interim pastor.” But often more is needed. You refer to it as “cleaning house.” Perhaps you are thinking of situations where a minister was released under difficult circumstances. Pastor Church Resources says it without laying blame: there are “key systemic dynamics” that often need to be addressed with truth and grace.

Henry De Moor is professor of church polity emeritus at Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich. He is the author of Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary.

Gambling is artificially increasing risk in order to profit at someone else’s expense.

Relationships

Q Over the last year my wife has become withdrawn. She does not appear to want to be with me, and we have not been intimate more than a few times. How can I help us get back on track?

A It depends. Ask your wife to see your family doctor to rule out certain health conditions such as depression or a hormone imbalance that could explain her withdrawal from the relationship.

If she is not willing to see your family doctor, initiate some frank discussions with her about your marriage. Ask, why the change? Did something happen? Are you angry, and, if so, why? Is there someone else? Resolve to listen and learn rather than be defensive. But also be clear that you are not prepared to continue to make guesses about what might be wrong. Tell her your wish that the two of you resolve the difficulties between you, whatever the cause. Ask if she thinks marriage counseling might help.

If your wife stonewalls all your efforts for change, be proactive by going for counseling yourself. Use individual counseling to get to know yourself better rather than focusing on your wife as the problem. Know that it always takes two people to resolve a marriage issue, even though it takes only one person to break a relationship. You can’t do it by yourself.

Be prepared for a crisis—a positive development that gives an opportunity for the two of you to move on to something different and potentially better than the year-long marital dysfunction. Pray much during this painful time of upheaval and trust in God’s love for both of you and the Holy Spirit’s help.

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

Ethics

Q Is it right to use funds gained through gambling for things of God’s kingdom?

A You are essentially asking if it is right to use wrongful profits for good. This is a version of “Do the ends justify the means”? I believe that a biblical worldview approach is that the ends should instead shape the means; if we can help it, we should not intentionally use sinful or unethical means, as they tarnish our gospel witness and have negative consequences.

Some Christians see gambling (and lotteries) as similar to alcohol drinking: it is not inherently evil but can be addictive and harmful. However, I see gambling as closer to pornography; it is itself a distortion of something good. Gambling is artificially increasing risk in order to profit at someone else’s expense.

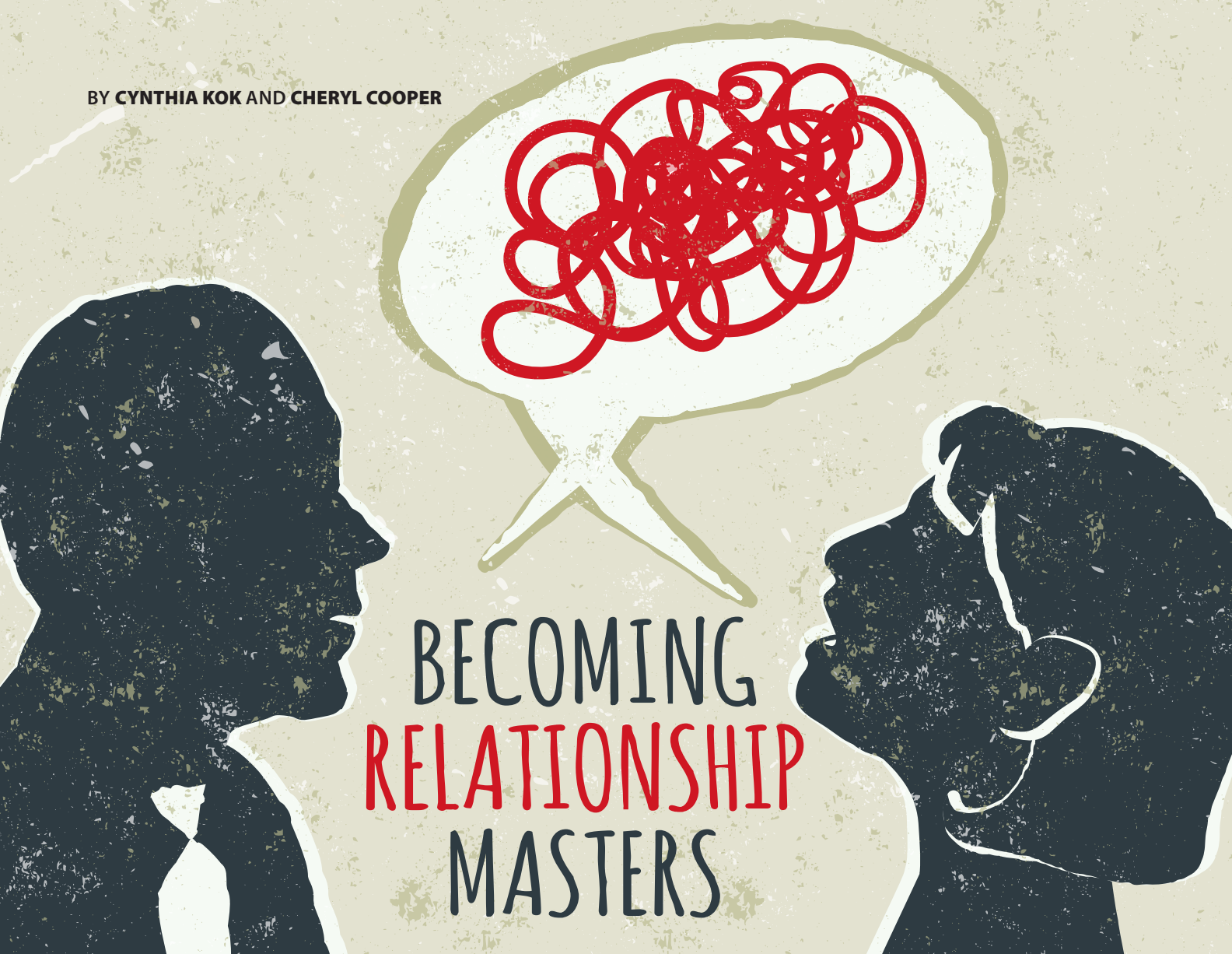
It distorts “chance and risk” that occur naturally in God’s good creation. Winners profit at the expense of losers. It is essentially a form of taking from our neighbors. Gambling feeds on the sin of greed. This differentiates fundraising raffle draws from lotteries, board games with dice from rolling dice in casinos, video games from slot machines. Gambling does not honor God, God’s creation, or show love to our neighbors.

Furthermore, the church’s gospel witness might be tarnished as there are people who would see it as hypocritical for the church to use funds from gambling.

Because lotteries are pervasive in our society, and a lot of lottery funds are channeled into charities and community organizations, it is not always easy to discern where funds originate. Hence, we need to show grace if Christians unknowingly or can’t help but use such funds.

As Christians, we should not intentionally use wrongfully gained funds, if we can help it.

Shiao Chong is editor-in-chief of The Banner. He attends Fellowship CRC in Toronto, Ont. ■



BECOMING RELATIONSHIP MASTERS

“WE FEEL STUCK.”
“We’ve grown apart. We don’t have fun with each other anymore.”
“We have the same fights over and over.”
“We can’t communicate well.”

“We love each other, but we don’t know how to make this marriage work.”

These are some of the concerns we hear from couples who come to our offices for counseling. They feel discouraged and defeated and want something better in their relationships.

Relationships are hard. Yet as Christians we know that it is worth the effort to establish and maintain healthy relationships because we serve a relational God—a God who created us to have a

personal, intimate relationship with himself and others.

God’s intention to have a special relationship with us is evident in the biblical account of creation. God spoke most of the world into existence. He commanded, “Let there be,” and most of his creation came into being. However, when he created man, God used intimate means. He “formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). Derek Kinder, in *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, describes the act of breathing into man’s nostrils as “warmly personal, with the face-to-face intimacy of a kiss.”

God also created us to be in close relationships with others. After creating Adam, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him”

(Gen. 2:18). Again, God used an intimate method to create this “helper.” He fashioned Eve from Adam’s rib and Adam responded, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23).

Although we were created to have intimate relationships with God and others, when sin entered the world our relationships were also affected. In his poem “Marriage,” Wendell Berry puts it this way:

*I turn against you,
I break from you, I turn to you.
We hurt, and are hurt,
and have each other for healing.
It is healing. It is never whole.*

Even though our marital relationships are “never whole,” there are some things we can do to improve them.

John and Julie Gottman (see sidebar) draw on 40 years of research with over 3,000 couples to provide strategies for improving relationships. Researchers observed couples and identified some as “masters” in their relationships. The “masters” were those who enjoyed long-lasting marriages where each spouse reported marital satisfaction. From these couples, researchers identified behaviors that promote healthy relationships.

The purpose of this article is to share some of the information couples in therapy have found to be especially helpful. If you regularly implement one or two of these ideas, you will be taking steps toward becoming a relationship “master.”

The Gottmans’ research identified that those who were masters in their marital relationships flourished in three main areas: friendship, managing conflict, and creating shared meaning.

Practice Friendship

The foundation of a strong marriage is friendship. Research indicates that having a solid friendship is positively correlated with long-term marital happiness. Couples who practice regular acts of friendship create positivity in their relationships so that when the inevitable marital conflicts and other stressors occur, they are able to maintain a positive perspective that sustains the relationship. Despite the busyness of daily life, relationship “masters” intentionally nurture their friendship. So what are some things that you can do to build your friendship?

First, take the time to know each other. The Gottmans refer to this work as “enhancing love maps.” Ask questions, listen to the answers, and remember what you’ve learned. What does he like and dislike? What is she worrying about and looking forward to in the coming week? What makes him laugh and cry? How does she feel about a recent accomplishment or disappointment? Note how God knows us as a model of how important it is to know each other: “You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar

with all my ways” (Ps. 139:1-3). Become an expert on your partner.

Second, nurture fondness and admiration. Look for the positive qualities and actions of your spouse and then compliment or thank your spouse. Share a character trait you admire in your partner and an incident to illustrate it. For example, “You have a great sense of humor. Yesterday, when I came home from work crabby, you made me laugh and helped me regain perspective.” Take a moment to remember what it felt like to receive a compliment or words of appreciation from your spouse. Make it a practice to do more of that for each other.

“WHEN WE ARE 80 YEARS OLD, WHAT DO WE WANT OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS TO SAY WE STOOD FOR IN THIS LIFE—BOTH AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A COUPLE?”

Finally, turn toward each other instead of away. When partners’ requests for attention and connection are positively responded to, the friendship grows. So when you’re in the middle of cooking and your spouse asks for a hug, stop for a moment to give a hug. Or respond when your spouse asks you a question or asks you to come and look at a bird, something the kids are doing, or a magazine article.

Manage Conflict

Conflict in a relationship is natural and functional. It helps us to know that something is wrong and provides an opportunity to make changes that allow us to better love and understand each other. Couples who are relationship “masters” also experience conflict; however, they manage it better—at least most of the time. For these reasons, the Gottmans talk about “managing” conflict rather than “resolving” it.

There are two kinds of marital conflict: solvable problems and perpetual problems. Solvable problems are those where a couple finds a compromise that works for them. It’s wonderful when this happens!

However, most problems in a marriage are perpetual problems. When the Gottmans observed couples over time, they found that 69 percent of the problems couples argued about continued to be present year after year. This was true even for the “masters.” Perpetual problems occur because of fundamental differences in personalities, interests, lifestyles, and needs. In his 2016 *New York Times* article “Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person,” Alain de Botton says that every human we may choose to marry “will frustrate, anger, annoy, madden, and disappoint us—and we will (without any malice) do the same to them.” He concludes that “the

person who is best suited to us is . . . the person who is good at disagreement.”

Many couples have benefited from learning that perpetual problems are not an indicator of a bad marriage or poor problem-solving skills; they are simply the predictable result of two people—inevitably different in some ways—living together. The goal of addressing perpetual problems is dialogue, acceptance of each other’s differences, and creating understanding such that there’s a lighter mood around the problem: “Oh, here we are again, with this familiar problem.”

Sometimes when couples attempt to manage conflict, they inadvertently cause further harm to the relationship. The Gottmans identified specific skills for managing conflict, including these:

First, avoid criticism. Attacking your partner’s character and/or blaming them for the conflict reliably escalates the situation and makes it less likely that your partner will respond favorably. There is nothing wrong with voicing a complaint; just make sure you say it in a way that your partner can hear. To that end, use what the Gottmans refer to as a “softened start-up.” Tell your partner (1) how you’re »

feeling, (2) about a specific behavior, and (3) ask for what you need: “I’m feeling overwhelmed by the mess in the kitchen. Can we figure out a plan to clean it up?” Research has shown that how the conversation starts is a strong predictor of how it will end. If you bring up an issue in a harsh way, 96 percent of the time the discussion will end that way. And if you bring it up in a gentle way, 96 percent of the time, the discussion will end similarly.

Second, avoid defensiveness. When hearing a complaint, it’s easy to take the innocent victim stance (“What are you talking about?”) or to counter-attack (“Well, you . . .”). Instead, take responsibility, if even for a small part of the problem. Be honest about what you are accepting as your responsibility: “I agree; you’re always right,” isn’t likely to be a helpful response. “I know that my need for neatness can feel rigid sometimes,” is more likely to encourage dialogue that may lead to compromise.

Third, learn to make and receive repair attempts. No one does conflict perfectly. You will make mistakes; your spouse will make mistakes. When you recognize, for example, that you’re being critical or defensive, make a repair attempt: “My reactions were too extreme. I’m sorry.” Or “Let me say that in a different way.” Or “Can we take a break so that I can calm down and think?” And when your spouse makes a repair attempt, make every effort to accept it. Ephesians 4:2 reminds us, “Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love” (NLT).

Create Shared Meaning

There are many ways to create shared meaning in your marriage; we will identify two. **First, take the time to discover your individual and shared goals and then honor them.** Spend some time pondering, “When we are 80 years old, what do we want our family and friends to say we stood for in this life—both as individuals and as a couple? What are our individual and shared values? What are our individual and shared dreams?” Considering these questions and sharing them with each other in a supportive, non-judgmental environment can forge a strong connection.

To create and honor each other’s personal goals, it is helpful to follow the imperative in Romans 12:10: “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” Encourage your partner to have life dreams rather than solely focusing on attaining your own. Ask each other, “What are your personal dreams and goals?” “What are your interests, gifts, and passions?” Allow your partner to pursue interests that are not your own and support their gifts; allow them to be who they are. Dream, plan, and work together as a team; nourish a sense of “we-ness” where each is open to collaboration.

Second, couples benefit from intentionally creating rituals of connection. These rituals require making time and space for each other in the midst of busy schedules. They are customs or traditions that each can count on and look forward to. Creating daily, weekly, and yearly rituals prioritizes the relationship and ensures that it is nurtured.

Daily rituals may include giving each other a kiss before leaving the house, sitting down to family dinners, giving each other a hug or back rub at the end of the day, or saying “I love you” before falling asleep. A weekly ritual recommended by the Gottmans is a date night that includes time to talk and check in emotionally with each other. Annual rituals include planning a vacation together and creating traditions for celebrating anniversaries or holidays. Establishing these or other rituals of connection helps maintain the health of your relationship.

Pray for Each Other

Finally, we encourage you to pray for your spouse. A 2017 *Washington Post* article by Thomas Burnett reported on research conducted for over two decades by Frank Fincham and his collaborators. Summarizing the research, Burnett stated, “Praying daily for one’s partner has been linked to numerous positive outcomes: increased relationship satisfaction, greater trust, cooperation, forgiveness and marital commitment.” If you are wondering how to pray for your partner, consider using the prayer given to the research subjects:

Dear Lord, thank you for all the things that are going well in my life and in my

relationship. Please continue to protect and guide my partner, providing strength and direction every day. I know you are the source of all good things. Please bring those good things to my partner and make me a blessing in my partner’s life. Amen.

Taking the First Steps

Regularly implement some of the ideas presented in this article to take steps toward becoming a relationship “master.” We encourage you to

- Identify two things that you will do to make your marriage healthier.
- Identify your personal reasons for wanting to have a better relationship with your spouse. There are many good reasons to want a healthier marriage. What are some of those reasons for you?
- Remember that marital relationships, among others, are a place where we can practice what Jesus asks of us—“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12). One way to show love is to pray daily for each other.

Although our marriages are “never whole,” there is healing. We can work toward becoming relationship masters through intentional effort, trusting that God will honor and bless our efforts. ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE

Further Reading

Gottman, J.M. & Silver, N. (2015). *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. New York: Crown.



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Praying in the Valley

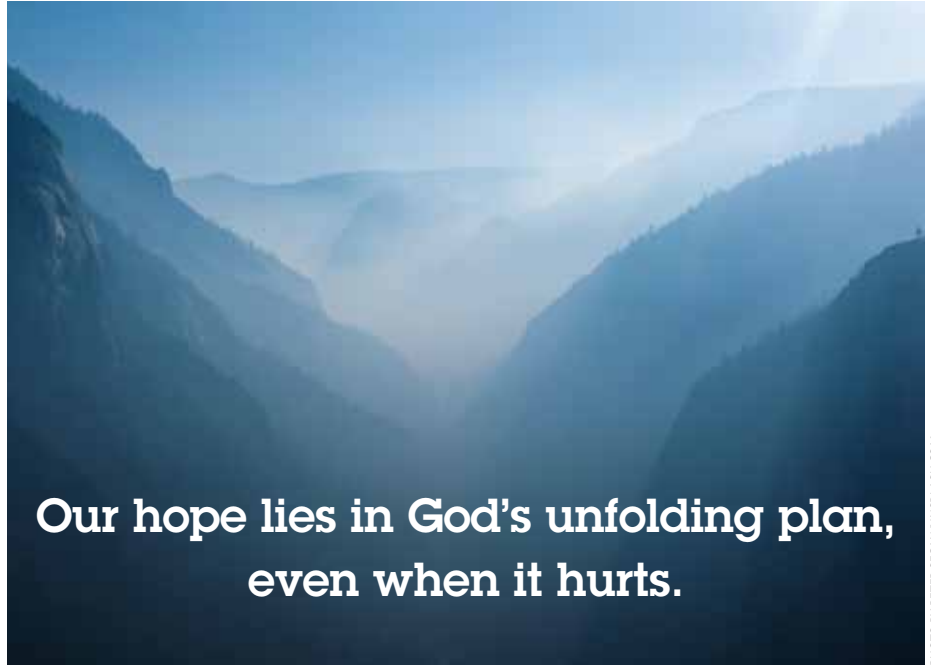
THERE HAD BEEN no symptoms. My wife's routine physical examination disclosed cancer that was followed by surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. We entered a valley that led to her death 22 months later. We prayed for life. We got death. Did our prayers make any difference?

We believed God's "prayer promises." We believed Jesus: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7). We believed James: "The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well" because "the prayer of a righteous person is effective" (James 5:15-16). But pray as hard and as often as we did, she only continued her unrelenting slide toward death. We believed the promises. Why did we not receive when we asked, nor find when we sought?

Popular wisdom tries to span the apparent gap between promise and experience.

"Prayer changes things," according to popular wisdom, "it changes us." And that's true. Or again, "God has three answers to prayer: yes, no, and wait." For most of those 22 months, God seemed to be saying "wait." Toward the end it became obvious that God was saying "no." And at the very end God said a gracious "yes" to our final prayers that she would move gently from life here to life there. But we needed more than popular wisdom to satisfy our hunger to find comfort in those promises. This is what helped us.

Most of God's promises are attached to a condition. God promises to forgive our sins, but we have to confess them (1 John 1:8-9). Scripture promises that we will be saved, but we have to believe (Acts 16:30-31). If we were to receive,



Our hope lies in God's unfolding plan, even when it hurts.

PHOTO BY PETER SECANUNSPASH.COM

find, and the door opened, we would have to ask, and seek, and knock. And we did. But there was no evidence of healing. We needed more.

It happened when we were engaged in our normal pattern of evening prayer: praying together out loud. A petition that God's will be done had been a regular part of our praying. But for some reason that night we added the words of Jesus in Gethsemane, "not my will." The impact of those words startled us. We said them again slowly, "not our wills." We finished the prayer, looked at each other, and said, "It's OK. If God wants you to live, wonderful! But if he wants you to die—well, it's OK."

This prayer gave us a remarkable sense of peace. We still prayed hard for the cancer to go into remission, but always added those powerful words: "Not our will." We felt obedient when we prayed "your will be done." We found peace when we prayed "not our will."

Jesus' Gethsemane prayer in Matthew 26 became the pattern of ours: "Father in heaven, let the cup of this cancer pass from us. Nevertheless, not our wills, but yours be done." An angel came to sustain Jesus (Luke 22:43). By his Spirit, God came to sustain us.

We did not want death. I do not want grief. But the peace that comes on the wings of God's grace enabled us to pray in the valley with confidence in God, who assures us that he has a plan to give us hope and a future (Jer. 29:11). Our hope then—and my hope now—lies in God's unfolding plan, even when it hurts. The plan, after all, has to be a good plan, because it is the plan of our good God. ■



Wilbert M. Van Dyk is a retired Christian Reformed minister. He is a member of LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

New Initiative Changes How Seminary Prepares Pastors for Ministry

by Bruce Buursma



Forging a mutually satisfying and long-term “fit” between congregation and pastor is a matter of considerable art, science, and prayer for both pastors and churches alike. At Calvin Theological Seminary, faculty and administrators have recently shifted their focus to address this need through a new emphasis on vocational formation.

“This is vocational formation for head and heart and hands,” explained seminary president Jul Medenblik. He added that combining classroom learning with experiences in local churches will help prepare students not only to fulfill their call to ministry but to better discern their unique needs, gifts, and passions at the dawn of their education so that they can figure out their own pathway to serving local churches.

One part of this sharpened focus lies with Geoff Vandermolten, the newly installed director of vocational formation at the seminary. Vandermolten came to the position after serving for 20 years in ministry, primarily as a church planter. He is hopeful that a fresh approach to vocational and leadership formation will

help Calvin Seminary graduates serve even more effectively in today’s North American culture.

“There is a well-documented perceived lack of leadership (in the church today),” Vandermolten said. “We want to place students at the intersection of academic learning and real-time ministry as a crucible for their formation as leaders.”

To do this, seminary students will spend time in the classroom while concurrently serving in real-life ministry settings. The hope is that this will help them benefit not only from academic learning but also from practical, intensive experiences in congregational life and other hands-on ministry venues.

In addition, throughout their years at Calvin Seminary, all M.Div. and M.A. students will be matched with gifted and experienced mentors from partner churches and ministries for a two-year term—not merely in short-term summer internships.

“We want our emerging leaders to live at this crossroads with a seasoned, engaged leader to help them so that when they are on their own, they are better

equipped to be well-prepared and successful,” Vandermolten said.

Academic dean Ronald Feenstra noted that Calvin Seminary has been taking steps in this direction for several decades.

“We’re continually trying to integrate what students learn in actual ministry experiences with what they learn in the classroom,” he said. “If you can connect classroom with real ministry, it enhances both. We’re working to deepen the connection between seminary and local churches and bring together a real connection between ministry experience and academic reflection.”

Existing Tools

A key tool in the vocational and leadership formation initiative at the seminary is a 65-year-old strengths-based assessment called the Birkman assessment. This tool combines personality, social perception, and occupational interest assessments to help users learn more about themselves and understand what ministry options might fit them best. It also helps them understand potential stressors and how they might personally react to different situations.

You add.
God multiplies.



Both Calvin Seminary and the Christian Reformed Church in North America's Pastor Church Resources office are using the Birkman assessment with promising early results.

Joan Beelen, Calvin Seminary's Registrar and Academic Program Advisor, is a trained facilitator for the Birkman assessment. She believes that the tool will enrich the student experience.

"[The Birkman assessment] is part of an overall growing in self-awareness and helping us see how we can function at our best," she said. "It's not a cure-all, but it's a good tool because it's strengths-focused. Unlike psychological evaluations that are designed to catch issues, the Birkman is more about how we're made and what we're meant to be and do."

"We're seeking to help pastors thrive and find joy in their work," added Rev. Samantha DeJong McCarron, a ministry assessment consultant who works with Pastor Church Resources. "A big part of that comes from having people in positions that fit."

She noted that the scope of ministry is changing, with a lot more job possi-

bilities in ministry than there have been traditionally.

"When it comes to vocation and finding a good place for pastors to work, there are a wide variety of possibilities for pastors to engage in ministry today," she said.

Discerning an individual's needs and talents as early in ministry training as possible, she added, "can help people use their gifts in a God-glorifying way and help them live into their call sooner and with greater potential. If we are doing our job well, the gospel will advance and the kingdom will expand and God will get the glory."

Common Pitfalls

DeJong McCarron pointed out that the new vocational formation initiative at Calvin Seminary is also a response to synod. In 2016, synod, the decision-making body of the CRCNA, noted an alarming uptick in reported cases of unresolvable conflict between pastors and congregation. In response to this situation, it called for measures to help reverse this trend, including a request for a

fresh emphasis on mentoring for prospective and fledging pastors.

"More and more students are coming to seminary with a clear sense of call to ministry but a vague sense of what that looks like and where that will lead them," said Aaron Einfeld, the director of admissions and enrollment management at Calvin Seminary.

This uncertainty can lead to people taking ministry positions that do not match their gifts and passions. Einfeld said that in addition to the Birkman assessments, the new emphasis on career and leadership development during seminary can help students avoid wrong ministry placements.

"Instead of having summer internship assignments when some church ministries might not be that active, students are going to be placed in one setting for two full years," he said. "They will be going to class and jumping into ministry that same day. Each semester there will be an anchor course—pastoral care, for example, or preaching—and the hope is they will get good and meaningful contextual experience along the way." »



Geoff Vandermolten, director of vocational formation at Calvin Seminary, and first-year M.Div. student Ben Hoekman meet to discuss Ben's vocational formation placement. Hoekman and his class of incoming students are the first cohort at Calvin Seminary to experience the new vocational formation placement program, which places students in churches and other ministry settings earlier in their program and for a longer duration.

» Church Partnerships

Chris Wright, who coordinates the work of the Vocational Formation Office, is one of six training coaches or facilitators available to Calvin Seminary students and to the pastors who are assigned as mentors. She explained that the Birkman assessment will be used to find the right placements for each seminary student.

"We'll use all of that assessment info for students and mentors to get our seminarians at the right ministry sites and with the right mentors—along with prayer and guidance from the Holy Spirit," she said.

"I think this change to a two-year contextual learning internship, where students go through the cycles of church life during the church year, is really important. I can see real value in this for our students and for the church."

During the inaugural academic year for the new vocational formation initiative, Vandermolten has engaged about 40 congregations and mentors for the first group of seminary students. His goal for the future is to have incoming first-year students meet their local church pastor/mentor before they crack open a book in any classroom on the seminary campus.

"This is all about partnering in education for the seminary," said Vandermolten. "I hope that churches understand the deep need and desire that we have for partnership. In fact, we need the local church to help shape emerging leaders with us. We simply cannot do it alone."

Building Leaders

With the inaugural year of this vocational formation behind them, seminary staff are enthusiastic about this shift in approach.

"The most obvious improvement is that students will be doing and learning at the same time," Beelen said. "Ultimately, we hope that students will graduate feeling that they are better prepared, so 10 years down the road, when they are asked about their seminary experience, they won't say that they were only given a lot of head knowledge but that they could take what they were learning and apply it immediately."

Vandermolten agreed.

"We have great academic learning happening already, but academics won't always win the day by themselves," he said. "Ministry today is too hard to simply lead or preach out of your head alone—you need a well-formed mind,

heart, and character. With the plurality of religious life right now, it's not enough to only say we have the right answers. We have to lead out of more than knowledge and theological acumen, beautiful and important though they are."

That is exactly what the new emphasis is all about.

"At Calvin Seminary," Einfeld concluded, "we are serving a student body that is more diverse, representing far more different denominations than in the past. We know there is a wider vocational path for our students. We need to provide an integrated approach to formation for ministry."

He added, "With the new approach for our students now, they can know that when they are finished with seminary, they will have had intentional vocational discernment and mentoring so they are much further along in where God is calling them next." ■



Bruce Buursma is a freelance writer for Calvin Theological Seminary.

Strength of Networking

A cord of three strands is not easily broken” (Eccl. 4:12). That Scripture verse is often quoted at wedding ceremonies, but have you thought of it in relation to ministry?

In September, 10 worship leaders and pastors from the greater Toronto area gathered with some members of the Worship Ministries’ advisory committee. They had the simple goal of meeting each other, eating with one another, and sharing joys and challenges.

“It was a wonderful evening with two hours gone too quickly,” said Rev. Joyce Borger, director of Worship Ministries. “In the end, there were still so many things left unsaid and so many questions left unasked and unanswered. That’s OK, because this meeting wasn’t the end but part of a journey together.”

In the room were seasoned pastors who knew each other from seminary, classis events, and various committees. Also present were lay worship leaders, young and old, new to the Christian Reformed Church and lifelong members, experienced worship leaders and those just beginning their position, full-time staff, part-time staff, and volunteers.

Despite the diversity of those in the room, the consensus at the end of the evening was that it was good to be together.

“To hear each other’s stories, to celebrate the blessings that God has given to our worshipping communities, to realize that others face the same struggles and questions, and to learn from each other, was a blessing,” Borger said. “It was a delight to see individuals seek each other out at the end of the evening and exchange contact info so that they can continue their conversations.”

Networking such as this event takes some intentionality and even courage to get started. Organizers said that those who take that leap, however, will soon find that it is worth the risk.

“By connecting with people doing a similar ministry, we find ourselves stronger, encouraged, and supported. For

groups that are meeting in person or online to study a book together.

Borger suggests that you don’t need to wait to be invited to attend an event or join a program to begin networking.

“Pick up the phone and call another CRC in your area and ask to speak with their worship leaders or planners and



Worship leaders from 10 Toronto, Ont.,-area churches gathered for a time of networking in September.

Worship Ministries, creating these networking opportunities for two, 20, or 200 worship leaders is one of our main objectives because we all intuitively know that we are better together,” explained Borger.

In addition to area events like the one in the Toronto area, Worship Ministries has a growing Facebook group ([facebook.com/CRCWorshipMinistries](https://www.facebook.com/CRCWorshipMinistries)) where people share resources, ask worship-related questions, and receive great responses from others in the group. This year there are also 15 Peer Learning

meet for coffee,” she said. “Connect with worship leaders and pastors from other denominations that are in your town. Join a Facebook group, send an email (worship@crcna.org) or call Worship Ministries (1-877-272-6202) and let us know you are eager to connect.” ■

—CRC Communications

We Are Not Forgotten

Our youngest two children were 11 and 15 when we adopted them, having lost their biological parents about seven years earlier. Exactly six months after they arrived from Ethiopia, the Watoto Children's Choir performed at Trinity Christian College, where we were living.

The choir is made up of Ugandan children left parentless because of war and disease. It was great for our sons to discover a part of Africa right in their backyard. The lasting impact for them and our family was a song the choir sang: "I Am Not Forgotten." We bought the CD and nearly wore it out. Some of the words are these:

*I am not forgotten
I am not forgotten
I am not forgotten
God knows my name
He knows my name
... Father to the fatherless
Friend to the friendless
Hope for the hopeless
He knows my name*

This song said it all. Our sons had been baptized according to Ethiopian Orthodox practice at 40 days after birth. Despite their losses, God didn't forget his promises to them while they waited and waited for an adoptive family. Now flourishing at Trinity Christian College, their lives demonstrate God's strength over weakness.

And God's promises are not limited to just a few. Consider these words from Ephesians 2:19-22: "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy



temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

Orphans, foreigners, and strangers no more. What good news! It's the news that's made real with the birth of Christ in a stable and proclaimed by the angels: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

As you read these words, it is Advent—a time of waiting. All of us wait, for one reason or another. Some wait for adoption; others wait for the end of displacement; still others wait for an estranged son or daughter to return home.

In many respects, our entire lives are times of waiting. When we strip away our human pride and confidence, we recognize that this process of sanctification—bringing us from our former lives as orphans, foreigners, or strangers to new life in Christ—is just that: a process and time of waiting.

Waiting doesn't mean we've been forgotten. As we wait, we are being changed, building new lives in Christ.

As you and I wait during this time of Advent, remember that God never forgets us. Because of Christ's sanctifying work in our lives, we are to shine while we wait—light in this present darkness. "Ere zij God in den hoge!" ("Glory to God in the highest"). ■



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

우리는 잊혀지지 않아요.

우리 집에서 가장 어린 두 아이는 각각 11살과 15살 때 우리 품으로 입양되었습니다. 아이들이 친부모님을 잃고서 7년 되었을 때였습니다.

에티오피아를 떠나 우리 집에 온지 딱 6개월 지났을 때, 와토토 어린이 합창단이 바로 우리 동네의 트리니티 기독교 대학으로 공연을 왔습니다.

이 어린이 합창단은 전쟁과 질병으로 부모를 잃은 우간다 어린이들로 구성되어 있었기 때문에 우리 아들들에게는 바로 집 뒷마당에서 아프리카의 일부분을 경험하는 좋은 기회였습니다. 당시 아이들과 우리 가족의 마음을 울렸던 곡은 "우리는 잊혀지지 않아요." 라는 노래였습니다. 우리는 CD를 구입했고 마르고 닳도록 들었어요! 가사 중 일부는 다음과 같습니다.

*나는 잊혀지지 않아요.
나는 잊혀지지 않아요.
나는 잊혀지지 않아요.
하나님은 내 이름을 아세요..
그 분이 내 이름을 아세요.*

*고아의 아버지 되시고
외로운 자에게 친구며
소망 없는 곳에 소망이신
그 분이 내 이름을 아세요.*

이 노래가 모든 것을 말해줍니다! 우리 두 아들은 에티오피아 정교회의 관례대로 난 지 40일이 되었을 때 세례를 받았습니다. 그 후 아이들은 부모님을 잃었고 입양될 가족을 오랫동안 기다려야 했지만 하나님은 그분의 약속을 잊지 않으셨습니다. 이제 트리니티 기독교 대학에서 꿈을 펼치고 있는 두 아들의 삶이 바로 우리의 약함을 덮는 하나님의 강하심을 보여줍니다.

그런데 하나님의 약속은 몇 사람들에게만 해당되는 것은 아닙니다. 에베소서 2:19-22 말씀을 생각해보십시오. "그러므로 이제부터 너희는 외인도 아니요 나그네도 아니요 오직 성도들과 동일한 시민이요 하나님의 권속이라

No Somos Olvidados

너희는 사도들과 선지자들의 터 위에 세우심을 입은 자라. 그리스도 예수께서 친히 모퉁이 돌이 되셨느니라 그의 안에서 건물마다 서로 연결하여 주 안에서 성전이 되어 가고 너희도 성령 안에서 하나님이 거하실 처소가 되기 위하여 그리스도 예수 안에서 함께 지어져 가느니라.”

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여러분과 제가 이 대림절에 주를 기다리는 동안, 하나님이 절대 우리를 잊지 않으신다는 것을 기억하면 좋겠습니다. 그리스도께서 우리 삶에서 이루신 성화의 역사 때문에 우리는 기다리는 와중에도 빛날 수 있습니다. 지금 여기 어둠을 밝히는 빛처럼 말입니다. “지극히 높으신 곳에는 영광을!” ■

스티븐 팀머만스 박사는 북미주 개혁교회 교단대표입니다.

Nuestros dos hijos menores tenían 11 y 15 cuando los adoptamos, habiendo perdido a sus padres biológicos unos siete años antes. Exactamente seis meses después de que llegaron de Etiopía, el Coro Infantil Watoto se presentó en Trinity Christian Collage, donde estábamos viviendo.

El coro está compuesta de niños de Uganda que se han quedado sin padres a causa de la guerra y enfermedad. Fue una bendición que nuestros hijos descubrieran parte de África en su propio vecindario. El impacto que perduró en ellos y en nuestra familia, fue una canción que cantó el coro: “No Somos Olvidados”. Compramos el disco compacto y ¡lo escuchamos una y otra vez! Estas son algunos de las palabras de la canción:

*No soy olvidado
No soy olvidado
No soy olvidado
Dios conoce mi nombre
Él conoce mi nombre*

*...Padre para quien no tiene padres
Amigo para quien no tiene amigos
Esperanza para quien que no
tiene esperanza
Él conoce mi nombre*

¡Esta canción lo dijo todo! Nuestros hijos habían sido bautizados a los 40 días de nacidos, de acuerdo a las prácticas de la Iglesia Ortodoxa de Etiopía. A pesar de sus pérdidas, Dios no olvidó sus promesas para ellos mientras esperaban por una familia adoptiva. Sus vidas—ahora floreciendo en Trinity Christian College—demuestran el poder de Dios sobre la debilidad.

Y las promesas de Dios no se limitan a unos pocos solamente. Considere estas palabras de Efesios 2:19-22: “Por lo tanto, ustedes ya no son extraños ni extranjeros, sino conciudadanos de los santos y miembros de la familia de Dios, edificados sobre

el fundamento de los apóstoles y los profetas, siendo Cristo Jesús mismo la piedra angular. En él todo el edificio, bien armado, se va levantando para llegar a ser un templo santo en el Señor. En él también ustedes son edificados juntamente para ser morada de Dios por su Espíritu.”

Ya no hay huérfanos, extraños ni forasteros. ¡Qué buenas noticias! Es la noticia que se hace real con el nacimiento de Cristo en un establo y proclamado por los ángeles: “Gloria a Dios en las alturas, y en la tierra paz a los que gozan de su buena voluntad.”

Mientras lee estas palabras, es Adviento—un tiempo de espera. Todos nosotros esperamos, por alguna razón u otra. Algunos esperan la adopción; otros esperan que termine el desplazamiento; y otros aún esperan por un hijo o hija que se ha alejado, que regrese a casa.

En muchos aspectos, nuestra vida entera es un tiempo de espera. Cuando nos despojamos de nuestro orgullo humano y confianza en nosotros mismos, reconocemos que este proceso de santificación—que nos lleva de nuestra vida pasada como huérfanos, extraños y forasteros a una nueva vida en Cristo—es justamente eso: un proceso y tiempo de espera.

Esperar no significa que hemos sido olvidados. Mientras esperamos, estamos siendo cambiados, edificando nuevas vidas en Cristo.

Mientras usted y yo esperamos este tiempo de Adviento, recuerde que Dios nunca nos olvida. Debido a la obra santificadora de Cristo en nuestras vidas, debemos brillar mientras esperamos—luz en esta oscuridad presente. “Ere zij God in den hoge!” (“Gloria a Dios en las alturas”). ■

Steven Timmermans es el director ejecutivo de la Iglesia Reformada de Norte América

Healing the Wounds of Trauma

Martha vividly remembers the last day her daughter left for school. “She was smiling when she left, with the intention to return around 6 p.m. for a prayer meeting at church,” Martha remembers.

While her daughter was away, Martha received a phone call. When she answered, it was her daughter’s teacher with news that Martha’s little girl had been rushed to the hospital and had died.

Martha prayed for God to bring her daughter back to life, but God convinced her instead that her daughter was with him. As time went on, bitterness began to settle in Martha’s heart, and the weight of losing her daughter began to push Martha into depression.

World Renew began working in Martha’s community after violence erupted in areas across West Africa. Churches, schools, businesses, and homes were ransacked and burned, and people were left to deal with trauma and loss all alone.

In alliance with the American Bible Society, World Renew established a program called “Healing the Wounds of Trauma.” Through this program, World Renew began to train church leaders to lead Bible studies that focused on trauma healing.

Many people came to the small-group gatherings to work through grief brought on by the attacks, but participants like Martha left healed from other traumas they had been holding in their hearts.

“The training given through the trauma healing support group resulted in the bitterness leaving, and the healing of my heart has brought relief,” she said.

Like Martha, many others attending the training felt their burdens lift.

For nearly 10 years, Pastor Okafor and his family wrestled with the loss of his father, who went missing during conflict in their community.

“All our efforts to find him failed, and it left us in deep depression and pain,” he said. “At the end of this training, by the grace of God, I found closure and the strength to overcome this horrible situation.”

Pastor Okafor is excited to share what he learned with his family and church, hoping it will encourage them to look to God for strength.

For another participant, Omar, the training provided freedom. Omar was grieving the loss of his wife, who died while giving birth to their first child.

“This relief was great after learning to bring our burden to the cross of Jesus,” he said. “Peace has taken the place of bitterness in my life. Glory to God!”

“Now I can remember my wife and child without my heart hurting like before,” said Omar. “Thanks to this trauma healing support group, I feel encouraged.” ■

—Taylor Smith, World Renew



Graduates of World Renew’s trauma healing program.

Couple Brings New Ministry to Seattle

Bookie and Lakesha Gates felt a sense of brokenness and mistrust in their marriage that Lakesha described as “horrendous pain.”

But the couple took a step in faith and turned to their pastor and friend, Clarence Presley, and his wife, Athena, for help.

Clarence Presley leads ministry at Word of Truth CRC in Tukwila, Wash., and also serves as a local mission leader with Resonate Global Mission.

The two couples met in the Presleys’ living room for deep conversations. As they shared, the Presleys were open about the struggles they faced in their own marriage and in grappling with the tragic death of Athena’s mother.

“Their openness, their honesty—their willingness to walk with us for the long haul—has modeled the process [of healing],” said Lakesha Gates. “They’re able to embrace those that most people would push away just because of their life experiences.”

“They didn’t come and tell me what I needed to do, they encouraged me and gave me Scripture, they prayed with me, they supported me,” added her husband. “That’s when I really realized the power of God.”

After many hard talks and time for healing, the Gates are now among the key leaders for Word of Truth. What’s more, their struggles have led them to start new ministries of their own, Bookie in youth baseball and Lakesha in business leadership.

“What I love about this couple is they understand they’re in the people business,” said Clarence Presley. “[Bookie and Lakesha] may use sports or business strategy or relationship coaching but, at the end of the day, it comes down to God’s love for humanity—God’s love for his creation.”

You add.
God multiplies.



Bookie and Lakesha Gates

Bookie and Lakesha Gates sharpen their ministry impact by meeting regularly with about 20 other ministry leaders in the Seattle area as part of the Kingdom in Neighborhoods Network (KIN) founded and facilitated by Clarence Presley.

“The network helps them see that together we can be great,” said Lakesha.

“You have to understand individual mission vision but not in a silo. Together we can have a such a great impact.”

This vision of “having a greater impact together” is also what led Clarence Presley to accept the local mission leader role with Resonate, a new position created at Resonate’s launch this sum-

mer to allow people like Clarence to multiply their ministries in new places around the world.

“Clarence’s work with KIN will help us learn how to do urban ministry across denominations and among churches of different shapes and sizes,” said Ben Katt, Resonate’s Western United States regional leader.

Katt said, “KIN embraces an approach to ministry marked by kingdom connection and collaboration. As part of Resonate, Clarence’s vision for KIN can be informed by similar networks and support Resonate partners in places like Nicaragua and Guatemala.” ■

—Brian Clark,
Resonate Global Mission

A Christmas Baptism

Yoshiichiro Tokuhara can recall the first time he heard about Jesus. It was December 1983, a few weeks before Christmas. He was 12 years old, living in Japan, and listening to a shortwave radio—a popular means of communication at the time.

Listening to Back to God Ministries International’s Japanese program *Window to Tomorrow*, he recalls, “It was mainly hymns and preaching about the Bible and I didn’t understand it all, but I remember somehow it made me relax.”

Tokuhara tuned in regularly throughout middle school. Then when he entered high school, he stayed away from the Christian faith and stopped listening to the Bible-based programs altogether.

It wasn’t until 2013, close to 30 years later, that Tokuhara decided to open his heart to hearing God’s Word again when he was encountering multiple struggles in his life.



Pray for people like Yoshiichiro Tokuhara who are coming to faith this season through BTGMI’s Bible-based radio programs.

“I started praying to God to help me as I went through the death of my daughter, loss of my unborn child, and the worsening of my wife’s illness,” he said.

He began listening to the BTGMI Japanese audio programs *Let’s Open the Bible* and *Gospel Wave*, this time on the Internet as well as on the radio.

Now interested in the Bible and wanting to learn more, Tokuhara started to attend a local church. With the pastor, he studied the Bible and prepared to be baptized.

On Christmas Day 2016, Tokuhara publicly gave his life to Christ through baptism. He testifies, “I now believe the difficult time I had and the struggles were all in God’s plan. I leave everything in God’s hands.”

As we enter into another season of Advent and anticipation of Christ’s birth, Tokuhara said, “I am thankful for your website which was a bridge between me and God. As I was led to God through [BTGMI radio programs], I hope many people will also be led to God.” ■

—Kristen Fergus Van Stee,
Back to God Ministries International

Winter Waterland

In many parts of the world, the winter months can be very cold. Blankets of fluffy snow cover fields and forests. We pull out hats, mittens, and puffy coats to get ready for cold winds. Birds fly

south and animals like bears and groundhogs sleep in warm cozy dens. But what do animals that live in the water do during the winter? You may be surprised!

Frozen Frogs

Many frogs sleep for a long time during the winter. For cold-blooded animals, this is called *brumation*. Frogs like the leopard frog and American bullfrog “sleep” underwater in frozen lakes and ponds. Sometimes they lie on top of mud or hide underneath thick piles of leaves. As the weather becomes colder, their bodies also get colder. Their hearts beat more slowly, and they breathe oxygen underwater through their skin.

Some frogs, like the gray tree frog and chorus frog, turn into “frosicles.” Parts of their bodies freeze and their heart stops beating. It looks like they are dead—but they aren’t! Their bodies make a sugar to help them to stay alive, even though parts of their bodies are frozen. When the weather warms up, their bodies thaw and they hop away!

Other land frogs and toads sleep underground during the winter. They dig deep holes into the ground below the frost line, where the soil does not freeze. This means some toads dig as far as 3 to 4 feet (1 meter) underground!

Fish

Do fish sleep in the winter? No little beds or warm blankets for fish! They do not even close their eyes, because they have no eyelids. Some fish hide themselves in mud and rest during the winter, but most gather in groups called *schools* and have a nice winter rest.

Since fish are cold-blooded animals, their body temperatures become much colder as the weather changes. They rest in the deeper parts of lakes where the water is warmer. They stay very still as if asleep. Some fish—like trout and salmon—slowly swim and even look for food. Sometimes salmon swim near the top of lakes where there is more oxygen.

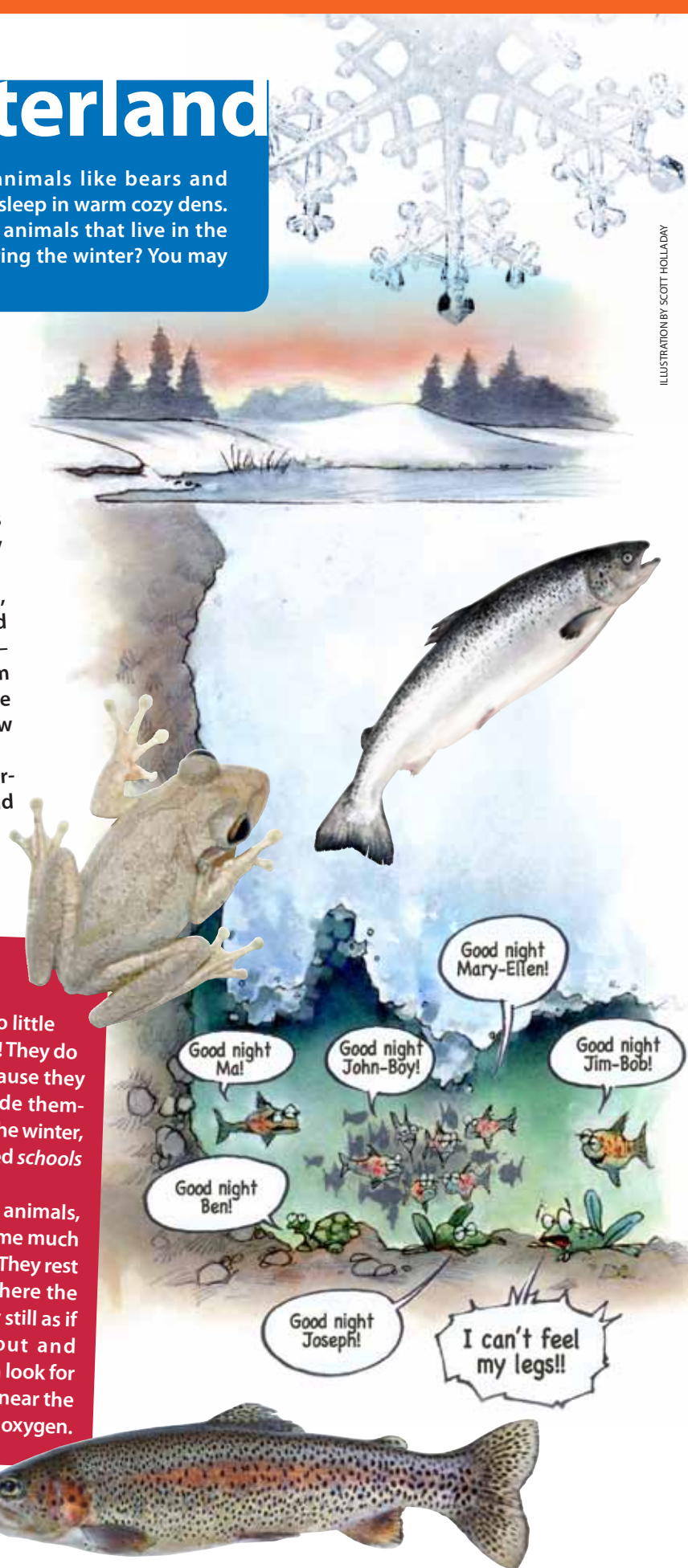


ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

FUN Facts

The “magic” temperature for a lake or pond to freeze is 39.2 degrees F or 4 degrees C.

Ice crystals form when tiny parts of water called molecules move closely together.

Some lakes form ice up to **six feet** thick!

What happens when you add **ice cubes** to a glass of water? The cubes float! Ice also floats on lakes and ponds, where it acts as a thick “blanket” to keep warmer water inside.

Most lakes and ponds do **not freeze** all the way. If they did, no animals could live!

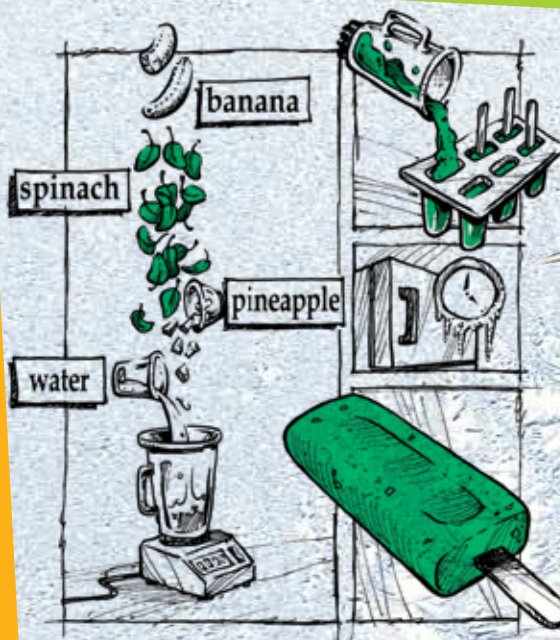
Homemade ‘Frogsicles’

Make this treat at home as you think of some of the frogs that will “freeze” this winter! Yes, these popsicles will be green!

What you need:

- Popsicle molds
- Blender
- 1 cup spinach
- 1 ½ bananas
- 1 cup pineapple chunks (or 1 cup mango chunks)
- 2/3-3/4 cup water or coconut water

Blend all the ingredients in a blender until smooth. Pour the mixture into popsicle molds. Freeze until solid. Makes 6 popsicles.



Make Your Own Frozen Pond!

Try this cool experiment at home!

Here's what you'll need:

- Clear plastic container
- 4-6 cups water
- Sand, soil, stones, twigs, leaves
- Clear plastic wrap
- Small plastic frogs, turtles, or fish (optional)

What to do:

With an adult's help, look for sand, soil, stones, leaves, and twigs in your neighborhood. Pour about 2-3 cups of the soil into a clear plastic container. Spread the soil, leaves, and stones evenly at the bottom of the container. Add a few plastic animals for fun!

Next, carefully add 4-6 cups of water to the container. Let it stand still for about 10 minutes for the soil to settle to the bottom of the dish. Cover your pond with clear plastic wrap and place in the freezer.

After about 1 hour and 15 minutes, take off the plastic wrap without moving the container. What do you see? Are ice crystals beginning to form? Draw a picture of what your pond looks like. Wait another 30-45 minutes and check your pond again. Take your pond out of the freezer and look inside. What changes do you see? Draw another picture!



Turtles

Turtles make winter homes for themselves at the bottom of lakes and ponds. They dig deep under the mud to sleep. Their body temperature becomes very cold and they do not move much. Their hearts beat only once every few minutes.

Like frogs, turtles can also breathe oxygen through their skin. Turtles are able to live in their underwater homes for a long time without oxygen—sometimes up to three or four months during the winter!

God of Winter Wonders

Isn't it cool how God made animals to live in very cold weather? Just as God keeps us safe in our warm homes, God takes care of all living things. The next time you put on a sweater or scarf, remember to thank God for keeping you warm during the winter. And thank him for keeping animals safe in their winter waterlands!

Your holiness is as great as the height of the highest mountains. You are as honest as the oceans are deep. Lord, you keep people and animals safe. Psalm 36:6, NIV



Christin Baker is a stay-at-home mom and writer.

Gentiles, Homosexuality, and Grace in the Body of Christ

AS THE CHURCH wrestles with whether women and men who practice homosexuality ought to be embraced into the full life of the church, it is important to remember that the church has struggled with questions of membership from the very beginning. The primary conflict in the life of the early church had to do with another question: Should Gentiles, who do not keep the mosaic law, be received into the fellowship of the body of Christ?

The church embraced believing Gentiles, but only after an intense conflict that featured breaches of fellowship (between Peter and Paul, among others), intense argument (Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Romans, among others), and even a major church council (the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15). It took testimonies of special revelation (Peter's visions in Acts 10), indisputable signs of the outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles (Acts 10-11), and careful study of Old Testament prophetic texts to determine that the Spirit was indeed calling believing Gentiles and believing Jews to be united in one body.

In the end, the apostles determined that to deny Gentiles membership in the body of Christ was to deny the gospel. It was to commit the heresy of saying that salvation comes by the law rather than by grace through faith.

Should the church use the same process of discernment to determine whether or not to receive our gay and lesbian neighbors, friends, and family members into full church membership?

It is an important question because nothing less than the graciousness of the gospel is at stake. To exclude a gospel-believing person from the church because she is same-sex attracted is to abandon the gospel of salvation by grace through faith, without question. And does the exclusion of such a person, if she refuses to give up the practice of homosexuality, also amount to an insistence on salvation by works of the law? What if she confesses the faith of the gospel, as did the Roman centurion Cornelius, who heard Peter preach in Acts 10? What if her life evidences the fruits of the Spirit,

PHOTO BY PIXABAY.COM

as did the Gentiles who experienced their own Pentecost at Antioch (Acts 10)?

A lot is at stake. As Paul put it in Galatians 5:4, “You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”

On the other hand, we must flee the sort of cheap grace that claims justification apart from the fruits of the Spirit. In the same letter Paul warns that those who practice “the acts of the flesh,” including “sexual immorality,” “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21).

So we have got to get this right. How exactly did the early church discern that Gentiles, despite their infidelity to the law of Moses, had received the Spirit of Christ? And what would it look like for the 21st-century church to discern whether gay and lesbian men and women have also shared in the blessing of grace?

The early church’s discernment process consisted of six dimensions.

First, certain apostles received special revelation from God that key elements of the mosaic law were no longer binding. Most famously, Peter experienced a vision in which God commanded him to eat animals that were unclean according to the law. God told Peter, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10:15); Peter eventually grasped that God was calling him to receive believing Gentiles into the church.

Second, the Gentiles responded to the preaching of the gospel with faith. The apostles reasoned that if salvation is truly by grace through faith, then that is as true for Gentiles as it is for Jews (Acts 15:9; Gal. 3:8).

Third, God immediately poured the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles, manifesting his presence within them by enabling them to speak in tongues (Acts 10:44-46). Peter quickly grasped the significance: “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have” (Acts 10:47).


Fourth, believing Gentiles began to practice the fruits of repentance. The apostles recog-

nized that “even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:18).

Fifth, the church met as a council to hear the reports of Peter and Paul that the Gentiles were embracing the gospel in faith and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and to consider whether or not these Gentiles should be forced to keep the law of Moses. The apostles and elders came to a decision in unity as a body: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . .” (Acts 15:28).

Sixth, the church carefully reconsidered the teaching of Scripture. Upon hearing the experiences of Peter, Paul, and the Gentiles who had received the Holy Spirit, the apostle James grasped that he had heard of this phenomenon before. Where? In the Old Testament prophets. As James put it, “Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written . . .” (Acts 15:14-18). James goes on to quote Amos 9:11-12, and it is on this basis—the explicit teaching of Scripture—not merely on the basis of the experiences of his colleagues and fellow Christians, that James concludes, “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19). The upshot? They should be required to demonstrate the fruits of repentance in accord with faith, including the command to avoid “sexual immorality” (Acts 15:28), but otherwise set free from the burden of the law.

We would do well to follow this same process of discernment as we wrestle with questions concerning the inclusion of gay and lesbian men and women in the church today. We have no right to force others to keep the law as a condition of salvation if we ourselves have been saved by grace through faith. We must carefully listen to our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters who confess faith in the gospel, testify to the work of the Spirit in their lives, and practice the fruits of repentance. And finally, we must submit their testimony to the witness of Scripture.



We must carefully listen to our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters who confess faith in the gospel.

Does Scripture prophesy the blessing of homosexuality as it explicitly prophesies the inclusion of Gentiles within the church? Does it prophesy the blessing of same-sex marriage as it explicitly prophesies that women, like men, will exercise the gifts of ministry (Joel 2:28-29)? Finally, what does it mean for gay and lesbian Christians to “flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18), and what are the implications of Paul’s warning that men who practice homosexuality “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10)? Why does Paul affirm that some of the Corinthian Christians had practiced homosexuality, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God”? We cannot flippantly set these injunctions—rooted in the gospel, not the law—aside.

In the end, we can only claim the name of “church” if we remain rooted in the grace of the gospel of Christ. And the gospel is that all people—including people who are gay and lesbian—are saved by grace through faith alone, and that the wonderful fruit of grace—for all people, regardless of sexual attraction—is the ongoing life of repentance through the work of the Holy Spirit. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



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Magazines for Thoughtful Christians



LOOKING FOR SOME CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS to add to your reading list beyond well-known staples such as *Christianity Today*, *Sojourners*, and, of course, *The Banner*? Here are some to consider:

Comment: Produced by Cardus, a Canada-based Christian think tank, this magazine is grounded in a Reformed, biblical worldview that all of life is being redeemed by God and worthy of faithful attention. Its lively essays and timely, well-researched articles celebrate the multifaceted areas of human existence—vocation, family, worship, politics, economics—as opportunities to freshly proclaim God’s grace in a broken world. **Tip:** The recent *The Comment Reader* anthology is an excellent way to acquaint (or reacquaint) yourself with the magazine.

Geez: Definitely progressive and defiantly hopeful, this magazine highlights the role of social justice activism in living out a Christ-like response to the complex—and often controversial—realities of the world. Each issue uses poetry, personal essays, news stories, and photos to explore hard-hitting questions about such topics as poverty, politics, creation care, race, and gender identity.

Consider adding these to your reading list!

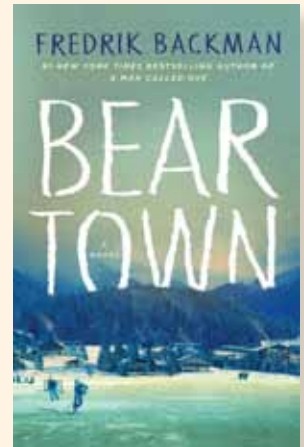
Image: Since 1989, *Image* has been demonstrating that contemporary art can do more than merely express faith. When crafted well, it can embody the very struggles and paradoxes at the heart of Judeo-Christian religion. The journal is an array of poetry, fiction, longer essays, artist profiles, and interviews that seeks to engage your imagination and invite you to see God’s image in every human being. Features the work of both modern masters and emerging artists.

Relief: This literary journal features fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, graphic narrative, and reviews by both new and established authors. It is a publication that boldly aims to rise above a saccharine or easy view of Christian faith by artfully revealing how belief and doubt can intersect in surprising, varied, and beautiful ways in a person’s spiritual journey.

The Other Journal: Presented by the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology, this journal blends academic scholarship with cultural critique, primarily through creative writing. Each issue is organized around a theme in the topical sphere of theology, art, and social justice. Recent themes include “Identity,” “Sport,” “Encounter,” and “Trauma.” ■



Adele Gallogly is a writer and editor living in Hamilton, Ont.



Beartown

by **Fredrik Backman**
reviewed by **Jenny deGroot**

In his latest novel, Swedish author Backman (*A Man Called Ove*) successfully endears the reader to a whole town of characters, revealing each of their passions and connections to the beloved junior hockey team. And then suddenly the hockey town plot line becomes complex. Backman writes with uncommon wisdom about the nature of communities and their shared life, exploring joy, sorrow, and disappointment through the lenses of parenting and leadership, culture and power, peer pressure and friendship. It is a good read for anyone willing to look into the heart of their own community. (Atria)



Be the One: Six True Stories of Teens Overcoming Hardship with Hope

by **Byron Pitts**

reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**



Journalist Byron Pitts was asked by a teen, “When you were my age, where did you go, where did you hide, when the world hurt too much?” Her question became the catalyst for this emotionally gripping book in which Pitts shares the stories of six teens who have overcome difficult challenges and their answers to this question. Some relied on their Christian faith; others escaped or retreated in other ways. Written

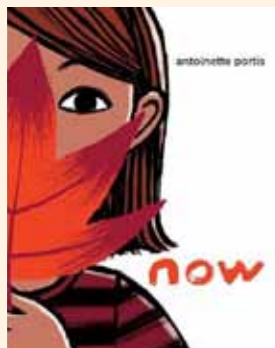
for young people, *Be the One* is also relevant for pastors, teachers, counselors, parents, and others who want to reach out in Christ’s name to struggling youth. (Simon & Schuster)

Now

by **Antoinette Portis**

reviewed by **Gwen Marra**

How do you spend your day? Are you worried about “what ifs”? Do you compare yourself with others and come up short? In *Now*, Antoinette Portis challenges young readers to see joy in each moment. This book follows a little girl as she shares her favorite things—a leaf she has found, a paper boat she sets sail, and her missing tooth. The book is a great reminder to be thankful for each moment and a perfect read-aloud that celebrates the little things in life that are really big things. Ages 3 and up. (Roaring Brook Press)



Maudie

reviewed by **Jenny deGroot**



Maudie is based on the life of Maud Lewis, a Nova Scotian folk artist. Orphaned at an early age, Maud (Sally Hawkins) suffers from early onset rheumatoid arthritis and has to depend on family. To gain independence, she answers an ad to be a housekeeper for an uncouth brute (Ethan Hawke). The relationship develops into a marriage of convenience and then slowly into love as Maud does her best to be a wife and also fills the interior surfaces of their tiny isolated home with art. At first blush the viewer sees brilliance trapped in a broken body, but paradoxically this might have been the source of the artist’s eye and skill. She takes infinite pleasure in every bit of beauty. A great film to share with an art class, book club, or small group. (Mongrel Media)



Remember Me

reviewed by **Kristy Quist**

RememberMeStories.net is dedicated to sharing the stories of those who grieve miscarried, stillborn, or never-conceived children. Site visitors are invited not only to read and find comfort in stories of God’s goodness through this very particular pain, but to submit their own stories as well. For those who find themselves members of a club they never wanted to join, hearing other people’s stories can be helpful and healing. This website is a great resource, especially for those who are, for any reason, unable to talk to others about it in person.



THE LOWDOWN



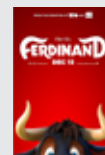
Saintly Pic: A pastor begins a program with refugees at the church he’s supposed to be closing up in *All Saints*, on disc mid-month. See our review at thebanner.org. (AFFIRM)



You Too? Devotees have waited a long time for the newest U2 album, *Songs of Experience*, slated for a December 1 release. (Island)



Reel Fans: Thoughtful movie buffs might enjoy the book *Beautiful Light: Religious Meaning in Film* by Roy Anker (Eerdmans)



Reel Fans Jr: Options abound for moviegoing with every age group. The animated *Ferdinand* (Blue Sky/20th Century Fox), the live-action *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (Columbia), and *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (Walt Disney) all hit theaters this month.

MORE REVIEWS ONLINE

NO WORDS FALL

POOOR ZECHARIAH. He's minding his priestly business, and suddenly an angel accosts him and delivers shocking news. Zechariah asks a completely understandable question—"How can I know this? After all, we're old"—and Gabriel strikes him silent. Gabriel, do you need to be all testy and indignant? Poor Zechariah.

We can hardly blame him. After all, Luke 1:6 tells us that both Zechariah and Elizabeth were upright and blameless before the Lord. And Zechariah's question sounds almost exactly like Mary's question later on in the same chapter: "How can this be?" (v. 34). Even if we were to suppose that Zechariah's question represents a tiny slip-up of doubt while Mary's exhibits faith, even then: Silence? For months?

I wonder, though. Maybe the silence isn't a punishment. Maybe it's more about getting Zechariah out of the way.

"I have been sent to speak," says Gabriel. I'm the one speaking words here, words that come straight from God. Luke 1:1-56 is obsessed with words and talking. The Greek words

logoi and *laleo* are all over this passage in various forms. God speaks, the angel speaks, Mary and Elizabeth speak. The word for blessed, as in "blessed are you" and "blessed is the child," is *eulogemene*—"good-spoken-of."

The passage in Greek is even more obsessed with words that come from the root *gen-*. To bring forth a child, to come to pass, to become, generation to generation. All these words in Greek derive from the same root. In verses 1-56, *gen*-related words occur 14 times. Surely we are expected to read the clues.

God's word is becoming, it is coming to pass. After a long wait—such long years of waiting—an urgent determination energizes the whole passage. This is the moment, and nothing will get in the way.

So the word comes to Zechariah, and Zechariah is silenced, and then a child is generated within Elizabeth. The righteousness of this faithful couple does not cause this marvel, nor do old age and barrenness prevent it. And then the word comes to Mary, and a child is generated within her. Her humility and purity do not cause this miracle, nor does her virginity prevent it. Because, as Gabriel says, "nothing is impossible with God." A more exact

translation would be: “Not shall-be-unable before God every utterance.” The utterances of God must bring forth their purpose; there is simply no option. In the Old Testament idiom, God’s words do not “fall to the ground.” They sweep in, irresistible.

When Gabriel makes his announcement to Mary, her question gets answered, and she offers her willing response: “May it become to me according to your utterance.” And then she hurries to visit Elizabeth.

Over the centuries, the faithful have speculated about why Mary would run off like this. Perhaps to avoid gossip in Nazareth? Perhaps because cousin Elizabeth needs some help around the house? Perhaps the hills of Judah are nice this time of year?

Within the shape of the narrative, Mary goes to Elizabeth because this creates an exclusively female space. The two women—one old and disgraced, the other young and ignored—embrace one another. Now is their time to speak. Elizabeth exclaims “in a loud voice”: Blessed, blessed, blessed! The Holy Spirit fills her words, fills her womb, fills every empty space.

Nothing against poor old Zechariah, but sometimes the ones who usually speak need to keep quiet. The ones who occupy the honored places in society, the priests and politicians, the capable and skilled, the smart and powerful—they all need to step aside. Maybe, too, that little skeptic in each one of us, blabbering on about what’s wrong with the world today and how everything is going downhill and, take it from me, I’ve been around long enough to be cynical, and it sure seems as if the horrors increase every year. Even the faithful and true, after all, get tired of praying for the same things over and over. The years go by. Nothing seems to change.

But then the word of the Lord comes to silence that part of us. The word of the Lord comes to silence the chatter of the powerful and still the strutting of the proud, to create a space for those who do not usually get to speak, a quiet moment where the disgraced embrace the ignored and something miraculous takes hold.

Sometimes those who seem barren or very young or outside the circle or unimportant—sometimes those are the ones God has chosen for a hidden purpose. After all, when you’re the one always in the shadows, you have time to listen and to perceive what the powerful hide even from themselves. Sometimes you are the one who hears God best.

In the same way, those places within each of us that feel disgraced and ignored, those are the places where God can plant a miracle. When Elizabeth hears Mary’s greeting, the baby leaps in her *kouilia*, her cavity. She says to Mary, “Blessed is the fruit of your cavity.” If we can just get our worry and competence and bluster, however holy, to step aside and be quiet, we might find a lowly cavity hidden underneath and notice that it’s not as empty as we thought. Something very small and important is growing there.

Whatever our weariness and cynicism have gotten used to expecting, that’s what God is about to overturn. Nothing will get in the way of this, for the utterances of God never fail.

So old Elizabeth speaks “Blessed” in a loud voice, and young Mary prophesies—feisty words proclaiming the mighty deeds of God across the generations. In God’s kingdom, everything is turned upside down: the proud rulers brought down, the humble exalted, the hungry filled, the rich left empty. Whatever our weariness and cynicism have gotten used to expecting, that’s what God is about to overturn. Nothing will get in the way of this, for the utterances of God never fail.

How we long today for the strong, unfailing, holy word of God! In a time when human words drown us in a torrent of the cheap, tawdry, deceptive, and cruel, we wonder if words can only ever confuse and destroy. Yet in Isaiah 55, God declares that the divine word “will not return to me empty, but will accomplish . . . the purpose for which I sent it.” And that purpose is life—restored, flourishing, everlasting life.

We know God’s promises, we profess God’s faithfulness, but how long must we wait for this generative word to come? Another thing we know about God’s powerful word is that it comes in God’s time, not ours. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord” (Isa. 55:8). Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary knew this very well. Their people had been waiting for generations for the Anointed One to come and save. They could do nothing either to cause or prevent or speed that day—nothing but pray and serve and wait.

And perhaps get out of the way. Luke 1 reminds us that God’s word comes in emptiness and silence. It begins in the hidden places where the usually quiet get to pipe up their praise, in the cavities that open up to receive the word of God.

That’s where the Logos is generated. The Word comes to pass. The Holy Spirit sweeps in to fill every empty space. Christ is born. ■



Debra Rienstra is an associate professor of English at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich.

What's Your Story?

SINCE I RETIRED, I've found myself reminiscing more. When I worked full time, the demands of job and home sponged up virtually all my attention, but now my thoughts venture beyond the bounds of the daily. One of the places my mind often goes is to the past. My grandparents and parents appear on my mental slate regularly, as do friends not seen for decades. Old photographs help make these memories more real. Faded pictures of me—a child in a swimsuit, a teenager behind the wheel, a 40-something eating birthday cake—speak of who I was, where I was headed, and what once seemed important.

Life Review as a Vantage Point

Researchers tell us that, aside from the very young, everyone thinks about the past. During the last third of life, such memories are likely to take the form of a “life review.” Psychologist Robert Butler suggested that people within sight of death get a much better sense than before of the entire course of their lives. It is as if we climb a hill from which we can see, more clearly than we did before, a panorama of our days on earth. This surveillance from an advantaged viewing post results in more integrated sense of our life.

We reminisce to gain a sense of perspective. When Moses gave his farewell address to the Israelites before they entered the promised land, he began by reviewing all that had happened since they left Mount Sinai (Deut. 1:6-4:40). This overview of 40 years could be abridged into one crucial truth: “You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other” (Deut. 4:35). Keep thinking about these events, Moses urged. “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out” (Deut. 5:15). Climb regularly to the



What really matters is not what I've done but what Christ has done in me.

PHOTO BY KABOOMPIKS/KAROLINA/PEXELS.COM

overlook, survey God's deeds, and reflect on them.

The Unfinished Business of Memory

Our thinking about the past not only provides perspective but also influences what we do in the present. Sometimes we're reminded of things we've left unfinished. Perhaps friends or family we need to bless (or from whom we need blessing). Apologies we intended to make, or forgiveness we intended to offer. There may be a spiritual legacy—an offering of wisdom in the form of stories or life lessons—that we wish to pass on to someone.

Of course, some memories are painful, and what we most need in that case is healing. Such healing is aided not only by calling to mind past injuries but by gaining a new understanding of them. In his book *The End of Memory*, Miroslav Volf describes his options for how to now think about mistreatment once inflicted on him by a Yugoslavian army captain: "I can view myself primarily as a person who was terrorized by powerful people against whom I was helpless and whose intentions I could not discern. Or I can see myself primarily as a person who, after some suffering, has been delivered by God and given a new life. . . ." The latter interpretation, which emphasizes his new identity in Christ, is most healing. Volf also suggests a new understanding of the perpetrator. Keep in mind, he says, that Christ's atoning sacrifice is sufficient for anything that has been done against us, should the wrongdoer be willing to accept forgiveness for his or her deeds. Volf concludes, "I will remember every wrongdoing in the light of that hopeful horizon of future reconciliation with the wrongdoer."

What I Did, What Was Done in Me

We remember in order to gain perspective and to guide what we do in the present.

Another reason for a life review is evaluation. In looking back, we are likely to take stock of the kind of life we've lived and the sort of person we've become. If this assessment is favorable, we're likely to feel self-worth. A negative evaluation of our life, on the other hand, produces futility and despair.

Such, at least, is what psychological theorists maintain. A Christian's self-evaluation might be tempered by other considerations. None of us has done all we could to further the cause of Christ, yet our shortcomings don't result in despair because every shortcoming has been redeemed by Christ's sacrifice. Besides, what really matters is not what I've done but what Christ has done in me. God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20), and that dwarfs my accomplishments.

If what matters is what God has done, not what I've managed on my own, my life review takes on a different character. It's less about how I've lived and more about the life of Christ in me. I no longer tell a story of such small scale that I look big, but embed my story in God's great story of reconciliation. I'm less concerned with validating my own self-worth than with recalling the deeds of the One who alone is worthy.

That's the story I want to tell, anyway. Often, I focus more on what I've accomplished than on what I've witnessed of God's accomplishments. I would like to be more like Paul, who, when he looked back near the end of his life, focused not on his achievements but on his shortcomings. "I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man," he notes (1 Tim. 1:13). In spite of this, he goes on to say, "I was shown mercy." This mercy was part of God's larger purpose, "so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus

might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:16). The phrase "I was shown mercy" can more literally be translated "I was mercied." I like that. I too have been mercied, often when mercy was least expected. The vantage point afforded by advancing age is best used not to review my successes but to look back on the copious mercies I've received.

Memory and the Whole People of God

It is not just our own lives that we remember. In her book *The Spiritual Practice of Remembering*, historian Margaret Bendroth encourages Christian communities to keep alive the memories of our ancestors in the faith. Noting that historical societies erect markers to commemorate memorable events, she envisions church buildings filled with do-it-yourself historical markers—of a donor's generosity, of a life-changing sermon, of baptisms, of funerals, of members who regularly occupied this or that pew.

Our memories, after all, are not islands apart; each is connected to the whole. With age, we see a bit more of that whole than we did when we were younger. We remember what we were told by members of the family of God who no longer walk the earth; we remember the evidence of God's grace manifest in their lives. We tell their stories, and ours, so that the people of God might recall how richly the followers of Christ throughout the ages have been "mercied." Let's speak again and again of that vast panorama of grace. ■



Robert J. Ritzema, a clinical psychologist, practices part-time as a therapist at Psychology Associates of Grand Rapids, Mich.

ADS

Deadlines: 12/5/17 for Jan.; 1/2/18 for Feb. Subject to availability. Details online.

Prices: Most ads are \$0.40^{us} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.33^{us} per character and \$50 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

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Denominational and Classical

Announcement of Candidacy

We are pleased to announce that **JANET RYZEBOL** has now completed her academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word.

Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

We are pleased to announce that **RICARDO TAVAREZ** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word.

Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

We are pleased to announce that **JEFFREY HOOS** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

Calls Accepted

REV. DAN STEEN has accepted a call to serve Park CRC, Holland, MI.

REV. DAVID HEILMAN has accepted the call to serve as Advancement Coordinator at Inspiration Hills Camp and Retreat Center, Inwood, IA. Calvary CRC, Orange City, IA installed him October 22, 2017.

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS HEARTLAND will meet March 3, 2018, at Immanuel CRC, Sheldon, Iowa. Submit agenda materials by January 20, 2018, to the stated clerk: Rev. Robert Drenten, 1405 Albany Ave NE, Orange City, IA 51041 robert.drenten@gmail.com

CLASSIS ZEELAND will meet on Thursday, January 18, at 4PM, at the North St. CRC of Zeeland. Agenda deadline is December 6.

Rev. Ron Meyer, S. C.

Financial Aid

CLASSIS GRAND RAPIDS SOUTH invites students from their Classis who are planning to pursue full-time ministry in the CRC (undergraduate or graduate level) and are in need of financial assistance for the academic year 2018-2019 to apply for a classical grant. Applications must be received prior to February 15, 2018. Please apply at onefaith-manyfaces.org/leadership-development. Contact Rev. Stephen DeWit with any questions at: stephend@algerparkchurch.org or call 616-452-9686.

STUDENTS preparing for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church from Classis Heartland may apply for aid to assist them in their study for the 2018-2019 academic year by contacting Rev. Loren Kotman;

1111 5th Street, Hull, IA 51239; (712) 439-1123; pastor@hull1stcrc.com. The deadline is February 1, 2018.

Retirement

PASTOR DOUG ALDRINK RETIRES The congregation of the Racine CRC congratulates Pastor Doug on his recent retirement from the ministry. Pastor Doug served the Racine CRC for the past 9 years, and as a pastor in the CRC for the past 40 years. We will miss him, and we wish Pastor Doug and Laura many blessings in this next chapter of their lives.

General

SUN FOLLOWERS: Maranatha CRC welcomes winter visitors from Dec 3 to Apr 8. We meet in Farnsworth Hall, 6159 E University, Mesa, AZ at 10 am. Our preacher this season is Rev Harry Weidenaar. Check us out at mesamaranathaccr.net or like us on Facebook.

BYRON CENTER CHRISTIAN SCHOOL Celebrating 100 years of God's faithfulness on April 14, 2018. Call 616-878-3347 or email gurley@bccs.org for more information

Birthdays

100th Birthday

THE FAMILY OF DR GEORGE DE JONG anticipates the celebration of George's 100th birthday on January 7, 2018. Our hearts are full of gratitude for God's many blessings. The De Jong family: Dear late wife Agnes (Van Soest), daughter Shirley (Dr Ronald) Stavinga, Nina Stavinga and fiancé JD Schreiber, daughter Judy (late John) Van Vossen, Jon Thomas, and girlfriend Ana Miliauskas, his son Avery Moller, Karl (Meghan) Van Vossen, Morgan and Kate, Anne Marie (Aaron) Uzueta, Melina and Lydia, Son Bruce (Diane) De Jong, Lisa (Robert) Lorenzini, Sofia and Giuliana, Scott De Jong. and many beloved nieces and nephews. Greetings are welcome at: George De Jong, 10501 Emilie Lane, Apartment 1109, Orland Park, IL, 60467.

95th Birthday

GLADYS RYCKBOST of Newark, New York celebrated her 95th birthday on November 20. Celebrating with Gladys are her children Diane (John) Boers, Donna (Ken, deceased) Achterhof, John (Kathy), Bill (Diane), and Tom (Amy Woltersdorff), 13 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren and her long time church family, East Palmyra CRC. Greetings may be sent to 208 Route 88 South, Newark, NY 14513.

90th Birthday

DR. GORDON FRYLING will celebrate his 90th birthday on January 3. He would be delighted to receive mail from friends and former patients at 3387 Tomahawk Dr. Grandville, MI 49418. His children and grandchildren praise and thank God for his long and blessed life!

Anniversaries

60th Anniversary

KLOMP, EVERT & JOANN (SMIT) Celebrated their 60th Anniversary on Nov. 22 with their children: Donna & Roger Grit, Diane & John Flikkema, Evert Jr & Mary Klomp, Edward Klomp and Dave & Shanda Klomp. 16 Grandchildren, 16 Great Grandchildren. We Thank God for His Love, Faithfulness and Blessings!

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VOS, DON & MILLIE 1131 S. Prospect, Elmhurst, IL 60126 will celebrate 60 years of marriage on Dec. 6. They, along with their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren give thanks for God's continued blessings and faithfulness.

Obituaries

BULTMAN, LINDA of Grand Rapids MI, went to be with her Lord on October 19, 2017. She was preceded in death by her husband, Rev. Fred Bultman, Jr., and is survived by their children: Kathy Bultman and Rachel (Michael) VanderWall of Grand Rapids, Fred M. Bultman of Fremont, Rosemary (Dean) Ellens of Holland, Carolee Stebbins and Joanne Bultman of Wyoming, and Bonnie (Dale) Oliver of McKinleyville, CA; grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren.

FEDDES, MARVIN God blessed Marvin Feddes with health & energy until the last hour of his life. He entered the joyous presence of Jesus on Sept. 19, 2017. He is survived by his wife of 64 years, Nellie (Izenbaard); children: Michael (Rene), Dan (Robyn), Tim (Tami), Marvanne (Dwight) Logterman, David (Wendy), Paul (Deb); 27 grandchildren; 9 great-grandchildren.

FOLGERS, JACQUELINE JANE, a special child of God, age 65 of Grand Rapids went to be with her friend Jesus on Nov. 2, 2017. She is survived by her sister Carolyn (Bob) Zwiers; 3 nephews and their wives; 11 great nieces and nephews; special cousin Darlene. Hallelujah!

JAGER, MARVIN, 89, of Washington, NH, died September 27, 2017. He was predeceased by his first wife, Marilyn (Lemmen), in 1979, & is survived by his wife of 35 years, Nancy (Ribbens), son Eric (Peg) of Los Angeles, daughter Sonja (David) Greydanus of Baltimore, grand-

son Jacob Greydanus of Boulder, CO, sister Gladys Uitvlugt, brothers Ron (Grace), Nelvin (Lucille), Carl (Dianne) & many nieces & nephews. "Love is stronger than death."

KUIPERS, HARRIET KEYZER (DeHoek), age 96, passed away peacefully on May 28, 2017. She is lovingly remembered by her children, Mary (Ron) Schrottenboer and Jim (Vicki) Keyzer, her step-children Carolyn (Rich) VanderMeulen, Doug (Sharon) Kuipers, and Sharon (Rick) Vryhof, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She was predeceased by her spouses - Peter Keyzer and Claude Kuipers, her parents - Ed and Nellie DeHoek, and her siblings. Praise God for her caring heart, love of family, life of service, contented spirit, and example of a Christ-centered life.

NIEWENHUIS, CALVIN W., age 89, of Zeeland, MI, died Sunday, October 8, 2017, at Holland Home Fulton Manor in Grand Rapids. He faithfully served as pastor of seven CRC congregations from 1956 to 1993. Cal was preceded in death by his wife, Ethel, and is survived by his children—Joel & Dawn Niewenhuys, Ellen & Bret Davis, Karen Mansor, James & Maartje Niewenhuys—18 grandchildren, and 8 great-grandchildren.

SLAGER, HARRIET JEAN, passed away on Friday, Sept. 29, 2017. She leaves behind her husband of 66 years, Ralph; her sons, Dan and Dutch; her daughter, Ruth (John) Lemmenes; grandsons, Berant (Heather) Lemmenes, David and Matthew Lemmenes; great-grandsons, Michael and Cole Lemmenes; sister, Trudi (Bill) Newhouse; sister-in-law, Dorothy (Keith) Boyce; in-laws, Ken and Alice Slager.

SPAAN, REV. HOWARD B., age 97, of Beaverton, OR; died on October 19, 2017. He is survived by his wife of 70 years, Margaret, his sons Harlow, Radall, Curtis, and Scott, their spouses, two married grandchildren and two great grandchildren. He will be greatly missed.

Church Position Announcements

WORSHIP COORDINATOR First CRC in St. Thomas, Ontario is seeking to fill a 16-20 hour per week position for a Worship Coordinator. This position requires music proficiency and an ability to plan a variety of worship styles in a multi-generational setting within the Christian Reformed perspective of Blended Worship. Visit our website at www.firstcrcstthomas.com for more details. Email a cover letter and resume to firstcrcstthomas@gmail.com or by mail to 320 Elm Street, St. Thomas, ON N5R 1J7

PASTOR The congregation of First CRC in Sioux Center, IA is seeking a full time pastor. We desire a pastor who is passionately reformational, is committed to Christian education, and preaches in an expository manner. We prayerfully ask that those interested in learning more about this position please contact Mark Sybesma at sybm@mtcnet.net to begin building a relationship with our church. www.firstcrc.com

PASTOR: We at First CRC of Allendale, MI are looking for a lead pastor to help us connect with God in Worship, to grow our faith, and to Serve our community. If you are interested in sharing your faith and story with us, please contact our search committee at: SearchCom@firstallendalecrc.org.

SEEKING LEAD PASTOR Mill Creek Community Church, located in the exciting, growing north Seattle area, seeks a pastor to lead it into the next phase of its mission. We are an open and inviting church, seeking in all we do to reflect the renewing love of God in our community. Check out our church profile at millcreekchurch.com with information on how to apply. We are open to both women and men in leadership.

SENIOR PASTOR: First CRC of Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, is looking for the pastor God has prepared to continue on as shepherd of this flock. We are looking for a praying pastor to grow us in the Word so we can live relevant Christian lives in a changing world and reach the lost. To learn more about who we are go to our church website. <http://www.firstcrocky.ca/> To pursue this opportunity please contact Case Krover. cmkrover@hotmail.com or call: (403) 729-2185.

LEAD PASTOR POSITION San Jose CRC, a small suburban church in the San Francisco bay area, is seeking a dynamic individual with excellent gifts for preaching, teaching, pastoring, and administration.

Please email Steve Bouman at steveb@sanjosecrc.org for more information.

LEAD PASTOR: First CRC in Edgerton, MN is seeking a full-time pastor. We desire a man who is eager to humbly model integrity while leading our congregation with passion for the Lord and his Word. As an organized leader and effective communicator, he will shepherd us in growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and encourage us to remain committed to Him and to our covenant responsibilities. We seek a lead pastor who is willing to care for both the spiritual and emotional needs of the flock. To learn more, our church profile is available on our website firstcrcedgerton.com or email us at firstcrcsearch@gmail.com.

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC & WORSHIP Modesto, CA CRC is seeking a full time Director of Music and Worship. See detailed description at <http://www.modestocrc.org> 209-523-1906

PASTOR Inwood CRC in Inwood, IA values a pastor that is distinctively reformed and eager to preach God's Word. We ask those interested in shepherding our congregation to contact Gerald Brands at gerbrand@alliancecom.net for more information and our church profile. www.inwoodcrc.org

DUNCAN CRC ON beautiful Vancouver Island is seeking a full-time, dynamic pastor who would be a caring shepherd ministering to all ages in our congregation. More info available on our website duncancrc.org or by contacting the search committee at search@duncancrc.org

PASTOR - We're a healthy, family-focussed church in beautiful Calgary, AB, and we're already praying for you - our future pastor. Contact the search committee at peterdejonge@shaw.ca or 403-730-9543.

SOLE PASTOR HANLEY CRC located in Grandville MI is seeking a full time pastor. We are a warm supportive congregation who desires a leader with strong Biblical teaching, ability to interact with all age groups, enjoys pastoral care, and a heart for reaching and serving the community. Please see our church profile at CRCNA.org for more information, contact Jack Nyenhuys at 616-299-0596, or email: hanleychurch@att.net



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WILSON, SHIRLEY A. Passed away on October 5 in Artesia, CA at the age of 89. She was predeceased by her husband Jim Wilson and is survived by her only son Doug Wilson and daughter-in-law Lorraine from Bellflower, CA., in addition to 2 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild.

Employment

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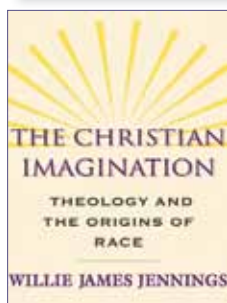


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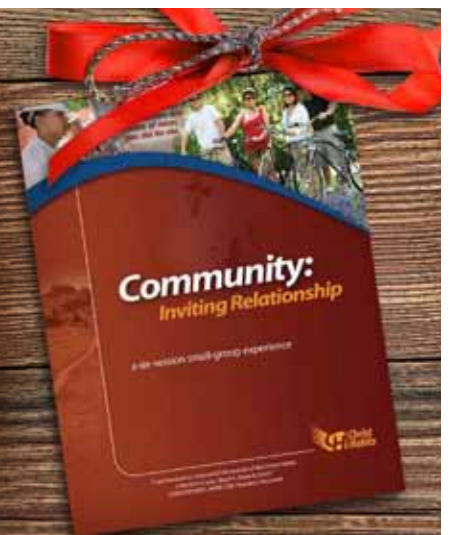
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Punch Lines

What tickles your funnybone? We're looking for original humor, including either true or fictional anecdotes (300 words max), original cartoons, or visual humor. Please send yours to editorial@thebanner.org.

In our senior retirement community there is a weekly vesper service. At a recent service the pastor titled her sermon "Biblical Napping." It was based on 1 Samuel 3 where Samuel was napping. At the close of the service, we sang "Open My Eyes."

Ron ten Elshof

Q. Why do cows wear bells?
A. Their horns don't work.

R. Smit

The man's beloved old convertible was in deplorable shape, but he refused to get rid of it. So when the old junker was stolen from his office parking lot, his family was delighted.

They called the police and filed an insurance claim.

Their relief was short-lived, however. Within an hour, an officer was on the phone.

"We found the car less than a mile away," he said, trying to restrain his laughter. "It had a note on it that read, 'Thanks anyway; we'd rather walk.'"

Marie Albers

I'm reading a great book about anti-gravity. It's really hard to put down!

Andrea De Boer

Matthew and I were watching a kids' program on TV. At the end, Matthew asked, "Grandpa, is this a video or TV?"

I said it was TV. He replied, "I wish it was a video." I responded, "Why, did you want to see something over again?"

"No," he said. "I want to fast-forward to *Dragon Tales*."

Ralph Slager

A boy and his dad were talking over possible use of the family car on Saturday after the boy's successful completion of driver's training and the issue of his license.

"That will be fine," said the dad. "But first I want you to complete your homework and Bible memory work for the week—and get a haircut."

On Saturday the young man stood expectantly before his dad.

"You didn't get a haircut!" said his dad.

"But Dad, you know that Moses, Elijah, and Jesus all had long hair, right?"

"You know what else?" said his dad. "They all walked."

Paul Bierens

Our grandson, 7 at the time, was learning all about recycling in school. Apparently

the teacher told the students that the person in the school who did the best job of recycling would win an iPad.

Our grandson, very excited, came home and told his dad all about it.

His dad said, "Do you know what an iPad is, son?"

"Sure," said our grandson. "That's what a pirate wears over his eye!"

Linda Wichhart

An athlete suffered a serious injury and was not allowed to participate in any more games.

It left him feeling totally out of sports.

A. Whipple

The doorbell rang. When she opened it, the lady of the house discovered a worker, complete with a tool box.

"Ma'am," he announced, "I'm the piano tuner."

The woman exclaimed, "Why are you here? I didn't send for a piano tuner!"

The piano tuner replied, "I know you didn't, but your neighbors did."

Jan Velkamp



THERE IS A STRAIGHT AND WIDE. THERE IS A CURVY AND NARROW. I HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO PROCEED.

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