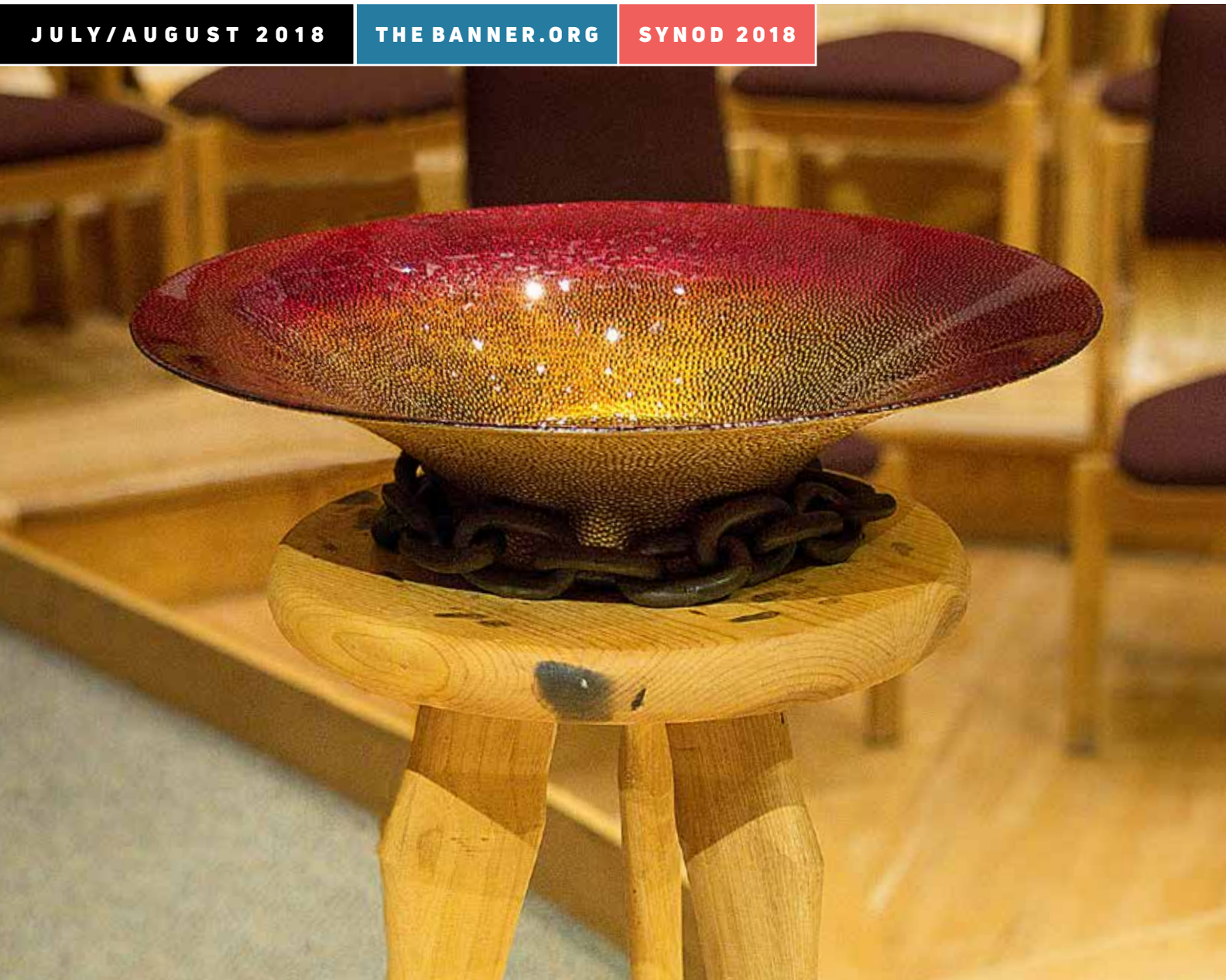


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 *The body of Christ remembered, not forgotten*

Christ's Body Has Big, Long Arms

by **Roze Meyer Bruins**

Central Reformed Church, Grand Rapids MI

As the minister to seniors at Central Reformed Church, it's gratifying to witness the range of God's reach in the world around us.

Scene 1: "I wish my church would do that," said a staff person at a local retirement facility. She had asked about the basket I carry that contains the tableware and elements for the Lord's Supper—the communion basket.

This family of faith in downtown Grand Rapids has big arms, long arms—big enough and long enough to reach into the dozen plus homes and retirement communities of its homebound members to regularly offer the Lord's Supper. The communion table, usually a walker, is set with a satin cloth in the current liturgical color. The gold military communion tableware, a gift from an Army chaplain, is sufficiently large and bright for the older eye.

To accommodate arthritic hands, the communion juice is poured into plastic shot glasses. The bread takes many forms—from naan bread to wafers to croissants—whatever is easiest for the particular parishioner to swallow. "Take, eat...Take, drink... Remember and believe that the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was given and shed for a complete forgiveness of all your sins." We are the church, the body of Christ, remembered, not forgotten.

Scene 2: "My church did this for me?" an elderly and bedridden saint asked as she clasped the soft prayer shawl next to her face. Assured that her church remembers, loves, and prays for her, she smiled. A year later, this soft and brightly colored prayer shawl would cover this beloved child of God as she breathed her last. At her loved one's request, the shawl, a sign of God's abiding love, was included in the cremains.

Scene 3: "Tell us about our prayer partners," excitedly asked the elementary church school classes. "Does mine have a cat or dog?" Each student receives the name and profile of a homebound parishioner, with whom they would correspond, visit, and pray. And, the big and long arms of this faith family? They make a covenant connection between the young generation and the older a living reality, maybe including a pet or two!

Scene 4: No talk, just doing, by parishioners age 66 and older (186 of Central's parishioners were born before 1953):

- Knitting prayer shawls.
- Corresponding with homebound siblings in Christ through cards, visits, phone calls.
- Serving as church elders, musicians, liturgists, committee members.
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More online

Thanks for reading this excerpt from the summer 2018 *Breaking Barriers*. This newsletter and the Disability Concerns blog (network.crcna.org/disability), co-published by CRC and Reformed Church in America Disability Concerns ministries, received a first place award for the blog and second place for the newsletter this year from the Associated Church Press.

Find a link to the rest of our summer edition, back issues of *Breaking Barriers*, editions in Español and in 한국어, and a link for electronic subscription at our website (www.crcna.org/disability).

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- » TV Show: *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*
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- » As I Was Saying: The Darkness Shall Not Overcome



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Cover: Synod 2018. This baptismal font created by members of Pillar Church in Holland, Mich., was used as an illustration in the opening worship service for the jointly held synods of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. Pillar Church has dual CRC and RCA affiliation. The font symbolizes past hurts turned to present blessings (see story on p. 22).

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Praying for Our Lives

Revival begins
with us humbly on
our knees praying
for our lives. . . .



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

Spanish and Korean translations of this editorial are available at TheBanner.org.

이 기사의 한글번역은 TheBanner.org/korean 에서 보실 수 있습니다.

Este artículo está disponible en español en TheBanner.org/spanish.

“WE NEED TO LEARN to pray like our lives depend on it.” I was struck by these words spoken years ago by Moses Chung, then director of Home Missions, now Mission Innovation director for Resonate. Those words have convicted me that my prayer life is not as fervent as it should be. I admit I am more comfortable with analysis, strategic five-year plans, creating new structures, and studying the Bible than with spending an hour praying. I know prayer’s utmost importance on an intellectual level, but in practice I probably underestimate its power.

That is why I was struck by synod’s prayerful atmosphere this year. There were prayers for synod before it even gathered. Our joint worship services with the Reformed Church of America synod featured times of prayer in small groups as well as video messages assuring us that our synods were being prayed for by Christians in India, Niger, Brazil, and South Korea. Many times synod paused its work to pray for various matters. I saw people praying in groups beyond these organized prayer times. I was personally involved in four impromptu occasions of praying for others and being prayed for by others, in a hallway, in a prayer room, out in the pathways, and in the parking lot. So it did not surprise me at all to hear delegate Ray Dennis, Classis Georgetown, remark that this was the most pastoral synod he has ever experienced. I believe those prayers also brought us closer in unity.

Last October, I wrote about our need for a “new reformation” (Oct. 2017). It was a call to revival and renewal. I suggested that we need to rely more on God and less on our strengths and intellect and asked

us to lean into our heritage’s more flexible side, the side that is willing to get messy with the Holy Spirit for the sake of God’s mission.

That sentiment is echoed by the Council of Delegates’ Report to synod, *Appendix D: List of Resources re Church Renewal, Church Planting, and Evangelism Training*:

The first . . . conclusion is simply that renewal for evangelism and church planting is an act of the Holy Spirit and not the application of “the correct tools” by ministry professionals. . . . The Lord must breathe life into the dry bones of his church (Ezek. 37) and give it a passion for evangelism and church planting. Such breath reinvigorates Christ’s church for mission through **prayerful encounters with the Holy Spirit**. The question is, *Do we want it?* Such a movement of renewal will be messy in our current church culture [emphasis mine] (*Agenda for Synod 2018*, p. 74).

I no longer think that revival starts with getting either our theology or social activism right, as important as both of those are. Revival does not begin with us standing tall with our Bibles in one hand and either protest signs or theological tomes in the other. No. Revival begins with us humbly on our knees praying for our lives, recognizing that we cannot save ourselves or even our denomination. Because of this year’s prayerful synod, I am hopeful for the CRC. **B**

Don’t forget our *Banner* essay contest for college students! USD \$1,000 first prize. Deadline: July 13. For details visit thebanner.org.



Céline-Lori Malepart for The Banner

Why Read the Bible?

(And How to Do It, With a Little Help from *Lila*)

Benjamin Lappenga

In Marilynne Robinson's novel *Lila*, old Reverend John Ames finds himself worried by his new wife's approach to the Bible. Ames is the son and grandson of pastors and has spent the better part of his many days reading and preaching the Bible. Lila, on the other hand, is uneducated and only recently acquainted with church. Yet she loves to copy verses from the Bible onto a notepad, and her favorite author is the prophet Ezekiel. Reverend Ames becomes concerned because she is reading and rereading portions of Ezekiel 5 ("I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the nations around you, in the sight of all who pass by . . .") at the expense of what he views as more accessible and useful parts of the Bible. He asks

her, "Why Ezekiel? That's a pretty sad book, I think. I mean, there's a lot of sadness in it. It's a difficult place to begin." Lila responds, "It's interesting. It talks about why things happen."

Ames, always the preacher, feels the need to educate Lila with the proper theology and the proper context by which to make sense of God, Israel, judgment, and the rest. But Lila has little interest in Ames's theological tricks to avoid reading the Bible itself. Robinson describes Lila's thoughts: "She was mainly just interested in reading that the people were a desolation and a reproach. She knew what those words meant without asking. In the sight of all that pass by. She hated those people, the ones that look at you as if they want to say, *Why don't you get your raggedy self out of my*

sight. . . [Here was Lila herself, right] in the Bible. Don't matter if it's sad. At least Ezekiel knows what certain things feel like. That voice above the firmament. He knows the sound of it."

I spend my workdays writing about and teaching the Bible. Nothing makes me happier than to be asked to help answer questions about the Bible, to promote better comprehension of Scripture, and to pass along tools and insights I've learned. In my experience, however, it's rare that even the best preachers or scholars or teachers will help you want to read the Bible (other than by the contagiousness of their own enthusiasm). It has to come from you, just like it did for Lila. And that means curiosity and delight, not compulsion and how-to books.

If you're reading this article and thinking, *Right, yes, I'm so bad about reading the Bible, so I need to commit to a reading plan, or buy a good devotional or a fancy new study Bible, and I hope The Banner gives some good suggestions*—stop. Just stop. If you read the Bible out of obligation or guilt, little good will come, and your time is better spent on other activities (I recommend poetry, hiking, or volunteer work).

Likewise, if you're reading this and thinking, *Well, I go to Bible study every week, and do devotions with every evening meal, so this article should make me feel good about myself*—watch out! Are you really reading the Bible, or do you think you already know what it says (and what it does)? Many of us, not least the “church lifers,” are exceptionally skilled at avoiding reading the text itself. Even when we “study the text,” our assumption that we know what it should say (think of Reverend Ames) prevents us from noticing what it actually does say. Put your trusty study Bible down for a while; those notes tend to swallow up all our attention. Get a new translation or two (try the NRSV alongside *The Message*). Read a version without the chapters and verses marked (make your own with a computer and a printer, or check out *bibliotheca.co*). Whatever you do, read—and read expecting to be surprised.

What Lila encounters in Ezekiel is a conversion of her imagination, and in this she helps us with both the “why” and the “how” of Bible reading. While I value catechesis and good theological education from childhood on (by all means, learn the Heidelberg Catechism, read *The Jesus Storybook Bible* with kids, and ask a trusted pastor or biblical scholar about good books and study tools), the thing I hope most for myself and my young children is that the Bible forms us. It elicits unexpected questions. It makes us react differently to the people and things around us. It carries us to a world that is altogether

different, yet makes us, like Lila, feel more at home than any other place.

If Lila's fascination with Ezekiel seems dangerous (*Wait—she reads Ezekiel but hasn't yet read John 3:16!*), relax. As James, Paul, and nearly every other biblical author remind us, the measure of our grasp of the Bible is whether it is put into play in our lives,


[The Bible] carries us to a world that is altogether different, yet makes us . . . feel more at home than any other place.

in community and through the Spirit. If our reading results in retreat from the world, hatred toward human beings, neglect of the marginalized, or the desecration of the earth, something has gone awry, no matter how long a tradition has been around or how sound our exegesis seems to be.

Most of us won't begin with Ezekiel. But avoid thinking that the Bible—for children or adults—begins with Noah, Goliath, and Jesus in a manger because far too often this means we end there too. Do you like snakes, ships, and (dare I say) sex? Flip to Proverbs 30:18-19 and discover wonder. Are plot twists and trickery up your alley? Spend a day with Michal and David (1 Sam. 19), and chat with some kids about whether it's ever okay to lie (and consider the better questions the text raises about two competing options that seem equally good). Like to sing? I

dare you to read Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55) or Psalm 40 and try to keep silent. Have trouble with Revelation? Read it out loud with a group of teenagers, in a prison, or with the homeless and let its explosive beauty wash over you like a thunderstorm.

God's incredible gift was to give us a great big story, filled with smaller stories and many types of literature, not a list of what to believe. We begin like kids, with identifying what's there, and then embark on the beautiful back-and-forth between the Bible and the rest of the world. With each circuit we return both changed by our experiences and ready to be surprised again. Do it with others. Learn from other readers of the Bible from cultures and times far from your own. Pray as you read, or read as you pray. Weep, lament, scream, shout. Most of all, read because you want to. I like to think Lila would also recognize herself in the exclamation of that other great prophet, Jeremiah: “When your words turned up, I feasted on them, and they became my joy, the delight of my heart” (Jer. 15:16-18, CEB).

After all those failed attempts at reading the Bible, in spite of (or because of) having all the resources in the world at our fingertips, how can this response happen? How are we to delight and feast on these ancient words? The answer for Jeremiah—and for Lila, for you, and for me—is that it's simply who we are: “I belong to you, LORD God Almighty” (Jer 15:16, GNT). 



Benjamin Lappenga is associate professor of theology at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, where he teaches courses in biblical studies, hermeneutics, and Greek.



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Expect Tears and Anticipate Joy

The morning I arrived, I was greeted with coffee brewing and chocolate croissants baking.

“Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy” (Ps.126:5, NLT).

IN NOVEMBER OF 2016, my sister was diagnosed with breast cancer after a routine mammogram revealed a lump in her left breast. She was 43 years old. Becky would need a mastectomy and chemotherapy. I know it’s superficial, but I couldn’t help thinking about her beautiful hair.

If you’re anything like me, you can probably remember the first time you ever had some serious hair envy. When I was a little girl, my first long-haired idol was my older sister, Becky. I still remember wearing towels on my head, dreaming of the day when I could boast the same flowing, silky, Farrah Fawcett hair that she had. Instead I rocked my little ‘fro that my mom swore was all the rage, endured being mistaken for a boy, and sat through painful comb-outs.

Cut to adulthood and some more regrettable hairstyles. My sister continued to rock long and gorgeous hair. And my envy turned to adoration for the big sister I love.

In February, 10 days after Becky’s first round of chemo, I left my husband and three kids in Virginia and made the four-hour drive to Kentucky to be with my sister and her family. It was one of the best weekends of my life. Don’t get me wrong. It was tough and exhausting, it hurt to see my sister living with cancer, and this was no carefree girls’ weekend away. But it was precious and important. It cemented an already strong bond I have with Becky—the kind of bond only sisters can share and suffering can bring.

The morning I arrived, I was greeted with coffee brewing and chocolate croissants baking. Becky is always

five steps ahead. With a gift of caring for others, her home is the kind of place you love to visit and never really want to leave. She had cut her hair into a bob, anticipating the hair loss. I was surprised to see a full head of beautiful hair and became hopeful it wouldn’t fall out after all.

Unfortunately, when my sister showered that morning her hair began to fall out in clumps. This made the cancer visibly obvious. We “planted in tears.” When I asked my brother-in-law to shave my head in solidarity (he gave me a mohawk before shaving it all), we harvested “shouts of joy.”

My sister, looking in the mirror and staring at her bald, white head, her disease looking back at her, planted tears. Driving to Jerome’s Beauty Boutique in Lexington, trying on some fabulous wigs—shouts of joy!

Going to dinner with friends that night, facing them for the first time with no hair: tears. Wrapping Becky’s head up in a beautiful scarf from our stylish sister-in-law: joy!

That whole weekend, God restored us in our sorrow. In our grief he gave us joy, no matter how silly or insignificant. We felt real delight, and we found ourselves rejoicing. When life comes at us fast and hard, we should expect tears. But we can also anticipate joy. **B**



Rachel Von Stein is a writer and a nurse who stays home with her three small children in Madison, Ala. She attends The Village Church.

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Did Jesus Really Exist?

True comfort in “body and soul, in life and in death” requires a Savior with a real body and soul who experienced real life and death for us and for our salvation.

“**WHAT’S A BAD** guy like Pilate doing in the creed anyway?” asked a student in last semester’s study group on the Apostles’ Creed. As we talked, the students themselves realized the phrase “He suffered under Pontius Pilate” was fixing the trial of Jesus to a real time and place: the rule of the prefect of Roman Judea, A.D. 25-36. It’s a non-negotiable for Christianity that Jesus really existed. But for some other religions, historical details about their founders don’t really matter. “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him,” speaks a Zen Buddhist maxim. In other words, whether the Buddha really lived is irrelevant because it’s only his teaching that matters. Christians could never say this about Jesus. A true comfort in “body and soul, in life and in death” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1) requires a Savior with a real body and soul who experienced real life and death for us and for our salvation.

But can we know for sure that Jesus existed?

There’s a lot of evidence for the existence of Jesus—far more, in fact, than for any other ancient figure of that day. Ancient Roman (Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny) and Jewish historians (Josephus) from the late first and early second centuries make reference to him. New Testament books such as Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, 1 Peter, James, and Hebrews were providing details of Jesus’ life and death only a few decades after the fact. Some might protest that the New Testament is “biased” evidence—and, of course, it is.

But the most likely explanation for the existence of Christ followers in the first century is the fact that there was a Christ to follow. Why would the early church invent a gospel of a crucified Messiah that was both absurdly

counterintuitive to their audience (1 Cor. 1:23) and extremely dangerous to themselves? And what sense would it make for Peter to remind his readers that Jesus was “leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21) unless they knew Jesus had actually lived and died? The ancient non-Christian and Christian evidence for the existence of Jesus is so compelling that even scholars unconvinced by the claims made about Jesus in the New Testament regarding who he is as God’s Son don’t doubt that he existed. It’s significant that the most impressive recent argument for Jesus’ existence, Bart Ehrman’s *Did Jesus Really Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (HarperCollins, 2012), was written by an agnostic.

But these days it’s typically not in campus classrooms or scholarly books where Jesus’ existence is being denied. It’s in popular films like Bill Maher’s 2008 mockumentary *Religulous* that claim there’s no historical evidence for Jesus of Nazareth, or in the large number of websites devoted to proving that the early church fabricated Jesus on the basis of Greco-Roman myths. These arguments have a whiff of conspiracy about them, as if we’ve all been duped for 2,000 years into believing a make-believe Jesus.

My impression, though, is that these critics are less intellectually skeptical than they are cynical. It’s not just that they resist the clear pull of the evidence toward affirming the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth; it’s clear to me that for all their talk about evidence, they don’t want to believe in a Jesus they don’t think they need.

“The heart has its order, the mind has its own, which uses principles and demonstrations,” wrote Pascal. “The heart has a different one” (*Pensées*, 298). It probably won’t work to try to overwhelm these doubters’ minds with more historical evidence for Jesus’ existence. What if we were to inquire instead about the reasons of their hearts for not wanting to believe in him? **B**



Todd Statham is the Christian Reformed campus minister at the University of British Columbia’s Okanagan campus.

Practicing Unity, One Step, One Synod at a Time

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President Greenway reminds delegates (using Bon Jovi): "Oh, we're halfway there . . . oh, oh livin' on a prayer!"

First clerk Mary Lee Bouma: You can stop singing now!



Some synods show church unity; others show increasing divisions in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). After two years of the latter, making me wonder if the CRC could hold together, I saw Synod 2018 delegates looking for ways to stay together and deepen the church's relationship with the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Synod is the annual leadership meeting of the CRC.

Perhaps because it was a synod bathed in prayer, delegates were trying out new ways of practicing unity.

It could have turned out so differently.

Doing Justice

Conditions were ripe for a showdown over how denominational leaders and agencies advocate to governments on issues such as immigration, poverty, and climate change. For some, those actions cross the line from advocacy to lobbying on positions church members cannot agree on, rather than promoting the underlying values we do agree on.

After a rancorous discussion last year over the Do Justice blog (July/Aug. 2017, pp. 20-21) published by the CRC's Office of Social Justice (OSJ) and the Centre for Public Dialogue, two groups of churches (classes) brought requests to this year's synod to put limits on the agencies that would restrict them to taking up only ecclesiastical matters.

A chance coffee break discussion turned into a lunch including delegates from the classes seeking to put limits on the social justice agencies and representatives of those agencies (p. 20). That seemed to set the stage for a much more tempered discussion on the floor of synod.

In the end, synod mandated the creation of a committee to provide guidance and support for the OSJ (p. 18). It will be modeled after the Committee for Contact with the Government, the body that provides the same support for the

Centre for Public Dialogue, the Canadian counterpart to the OSJ.

Delegates from classes that brought the objections told me they finally felt "heard."

Delegates were assured that the committee would include people holding a variety of political viewpoints. Time will tell if that will be enough to keep peace.

Uniting over Abuse Prevention

A surprising show of unity came from a very unlikely source; an overture (request) from an individual that was not officially supported by her church or her classis. Bev Sterk, from Lynden, Wash., asked synod to address abuse of power dynamics in the church. She wanted officebearers in the church to be required to take two or more hours of abuse prevention training and sign a code of conduct.

Rarely does an item from an individual rather than a classis gain much traction at a synod. But this one was different—perhaps because many delegates knew someone who had experienced abuse. Whatever the reason, this synod wanted abuse prevention work beefed up (p. 26).

The CRC's Safe Church ministry does amazing work with limited resources, supporting classis Safe Church teams and sharing myriad resources for churches. Synods have for decades urged churches to have Safe Church policies and classes to have a Safe Church team. In many places, that urging has been ignored. While a synod cannot order classes and churches on this matter, it will in the future publish the names of classes that fail to appoint a Safe Church team. It also instructed the CRC's Council of Delegates (which acts on behalf of synod between its meetings) to come back to Synod 2019 with recommendations to address abuse of power at all levels of the denomination.



It remains to be seen whether that will break new ground, but delegates made their wishes very clear.

Still Divided over Women in Office

An area that still at times strains unity in the CRC is the role of women in church leadership. Synod 1995 recognized two official positions for the church: One that includes women in all church offices and one that excludes them from serving in office. Both seek to honor Scripture.

One classis still registers its objection to seating women as delegates at synod. That can be uncomfortable for the women present. Two lengthy videos celebrating the journey of women into church leadership shown in a gathering of all delegates from the CRC and RCA was awkward for those who don't believe the participation of women as church leaders is scriptural.

Synod 2018 allowed a church in one classis to change to another (p. 29) because it didn't want to be in a classis that allowed women delegates.

Because of this and other ongoing issues that divide, Synod 2018 urged the executive director to issue a purposeful and consistent call to the entire denomination to be intentional in prayer for reconciled relationships (p. 21). It urged all church members to actively seek to reconcile strained and broken relationships even if that attempt is not reciprocated.

Continued Common Cause with RCA

The most predictable actions of synod were increasing efforts to work together with the RCA. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all," was the drum beat of the sermon co-preached by pastors Jena Brandsen and Jon Brown during opening night worship of a synod that included joint sessions with the RCA (p. 24). Each day, morning worship continued that message of unity.

Such actions increasingly undo the damage caused more than 160 years ago when the CRC was created by four congregations splitting away from the RCA. The denominations now act on the basis of the Pella Accord struck in 2014 that requires them to "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel [them] to act separately."

A Pastoral Synod

Although it could have been a very divisive synod, fourth-time delegate Ray Dennis, Classis Georgetown, described Synod 2018 as the most pastoral synod he has ever attended.

That doesn't mean there won't be rough road ahead, especially on the topic of same-sex relationships due to come back to the CRC synod in 2021. But if delegates and churches can continue to practice these steps of unity and continue to bathe the church in prayer, there is hope that unity can prevail.

—Gayla R. Postma,
news editor for The Banner

When asked how many knew someone who had experienced abuse, nearly all of the delegates raised their hands.

Fresh Faces on Synod 2018 Executive



Left to right: Cal Hoogendoorn, Scott Greenway, Elizabeth Vander Haagen, Mary-Lee Bouma

Delegates to Synod 2018 elected a young group (by synod standards) as its executive officers, a group that has only 11 synods between them but extensive experience serving the church.

They were president Scott Greenway, vice-president Elizabeth Vander Haagen, first clerk Mary-Lee Bouma, and second clerk Cal Hoogendoorn.

—Gayla R. Postma

Synod 2018 Creates New Justice Committee



Tom Bomhof, Classis B.C. South-East: We are Christians first, and members of political parties second.



Wayne Coleman, Classis Thornapple: If it wasn't for advocacy, where would we be? We are called to advocate for people who need it.

To engage or not to engage, and how? Should the church as an institution call its members to political action? When are such calls appropriate and when are they not? That was at the heart of three requests to Synod 2018. Would the discussion of those requests fall into familiar patterns, one political viewpoint against the other in the polarization that affects so much of political life, especially in the United States?

Shawn Brix, Classis Quinte, who introduced the discussion, framed it by saying, "Some of the material we're addressing has to do with process . . . but much of it also has to do with broken relationships, relationships between our mercy and justice staff and those who disagree with some of their content or approach. Some of these relationships are stretched, strained, even broken in some instances."

He noted that it is hard to be pastoral in a setting like synod with its 200 participants and formal rules. Much of the language online has been negative, even inflammatory and hurtful. "Today," he said, "we want to turn a corner, to find a new way of dialoguing that begins with listening, listening to those who differ from us and learning from them."

Brix concluded his opening speech by saying, "I'm going to declare that it's out of bounds for anyone to leave this dialogue today declaring a winner. If that happens, we've all lost."

In the end, it seemed that everyone won.

The issue of how the church should engage politically was raised by three classes: Minnkota, B.C. South-East, and Columbia.

Minnkota cited examples of actions by CRC staff and the Office of Social Justice (OSJ) that it said exceeded their mandate, such as denominational leaders signing on to the Evangelical Climate Initiative Statement and the OSJ posting an action alert advocating funding for Medicaid to continue support of family planning.

Minnkota's overture said, "We believe that engaging in this kind of activity goes beyond demonstrably biblical proclamation and embraces a particular political philosophy or strategy." The classis requested synod "to instruct all agencies of the CRCNA to take up ecclesiastical matters only and to refrain from political advocacy."

Classis Columbia took a different tack. They distinguished between lobbying, which they defined as asking for a specific action, and advocacy, by which they meant the expression of principles. They wanted agencies like the OSJ to be barred from lobbying the government on specific legislation or asking members of the church to do so.

Classis B.C. South-East emphasized the importance of education. That classis wanted agencies like the OSJ to make greater efforts to educate the church in biblical and justice matters.

Synod delegates agreed that it is important for the church to continue to engage the social, political, and economic layers of public life, that the church should continue to pray for justice and mercy, that churches should continue to pray for the CRC as it speaks the gospel to the nations, and that the church should pray for growth in wisdom with respect to these matters.

Wayne Coleman, Classis Thornapple, wanted more, not less, advocacy. Calling on the experience of the Black church in the U.S., and citing Dr. Martin Luther King, he said, "When I read these overtures [from Classes Minnkota and

“We live in an age of individualism, and against that individualism the CRC has held to the idea that we are in covenant with God and each other.”

Columbia], I was deeply troubled. If it wasn't for advocacy, where would we be? We are called to advocate for people who need it.” He said that the greatest advocate “was Jesus Christ, our Lord, who advocated for us when we did not deserve it.”

For Gary Duthler, Classis Alberta North, speaking together to the powers of our time expresses “the heart of the Christian Reformed Church.” We live in an age of individualism, he said, and against that individualism the CRC has held to the idea that we are in covenant with God and each other.

Synod got to the heart of the issues by creating a committee to provide guidance and support for OSJ. The model for this new committee is the Canadian Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG). This committee, now 50 years old, provides guidance and support for the Centre for Public Dialogue, OSJ's counterpart in Canada.

In the Canadian context, this arrangement has worked well. The idea is that the new U.S. committee would provide for the OSJ the same structure and counsel as the CCG provides for the

Centre. Delegates asked how committee members are selected and how it works. Darren Roorda, director of Canadian ministries, and Mike Hogeterp, director of the Centre, familiarized synod with how it functions. Delegates were assured that committee members would bring a range of political opinions.

Ben Boersma, a young adult representative, said that the proposal “seemed like good middle ground.” Delegates were also happy with the plan, which promised to both temper the OSJ and protect it from unfair criticism.

Tom Bomhof, Classis B.C. South-East, praised the committee that had brought the proposal. He said, “We tend to be shrill, entrenched in and tied to our views.” He added, “We are Christians first and members of political parties second.”

Synod asked that in the future the justice and mercy ministries connect theological reflection with political advocacy, fostering discussion and education based on biblical principles for public discipleship, and that, in the case of calls for action, these ministries “provide rationale that is biblical, theologically Reformed, and grounded in . . . denominational positions.”

Some time was spent discussing whether to include an instruction to the OSJ and other justice ministries that they should present alternative political stances when issuing a call for action. Synod rejected this idea, with several delegates saying that it was impractical.

In a remarkable show of unity and good spirit, synod applauded the officers of the committee that had formulated the recommendations, reporter Shawn Brix of Classis Quinte and chair Brian Kuyper of Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan.

Synod delegates had entered the discussion with what seemed to be trepidation, afraid that the deep divisions in society would explode into a difficult and



Shawn Brix, Classis Quinte: We want to turn a corner, listening to those who differ from us and learning from them.

divisive debate in the church. It emerged from the discussion with a sense of new possibilities for dialogue and unity. Perhaps it was summed up best by Darrell Delaney, Classis Grand Rapids East, who said, “The essence of justice is the restoration of shalom [peace]. God's shalom is for all the world because the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.”

—Clay Libolt

Talking Justice: Face to Face Is Way Better Than Facebook

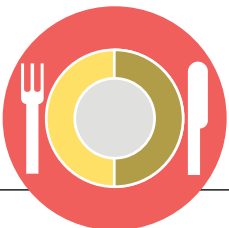
Left to right:
Rob Toornstra,
Mike Hogeterp,
Kate Kooyman,
Josh Christoffels,
Roger Sparks,
Reggie Smith,
and John Byl



Photo provided to The Banner

2000 700%

Meals served to
CRC and RCA synods.



God’s shalom seemed to be at work when people on both sides of a thorny issue met face to face. An informal chat begun at coffee time led to a longer lunchtime conversation—a conversation everyone at the table described positively.

Delegates from Classis Minnkota and Classis Columbia sat down for lunch with employees of the Christian Reformed Church’s social justice agencies. Minnkota and Columbia made requests to Synod 2018 objecting to various aspects of the agencies’ justice work.

“We felt they were listening well, hearing our concerns, and responding well,” said Rob Toornstra, Classis Columbia.

“This conversation felt better at a table,” said Mike Hogeterp, director of Canada’s Centre for Public Dialogue. “It felt like a faithful way of engaging. Way better than Facebook.”

“We had a wonderful conversation,” said Roger Sparks, Classis Minnkota. “We shared with them that advocacy goes over better with our constituents than actual lobbying.”

“Given the polarization here in the United States, this kind of face-to-face communication is really important,” said Kate Kooyman, justice education team member for the Office of Social Justice.

Over lunch, they talked about the removal of a Do Justice blog post in response to concerns raised at last year’s synod. “[Removing the blog] was not an easy decision for us,” said Hogeterp. But in the end they removed it “because it was an obstacle to meaningful conversation.”

“[That helped us know that] they were really listening to us,” Sparks said.

The two parties discussed justice-related overtures from those classes that had not yet been discussed by synod.

“Our goal is not to say justice doesn’t matter or to get rid of the Office of Social Justice but to say, ‘How can we do this well?’” said Toornstra.

Both groups acknowledged that tensions remain in their relationship, but added that addressing their differences openly was helpful.

“We invited them to come back to continue the conversation,” said Toornstra. “We need to be challenged in the area of what it means to do justice.”

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod Recognizes Conflict, Urges Reconciliation

Synod 2018 heard a request from Classis Pacific Northwest to address unresolved conflict in the Christian Reformed Church and how it contributes to the church's 25-year membership decline. This regional group of churches suggested that "a contributing cause of that change is the emotional and spiritual hurt and grief caused by the bitter conflict that remains unresolved. . . . The hurt of that conflict has become institutionalized and normalized, and is at the root of the CRCNA's failure to thrive."

In response, Synod 2018 agreed to urge the executive director to issue a purposeful and consistent call to the entire denomination to be intentional in prayer



Lori Fieber, Classis B.C. North-West: I'm excited about all this language toward reconciliation.



Roger Sparks, Classis Minnkota: We need to move toward each other and deal with the things that have divided us. I wonder if we are ready to do that?

for reconciled relationships with special focus toward brothers and sisters who have left the CRC for various reasons.

It also urged all church members and assemblies to use Matthew 5:23-25 as a model, recognizing where hurt has been given and actively seeking to reconcile strained and broken relationships.

Lori Fieber, Classis B.C. North-West, said, "I'm excited about all this language toward reconciliation." She noted that an environment that is conducive to restoration must include willingness. "Let's continue to make overtures and offers of reconciliation toward those we are in conflict with, but be patient," Fieber said.

Herbert Schreur, Classis Northcentral Iowa, emphatically affirmed that not acting because another party is unwilling is not an option. "In the parable of the sower, 75 percent of the seed falls on bad ground. But we are not excused from sowing that seed, and we are not excused from reaching out to those who aren't going to respond."

Synod further agreed to urge the executive director to work with the appropriate agencies and ministries to publicize existing resources addressing unresolved

Delegates pray for reconciliation.

conflict in our history and the need for reconciliation, and to include a focus on reconciliation in the CRC's next ministry plan cycle.

Roger Sparks, Classis Minnkota, wondered if synod was being too general in its talk of reconciliation. "Pointing to resources is a good start, but we actually have to get specific," he said. "We need to move toward each other and deal with the things that have divided us. I wonder if we are ready to do that?"

Synod closed its discussion of reconciliation with a reading of Matthew 5:23-25 and a time of prayer among the delegates.

—Alissa Vernon

Tools of Destruction Turned to Tools of Grace

At the jointly held synods of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA), a symbol of past hurts turned to present blessings was used as a sermon illustration in the opening worship service led by Rev. Jon Brown and Rev. Jenna Brandsen, co-pastors of Pillar Church, a congregation with dual CRC and RCA affiliation in Holland, Mich.

The history of Pillar Church includes an 1882 majority vote to leave the RCA, the denomination with which it was then affiliated. Congregants who won the vote are said to have physically barred the minority faction from returning to the church with chains and axe handles. For 130 years the brokenness went largely unmentioned as the continuing congregation became affiliated with the CRC and proceeded with ministry—until it became clear that the church was dying and the congregation began a process of discerning what to do.

Eventually the church decided to become reestablished as a dually affiliated congregation in 2012. As part of the reestablishment service, a unique baptismal font was introduced to serve the church.

Long, wooden axe handles hold a platform for the bowl, and a thick chain surrounds its base. These tools of destruction that had once been employed by some members of the church to bar a minority group have now become tools of grace. Church members created the font with the words of Isaiah 2:4 in mind, metaphorically beating swords into plowshares.

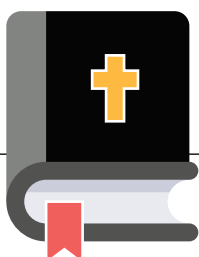
The collaborative vision behind the baptismal font came from Jon Brown, Jonathan Gabhart, and Ron Rienstra. They had been invited by Rev. John Witvliet to consider thinking about “not only what people will hear when they come to Pillar but what they will see.”

9

“Just as we see in Isaiah, God intends to repurpose our weapons of destruction for his tools of renewal!” Brandsen said.

—Alissa Vernon

Women ministers of the Word delegated to Synod 2018.



The baptismal font at Pillar Church.

At Worship, Two Synods Are Better than One

Dr. Michelle Loyd-Paige challenged worshipers to move as well as sing.



Synods are at their best in worship. And two synods in worship are better than one. On June 10, the synods of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA) gathered together for worship. At times exuberant, at times prayerful, the service was driven by the conviction that the two denominations share a common mission.

As is the tradition, the service was hosted by a local congregation. For this service, the host was Pillar Church of Holland, Mich., a union CRC/RCA congregation with roots deep in the history of both denominations.

The message was brought by Ajoy Kumar Lama of India. Lama converted to Christianity as an adult. He leads several evangelistic and discipleship ministries in India in cooperation with the CRC's Back to God Ministries International and the RCA's Words of Hope.

He preached on 1 Corinthians 9:22-23: "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel" (ESV). Walking through several texts including Ephesians 4, John 17, Philippians 1, and 2 Timothy 1:11-12, Lama emphasized the need for Christian unity. He stressed that "unity [among Christians] is essential."

Unity is achieved, he added, in learning to sacrifice individual wishes and preferences for the sake of others and for the gospel. With grace and humor, Lama moved the message into a direct challenge to the two denominations to unite in mission, putting aside their preferences and becoming, as Paul says in the text, "all things to all people, that [they] might by all means save some."

— *Clay Libolt*



Dr. Ajoy Kumar Lama

RCA and CRC Delegates Discuss their Shared Future

For the first time ever, delegates from the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) gathered together in small groups to discuss and provide direction on four proposals to increase cooperation. These proposals were intended to give direction for the future.

The RCA and the CRC, which come from common roots, separated initially in 1857. For many years there was little direct communication between the denominations, but in recent years they have moved to become more collaborative. In 2014, both synods adopted what has become known as the Pella Accord, which is to “act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel [them] to act separately.”

The proposals discussed by the groups presented new ways for the two denominations to cooperate. They varied from probable, already-in-the-works ideas to a less likely, what-if idea for the future. Proposals already being worked on or likely to be worked on soon include ways of further consolidating denominational services, especially in the area of congregational renewal, and a joint

effort to promote and shape interfaith engagement. Less likely at present is a proposal to join and radically reconfigure the denominations.

Five groups met to discuss “New Creation,” the most radical proposal to join and reconfigure the denominations. In the proposal, the RCA and CRC would unite as one new denomination with three affinity synods. The groups discussing this proposal were dubious. Instead, they found hope and joy in increasing collaboration between the CRC and the RCA.

The groups discussing increased collaboration between the denominations were enthusiastic about the possibilities presented to them. One proposal envisioned future collaboration between the denominations in a “jointly developed and owned central service center” that would consolidate denominational services.

The remaining two proposals were specific examples of possible collaboration. One was an effort to bring together church renewal resources and programs so that congregations seeking assistance would be able to easily access what is currently available and what may become available. The other is a proposal to cooperate across denominations in learning how to engage other religions.

Delegates spent time in a plenary session discussing what they had heard. What happens next to the proposals has not been specified.

—Clay Libolt

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Percentage of total delegates who were first-timers.



CRC to Collaborate with the RCA in Interreligious Matters



Two days after the synods of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA) met together in a unified and unifying worship service, the CRC synod debated whether or not to cooperate with the RCA when reaching out to other religions.

The occasion for the debate was a report from the CRC's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC), indicating that it was working out an arrangement with the RCA to cooperate in interreligious matters—relationships with non-Christian faiths. By the time synod met, the EIRC had received a request from the RCA to merge their two committees for this work.

Not all delegates agreed with the move. Joshua Christoffels, Classis Minnkota, objected, noting that the proposal to merge the committees had come too late for delegates to have sufficient time for review. He also wondered whether the RCA was a suitable partner for the CRC in this work, noting that "the CRCNA has different priorities and standards when it pertains to interfaith and ecumenical relationships."

Stanley Jim, Classis Red Mesa: Interreligious work would be strengthened by the RCA's experience in ministry with Native Americans.

However, others called attention to the call for unity earlier in the week. Mark Brouwer, Classis Northern Illinois, said, "I find it ironic and troubling that we say we are one, and then, when things like this come, we find reasons to slow things down."

Lenore Maine, Classis Hackensack, added, "As the world grows smaller, we need to think bigger." She worried about the opportunity to cooperate with the RCA slipping away: "We may not have this partner forever asking us." She urged moving ahead with the new cooperative venture.

Stanley Jim of Classis Red Mesa brought in the perspective of a Native American. He said that every tribe has its own religion, and that there are more than 500 tribes. He suggested that interreligious work would be strengthened by the RCA's experience in ministry with Native Americans.

For James Vanderleeuw, the proposal was a matter of having a place at the table: "We have more influence at the table if we are in the room instead of standing outside the door." Synod agreed. It voted to authorize the EIRC to work with the RCA in interreligious matters.

—Clay Libolt



At Synod 2018's opening worship service, an offering was taken for Disability Concerns, a joint ministry of the CRC and the RCA. The counting committee included the chief financial officers of the two denominations: Jillisa Teitsma (RCA) and John Bolt (CRC). More than \$3,000 was raised.

“

In razzing Canadians about some pronunciations, like prooocess (long o), President Scott Greenway reminded delegates that synod was meeting in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Doug MacLeod replied: "So it's Report 5b, eh?"

”

Synod 2018 Confronts Abuse



Adam Barton, Classis Northern Michigan:
We continue to wring our hands and offer our thoughts and prayers; we should not be content with what [past] synods have done.



Dayna Vreeken, Classis Alberta North:
Why can't the church require that pastors have abuse [prevention] training? The church is falling behind in this area.

Synod 2018 confronted the issue of abuse, now much in the news in the #MeToo and similar movements. During a lengthy and at times passionate discussion, synod looked for ways to strengthen the position of the denomination against abuse while respecting the autonomy of congregations and classes.

The question was how to respond, especially in light of the current focus in the broader culture on various kinds and instances of abuse. The denomination has for years funded the Safe Church office to help churches respond to and prevent abuse. Its director, Bonnie Nicholas, reported to synod that the number of cases coming to her office has doubled each year over the past three years.

Shawn Brix opened the discussion by saying, "These are issues that affect us all." He asked the delegates to raise their hands if they knew of someone who had experienced abuse. Nearly all of the delegates raised their hands. In prayer, Brix confessed, "Too often we hurt the vulnerable among us."

In the course of the discussion, several women spoke of abuse in their own lives, one saying that from a young age she had been groomed by a person in the church for abuse and another calling herself a "refugee" from another denomination in which her daughters had experienced abuse.

In an exception to common practice, the discussion was brought to synod by an individual church member, Bev Sterk of Lynden, Wash., without the official support of her congregation or the classis to which her congregation belongs.

Sterk asked, among other things, that all those who hold office in the CRC be

required to attend two to four hours of training on abuse prevention each year; that pastors sign a code of conduct; that classes offer training in restorative practice; that Calvin Theological Seminary add abuse prevention training to its curriculum; and that synod address the issues surrounding non-disclosure and other confidentiality arrangements that may serve to hide abuse.

Brix noted that while Classis Pacific Northwest had not passed Sterk's petition on to the synod, it has not dropped it either. The classis appointed a committee with Sterk as a member to work out how to implement her recommendations.

Synod reaffirmed the work of past synods, particularly 2010, which received and acted on an "Abuse Victims Task Force Report," and 2014, which formulated five goals, including goals that every congregation should have a Safe Church abuse prevention policy and that every classis should have a functioning Safe Church team.

Not every classis has been responsive. Brix noted that despite repeated calls by synods through the years for churches and classes to adopt Safe Church policies and appoint teams, approximately 30 percent of the churches do not have Safe Church policies in place, and approximately half of the classes do not have Safe Church coordinators and teams.

Some delegates wanted more than that. Andrew Hanson, Classis California South, said that in addition to telling the classes and congregations what should happen, synod should use its power to make them happen.

In response, Brian Kuyper, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, drew on language from the CRC Church Order, saying that synods are not permitted to "lord it over" classes and congregations.

Dayna Vreeken, Classis Alberta North, challenged this. She asked, "Why can't

“Too often we hurt the vulnerable among us.”

the church require that pastors have abuse [prevention] training?” She said, “It’s not ‘lording it over’ but protecting those who are vulnerable. The church is falling behind in this area.”

Jeanne Maher, Classis Grand Rapids North, stood with Vreeken. She said that taking actions that would require people holding office in the church to take additional training in abuse prevention is not just to protect potential victims: “Elders, pastors, it’s for their protection, too.”

Adam Barton, Classis Northern Michigan, pressed the issue. He said that the present synod should “not be content with what [past] synods have done,” adding, “We continue to wring our hands and offer our thoughts and prayers” instead of taking direct action.

In addition to reaffirming past decisions, synod decided to require in the future that the number and names of classes that fail to appoint a Safe Church team be published.

The question kept coming back to what more synods can do. Are they limited to “naming and shaming,” or can they in a more direct way enforce Safe Church policies? Can ministers and other church officials be required to attend abuse prevention training or sign a code of conduct?

Synod proceeded without definitely deciding those questions. It instructed the Council of Delegates (the administrative board of the denomination) “to appoint a small team to bring recommendations . . . to Synod 2019 regarding how the CRCNA can best address the patterns of abuse of power at all levels

of the denomination.” Appointing a team or committee is a time-tested way for synods to push off tough decisions to the next year.

Regardless of whether Synod 2018 broke any new ground, Bonnie Nicholas, head of the denominational Safe Church office, was appreciative of the discussion. She said that effective Safe Church practice cannot be top-down. “Where there is the most success [at the classis level], there is always a champion.” She urged every classis to have not just a Safe Church team but a Safe Church coordinator so that every classis has a champion.

Bev Sterk, author of the petition, sat through most of the discussion, including long interruptions when the synod had to take up other business. Asked at the end of discussion what she thought, Sterk said, “I’m very thankful.” She also expressed gratitude for the ongoing work on abuse prevention in her classis. She added, “I think [there] will be a powerful collaboration between the denominational level and the local level.”

As synod concluded its discussion, Shawn Brix asked the delegates to recognize Sterk, who was seated in the back of the auditorium. The delegates gave her a standing ovation.

—Clay Libolt



Synod gave Bev Sterk, author of the overture, a standing ovation.

Synod Receives Candidates for the Office of Minister of the Word

New candidates for ministry.



Synod 2018 of the Christian Reformed Church received 43 new candidates for the office of minister of the Word, welcoming them with words of encouragement and congratulation and a time of worship.

By the numbers in the past year:

- » 44 ministers retired
- » 27 ministers left CRC ministry
- » 64 men and women entered CRC ministry

Twenty candidates stood as David Koll, director of candidacy, read all the names, noting that many of the 23 who were not present would be joining the proceedings through the live webcast. He asked synod to “receive these persons as gifts of God to the church.”

Koll noted and gave thanks for the many people—pastors, mentors, youth leaders, and others—who played roles in forming the faith of those marking this milestone.

Calvin Seminary president Jul Medenblik told the candidates: “This is a church that loves you, that desires to pray for you, and also to challenge you to a long obedience in the same direction.”

Synod Vice President Elizabeth Vander Haagen closed the time by praying for the candidates as delegates laid hands on them, each standing with the classis that had supported them.

—Alissa Vernon

Funds Found for Immigrant Churches



Joel Zuidema, Classis Illiana

Classis Atlantic Northeast and Classis Illiana asked for \$25,000 to assist immigrant churches to affiliate with the Christian Reformed Church. The funds would be used to assist with transition and relocation expenses for immigrant religious workers, administrative expenses associated with immigration requests, and offsets to immigration lawyer expenses to provide immigrant pastors as needed.

When this initial request wasn’t accepted, Joel Zuidema of Classis Illiana requested \$10,000 to be made immediately available because a Chin-speaking Burmese pastor is willing to pastor the Syracuse Chin Church, and synod’s support would strengthen a visa request.

However, delegates were reminded that a synod is unable to pass a motion without including the source of funding.

After synod asked the executive director and agencies to explore processes and resources related to this request, delegates came back from a break, and Zuidema joyfully reported that funding to meet the immediate need of the Syracuse Chin Church would come from the Financial Shalom Project Fund.

—Alissa Vernon

Rules for Commissioned Pastors Clarified

Commissioned pastors in the Christian Reformed Church become pastors by special assignment rather than by completing an accredited theological education. Previously they were known as “ministry associates” and, before that, “evangelists.”

As more and more people enter ministry by alternate routes, leaders want to better establish procedures for commissioned pastors in the CRC.

Not all situations are addressed by current rules. For example, some Christian Reformed churches have begun to hire commissioned pastors with the agreement that they will pursue ordination.

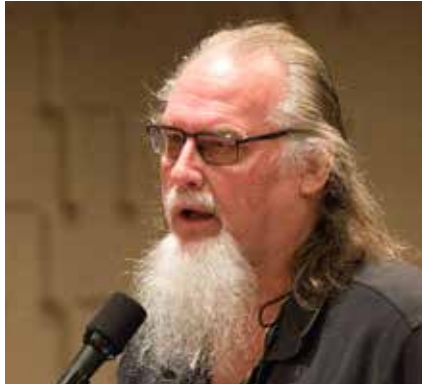
In answer to the growing number of commissioned pastors, Synod 2018 took several measures. Synod

- » required background checks and psychological assessments for commissioned pastors serving in solo or senior roles.
- » initiated a reformat of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook for final consideration by Synod 2019.
- » took steps toward requiring that solo/senior commissioned pastors develop and complete a “contextualized learning plan.”

The report before synod stated that “though not expected in all circumstances of persons serving as commissioned pastors, a plan toward candidacy may be beneficial for the pastor and the church.”

Because the report recommends significant changes to the Church Order, it will go to Synod 2019.

Rod Hugen, Classis Arizona, said that adding requirements can be burdensome to commissioned pastors,



Rod Hugen, Classis Arizona: Adding requirements can be burdensome to commissioned pastors, especially without corresponding funds.

especially without corresponding funds. “At some point we need to figure out what we are offering them as well as what are we expecting of them,” said Hugen, himself a commissioned pastor.

Melissa Van Dyk, Classis B.C. North-West, asked, “Why not require all commissioned pastors [not just those in solo/senior roles] to have background checks?” to help ensure safe churches. David Koll, director of the CRC Candidacy Committee, responded that the CRC has recommended background checks for all commissioned pastors but has not required them. Such a requirement could come before a future synod, he added.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Church Switching Classes Raises Church Unity Discussion



Anthony Elenbaas, Classis Hamilton: Living with people with whom we disagree forces us into a position of humility.

Peace Christian Reformed Church of Menno, S.D., asked to transfer to Classis Minnkota, a group of churches located mostly in Minnesota, but also with congregations from as far away as Michigan. For some years, Classis Minnkota has acted as an affinity classis appealing to conservative congregations. In this case, as in others, the congregation requesting transfer does not believe that women are permitted to serve in church office.

When Classis Iakota, its classis, permitted the delegation of women, Peace CRC requested a transfer. Classis Minnkota agreed to the transfer, but Classis Iakota did not. Instead the classis asked that the congregation remain while the classis explored ways to accommodate diversity on this issue.

Speaking against the transfer, Anthony Elenbaas, Classis Hamilton, said that when theological diversity in a classis is lessened, “the classis is impoverished.” Living with people with whom we disagree “forces us into a position of humility.”

Robert Toornstra, Classis Columbia, challenged those who opposed the transfer. He said that for the sake of unity “we need to allow congregations to leave.”

—Clay Libolt

Women Reflect on Female Leadership in CRC



First All-Female Classis Delegation

For the first time ever, a classis sent an all-female delegation to synod. From left, Melissa Van Dyk, Lori Fieber, Mary-Lee Bouma, and Dena Nicolai together represented Classis B.C. North-West.

Bouma, B.C. North-West's minister delegate, was one of the first women ordained in the Christian Reformed Church. "It's quite a beautiful change to see all these women here," she said. "There is quite a difference when you have women and men together. There is something beautiful about this."

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Photo by Carol Bremer-Bennett

About 30 female church leaders celebrated the history of women in the Christian Reformed Church while attending Synod 2018.

"We named courageous women from the past, present, and future of our denomination," said Denise Posie, the CRC's director of leadership development for women and ethnic ministry. "We can't neglect the history."

"There was the feeling of 'You belong here, you're important, you have a voice,'" said Carol Bremer-Bennett, World Renew-U.S. director.

The group then walked outside and read a liturgy together by candlelight.

Posie came to synod to have conversations about women in ministry, she said. Women's leadership is, she believes, "the greatest challenge in our denomination." Over a quarter of CRC churches (27 percent) do not have any women in church office. Just over half of them have female elders and deacons on council.

"When [past synods] agreed to hold two positions on women in office, we

Women shared a liturgy by candlelight.

didn't think about how do we live that out," Posie said. "There is lots of work that needs to be done. It begins with love, humility, and a willingness to do the work."

Posie wants to build a team of people both for and against women in office and meet together regularly to "hold these tensions in ways that honor God." Meanwhile, she is planning a special celebration for 2021, which will be the 25th anniversary of the first female ordination in the CRC.

That history of women in the denomination was emphasized in a video shown to synod Friday evening. According to the leadership development ministry, the CRC now has 149 female pastors, 101 of them ordained as ministers of the Word.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

In Memoriam: Rev. Peter Borgdorff (1939-2018)

Peter Borgdorff loved the Lord, his family, the Christian Reformed Church, and the church worldwide. Although diagnosed with brain cancer in April, Borgdorff died sooner than anyone expected—on the 21st of May. He was 78.

Referring to the challenging denominational positions Borgdorff held over the years, pastor Joel Boot reflected, “I came to know that he did not so much choose that life as recognize he was chosen for it. It was hard and often painful. But he did it enthusiastically because he lived ‘to the Lord.’”

In 1951 Borgdorff’s family immigrated from the Netherlands to Hamilton, Ont., where he lived until he attended Calvin College. He graduated from Calvin Seminary in 1969 and obtained a D.Min. from Western Theological Seminary in 1990. He served the CRC for more than 38 years in a variety of positions under various titles from congregational ministry to administration, including as executive director, until 2006.

William Koopmans, who worked frequently with Borgdorff over the last 12 years, described his heart for ecumenism. “Peter’s contributions and insightful leadership were widely appreciated in Reformed ecumenical circles. He was instrumental in the merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Recognizing that to be a successful ambassador for ecumenism requires more than passing relationships with others, Peter developed and maintained an amazing breadth of global friendships among church leaders. His passing is grieved by countless ecumenical contacts around the world.”

Similar tribute was paid by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary emeritus of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). He spoke of his relationship with Borgdorff during Synod 2018. Their work together led eventually to the Pella Accord of 2014. That year, both denominations pledged to “act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel [us] to act separately.” This year, the synods of both denominations met together, holding several joint sessions.

Borgdorff also found time to do local church work—to mentor seminarians, to serve on the personnel committee, to be a church visitor at classis, and to be involved in refugee and immigrant resettlement. He was a fierce advocate of justice. “And all of this was outside the parameters of his potentially all-consuming denominational position,” Boot explained. “How he found the time, how he called up the energy, how he summoned the patience, I always wondered, until I remembered he viewed it as his calling to ‘live to the Lord.’”

“He was all those things people noted,” said Janet, his wife of 55 years. “However, he was also the ordinary guy in our lives who we will miss every day.” He loved golf, happy hour, traveling, and spending time with those he loved. He was preceded in death by their oldest son, Leonard, in 2012. He will be lovingly remembered by Janet, their four children and spouses, and 16 grandchildren.

— Janet Greidanus



Courtesy photo

Family Ties with the Dominican Republic CRC



John Medendorp grew up in the Dominican Republic.

Reformed (Iglesia Cristiana Reformada) after the CRC, and they wrote to the offices of the Back to God Hour in the Chicago area to let them know who they were. From those small roots, they have grown into a denomination of more than 200 congregations.

For Synod 2018 president Scott Greenway, receiving this church as a partner denomination sparked a memory. His father, Roger Greenway, then Latin American Secretary for CRC World Missions, took the younger Greenway on a trip to the D.R. They had received word that “there were some churches there claiming to be Christian Reformed.” When they arrived, they found a small building with “Christian Reformed” on the front. They stayed for a worship service—a long, exuberant service quite unlike anything one might have found in those days in the CRC in North America. When the service was done, Greenway asked his father, “Is that a Christian Reformed Church?” His father replied, “You bet it is.”

John Medendorp grew up in the D.R. while his father was a missionary there. He said that it had always seemed odd to him that this church, whose history is so deeply embedded in the history of the CRC, was not included in the list of churches with whom the CRC has established an official ecumenical relationship.

Synod affirmed the ties between the two Christian Reformed Churches with an enthusiastic and unanimous “Aye.”

—Clay Libolt

Synod 2018 designated the Christian Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic as “a church in dialogue with the CRC”—a category of ecumenical relationship used by the CRC Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee. For two of the delegates, it touched deep memories.

The CRC in the Dominican Republic (D.R.) became a Reformed church not as the result of missionary efforts but by listening to the Spanish broadcasts of the Back to God Hour—a radio ministry of the CRC. The members of this small church decided to call themselves Christian

15

Percentage of total delegates from an ethnic minority.



Ecumenical Guests Greet Synod



Two ecumenical delegates brought greetings to the Christian Reformed Church at Synod 2018.

Rev. Tshililo Liphadzi, Reformed Churches in South Africa (Soutpansberg Synod)

Rev. Lisa Vander Wal brought greetings from the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), where she serves as one of four vice presidents. Expressing thanks for the period of collaboration between the CRC and RCA, Vander Wal said, "It is indeed good and pleasant when God's people dwell together in unity."

Rev. Tshililo Liphadzi of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (Soutpansberg Synod) also brought greetings and encouraged the CRC delegates. He said, "Your ministries truly indicate you are not an inward-looking church, but indeed saved to serve."

—Alissa Vernon

More Synod Actions

Synod 2018

- » Approved a \$7 ministry share increase (2 percent).
- » Received a list of resources for church renewal, church planting, and evangelism training, fulfilling Synod 2017's request.
- » Designated Faith CRC in Wyoming, Mich., as the convening church for Synod 2019, which will be held on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich.
- » Took note of the new Classis Renewal Advisory Team and encouraged all classes to develop and share their ministry plans so a summary can be forwarded to Synod 2020.
- » Asked for an increase in gender and ethnic diversity in the CRC Judicial Code Committee, which is tasked with helping to resolve serious disputes.
- » Encouraged congregations, classes, and agencies to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the historic Synod of Dort in 2019.
- » Called the church to prayer for Nicaragua, where roadblocks, gang violence, and looting have been escalating and the work of World Renew and Resonate Global Mission staff has been hindered.
- » Honored Dr. Michael Williams, who is retiring as Calvin Theological Seminary's professor of Old Testament and Hebrew.
- » Decided that one classis cannot send an appeal to another classis, circumventing synod.
- » Awarded commemorative plaques to churches that are more than 150 years old.

Tasks for the Council of Delegates

- » Recommend for a future synod how to address its responsibility regarding the review and approval of Bible translations.
- » Clarify expectations for the denominational funding of Reformed curricula in the future.
- » Continue to be attentive to possibilities for combining program functions and infrastructure within and beyond the denomination.
- » Assemble a committee to provide guidance and support for the Office of Social Justice.
- » Appoint a team to bring recommendations to Synod 2019 for addressing abuse of power at all levels of the denomination.

—Banner staff

“

President Scott Greenway: If you are having technology difficulty, raise your hand for the help of the IT staff in blue shirts.

Oh no, now the people in blue shirts are raising their hands!

”

Married Couples as Delegates a Synod First

In a first for the Christian Reformed Church, Synod 2018 had not one but two delegations that included a married couple. Steve and Louise Breuker are from Classis Muskegon. Steve came as an elder delegate and Louise was there as a deacon.

Edward and Jenny Yoon are from Classis Ko-Am, where Edward is a pastor and Jenny is a deacon at Phoenix Korean Presbyterian CRC.



Jenny and Edward Yoon



Louise and Steve Breuker

Young Adult Reps Hopeful About the Church



Young adult representatives, from left: Kristy Bootsma, Lydia Verstrate, Ben VanderWindt, Izhar Alvarez, Benjamin Boersma, Robyn Stegink, and Jenna Rodermond.

This year's young adult representatives were impressed—and encouraged—by the processes of church government.

"People our age know very little about how the church is run," said Jenna Rodermond.

"A lot of care goes into this process," said Lydia Verstrate. "How special it is to be here and be part of the church and see how widespread it is. To hear the perspectives of people across the U.S. and Canada." Robyn Stegink said she would use her experience at synod to become more involved in the church in the future.

Rodermond cast a vision for synod's future: "I hope that in 10 years we won't need young adult representatives because there will be so many young people as delegates on the floor of synod."

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Notable Facts from Synod Agenda

- » 3,000,000 people receiving daily Back to God Ministries International digital devotionals.
- » 1,350,000 total page views on Center for Excellence in Preaching website.
- » 3,500 recipients of OSJ News, the monthly electronic newsletter from Office of Social Justice.

From Playground to Synod Floor

Annie Biggs, Classis Greater Los Angeles, has 40 years experience as a playground supervisor. Announcing her appointment as sergeant-at-arms for Synod 2018, synod president Scott Greenway said her experience shepherding children and her handy cane would serve Biggs well in the role.

The sergeant-at-arms is tasked with directing delegates to return to their places after a break. Biggs could be heard rewarding gold stars—“gold stars for you”—to those slipping in early.

“My high school counselor said I had the aptitude of a marine drill instructor,” Biggs said.

—Alissa Vernon



Annie Biggs

Synod's Oldest and Youngest Delegates



Jenna Brandsen, Classis Holland, and Esther Korzilius, Classis Kalamazoo, were this year's youngest and oldest delegates to synod.

Brandsen, 27, is a pastor of Pillar Church in Holland, Mich. Korzilius, 81, is a deacon of Third CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich.

Synod a Family Affair



Delegates Matt Ackerman and Jennifer Geelhoed, who are brother and sister, enjoyed some family time with their aunt, Elsa Fennema, while at synod. Fennema is a member of the CRC's new governing body, the Council of Delegates.



Delegate Rob Toornstra, Classis Columbia, was surprised to see his father, Bert, who secretly flew to Grand Rapids, Mich., from Edmonton, Alta., to be a synod volunteer.



Jack van de Hoef (Classis Eastern Canada) attended with his daughter Lynette van de Hoef (Classis Chatham).

Photo courtesy of Jeff Bolt.

Diary of a First-Time Delegate

By Sanneke Kok (Classis Iakota)



Photo credit: Lee Hardy

Sanneke Kok is enjoying an active retirement from teaching languages at Dordt College. She worships at Covenant Christian Reformed Church, Sioux Center, Iowa.

June 8

The first order of business for us was to elect the officers of synod. We ran into a bit of trouble with an overloaded Wi-Fi system, which created a blended voting process: electronic, when possible, and paper, pencil, and bringing-to-the-podium when the system was down.

Then we were off to advisory committees. I had been placed on Committee 4: Interdenominational Matters. I got lost in the Covenant Fine Arts Center trying to find the room. Arriving in the nick of time, I squeezed in next to the chair of the committee chairman—yikes—and beside a husband/wife pair of delegates from Phoenix. We introduced ourselves to each other and got a list of assigned matters to discuss and on which to make recommendations to synod. For the rest of the day, with breaks for lunch and refreshment, we read, listened, and discussed, coming up finally with recommendations for the whole synod to consider.

June 9

The day began with a worship service held with the members of the Reformed Church in America synod, who were also meeting at Calvin College. Today was an advisory committee day. We first had joint advisory committee meetings with the RCA people.

The rest of the day was spent in our CRC advisory committee, working through the agenda items we were preparing to present later on the floor of synod. Being a first-timer at synod, I mostly listened. Our chairperson encouraged each member of the committee to contribute, though, and we got to hear from everyone.

June 10

Today is Sunday. First chance to sleep in a bit—and I needed it. I went to my sister's church in the morning, where I met the president of the Christian college in our hometown, along with his wife. I'd been asked to help distribute the communion elements at a combined local RCA/CRC worship service Sunday evening. I went up to my assigned station in the mezzanine and introduced myself to the pastor who was keeping watch over the elements to be distributed later in the service. Turns out that he'd been an RCA pastor in our town for many years, and his son currently holds that position! It just goes to show how even in our small towns, our denominations can keep us moving in different orbits.

June 11

You've probably noticed the theme of CRCNA/RCA togetherness. That continued today when the first part of the morning was spent in another joint session in which reports of the joint advisory committees were heard.

This morning session's goal was basically to come up with some practical ways the RCA and CRC could continue working together in the future. Actually, the results of it were not so practical, but it was a good exercise in imagining possibilities.

The rest of the day was spent in plenary sessions that lasted till 9 p.m. Whew! A lot of things to keep straight! However, things were done "decently and in good order" in spite of some friendly unruliness now and again and lots of emotionally charged discussion on points of difference.

June 12

The plenary session continued today. Various recommendations were discussed and debated. Extra meetings of committees and between committees were held in order to reconcile varying opinions and points of view. Numerous times we stopped discussions and prayed specifically for the Holy Spirit to be present with us. This was hard work. Yet it was striking how respectful people were of each other and how unity and reconciliation between different thinking parties was always sought. Another late night, but we were making progress.

June 13

Delegates were treated to a wonderful banquet during the lunch hour on Wednesday. We enjoyed excellent fellowship with lots of laughter and good food. We were refreshed and ready to continue. In fact, so refreshed were we all that we tackled the remaining agenda points energetically, and, skillfully led by our officers, we completed our work by 5 p.m. and took the evening off!

June 14

So, no business items to report. All synodical committee work was completed yesterday. As we had done many times during this synod, we took time in little groups around our tables to talk to the Lord. Things that I personally thanked God for were nurturing in me the seed of awareness and patience for listening to those who have been sexually, emotionally, or spiritually abused by others in positions of power.

I also thanked God for the growing visible participation and leadership in the CRC by African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos and Latinas, Koreans, and people from quite a few other countries, as well as contributions by the young adult advisors to synod and the younger generation of pastors, elders, and deacons.

I thanked God for the opportunity to get to meet and to know some of the thinking of the women and men who sat around me at the tables, as well as those who spoke up on the floor of synod and in advisory groups.

While being part of the universal body of Christ is my main identity, I thank God for the ongoing work through the members and leaders of the Christian Reformed Church.

“

President Scott Greenway, thanking his fellow executive members: Anything smart that came out of my mouth was because one of these people whispered it to me. I'm a 40-watt bulb amidst 100-watt bulbs. And this one's flickering.

”

27

Percentage of total delegates who were female.



IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Harry Hendrik Boer
1940-2018

Being told he had acute kidney failure was the impetus Harry Boer needed to finish his (currently unpublished) book, *God's Deacon*. He was able to send copies to family members and other interested persons. He died on March 30, three months after his diagnosis.

Boer was 10 when his family moved from the Netherlands to Vancouver Island, B.C., where he lived until he attended Calvin College and Seminary. Boer was ordained in 1968 and served the following CRC congregations: Grangeville, Idaho; Charlottetown, P.E.I.; and Beacon Light, Gary, Ind. After two years of chaplaincy training, he began working part time as chaplain at Queen's Medical Centre in Honolulu and as pastor at Central Union Church. For five years, he and his wife were directors of the CRC Hospitality House in Honolulu until it closed. For the next decade Boer worked as a full-time chaplain in the Chicago area until his retirement in 2006.

Boer will be remembered for his kindness and understanding, his sense of humor, and his love of music. He often sang during pastoral visits.

Predeceased by daughter Ellie in 2000, Boer is survived by Barbara, his wife of 56 years; children Carolyn and Robert and their spouses; and by six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

—Janet Greidanus

'Coming Home': CRC Chaplains Gather, Remember Those Passed

Chaplains in the Christian Reformed Church serve beyond the walls of the church in diverse, pluralistic settings in the United States and Canada as well as in Iraq, Italy, and South Korea. Once a year they come together to grow, share, and learn from each other's experience. The 2018 Chaplains Training Conference, with the theme 'Coming Home,' gathered in Grand Rapids, Mich., on June 7-9. Along with participating in workshops and fellowship, the chaplains also marked the eternal homecoming of nine chaplains over the past year, including former chaplaincy directors Hal Bode and Herm Keizer.

A number of the chaplains present had attended Keizer's military burial service at Arlington National Cemetery on May 23 and spoke of the event.

"The chapel service was meaningful and heartfelt," said Gloria Kroeze, a fellow CRC chaplain. "The processional with the military guard followed by the six-horse-drawn caisson bearing the flag-draped casket and the riderless horse was awe-inspiring." The burial included the folding and presentation of the flag, a gun salute, and a bagpiper. "The interment was an amazingly honoring event for an amazingly honorable man," Kroeze said.



Ardis Keizer (front, holding the American flag), Herm Keizer's widow, with chaplains who attended the May 23 funeral at Arlington National Cemetery.

The conference also celebrated milestones of service, including the presentation of an American flag to Chaplain Major InSoon Hoagland on her retirement from the U.S. Army. The CRC's first ordained female military chaplain, Hoagland served in Army installations from South Carolina to South Korea, Texas, and Kansas, as well as in two year-long deployments to Iraq. All CRC military chaplains in the room stood at attention as CRC Army Chaplain Lt. Col. Scott Koeman presented the flag.

The CRC's Chaplaincy and Care Ministry orchestrated the training conference, attended by 138 chaplains and spouses as well as 17 seminary and clinical pastoral education students.

—Janet Greidanus

Dordt and Calvin Colleges to Be Renamed as Universities

This spring Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, and Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., announced their intentions to alter their institutional status within the next two years.

Dordt College will become Dordt University in May 2019. Calvin College will become Calvin University in May 2020.



Noteworthy

The Canadian Council of Churches, the largest ecumenical organization in Canada, elected Peter Noteboom to the position of general secretary for a five-year term begun in May. Until last September, when he left to serve as acting general secretary of the council, Noteboom had been Canada director of advancement for the Christian Reformed Church Foundation.



Peter Noteboom



Photo: Ziploc Brand commissioned portrait

Paul Peterson, a member of Valley CRC in Binghamton, N.Y., was honored as a teacher Super Hero in a national campaign recognizing teachers who make a difference. A creative portrait of Peterson composed of classroom memorabilia was commissioned.

Carol DeYoung, also a member of Valley CRC, was named 2018 Country Woman of the Year by *Country Woman* magazine.



Photo: Courtesy Country Woman Magazine

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Roger Hugh Kraker
1948-2018

An expressive storyteller and writer, Roger Kraker was a big man with a big laugh, a wonderful sense of humor, and a love of adventure. Kraker died at his home in Spring Hill, Tenn., on April 9.

After graduation from Calvin Theological Seminary and ordination in 1980, Kraker worked for the next 18 years in Sierra Leone and Liberia with Christian Reformed World Missions. He considered these years in Africa the most significant and meaningful of his life.

In 1998, the Krakers returned to the U.S. He took training in Hawaii to become a certified chaplain. Beginning in 2002, Kraker worked as chaplain at St. Luke's Hospital in Milwaukee, Wis., until 2010 when he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. For the next eight years, Kraker was lovingly cared for at home by his family. No longer able to travel and explore the world, reading the journal he wrote during his years in Africa provided Kraker with stimulation and joy.

Kraker is survived by Yvonne, his wife of 38 years; his daughter Nikki and son, Zachary; and one granddaughter. He was preceded in death by his daughter Sasha.

—Janet Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. John Timmer
1927-2018

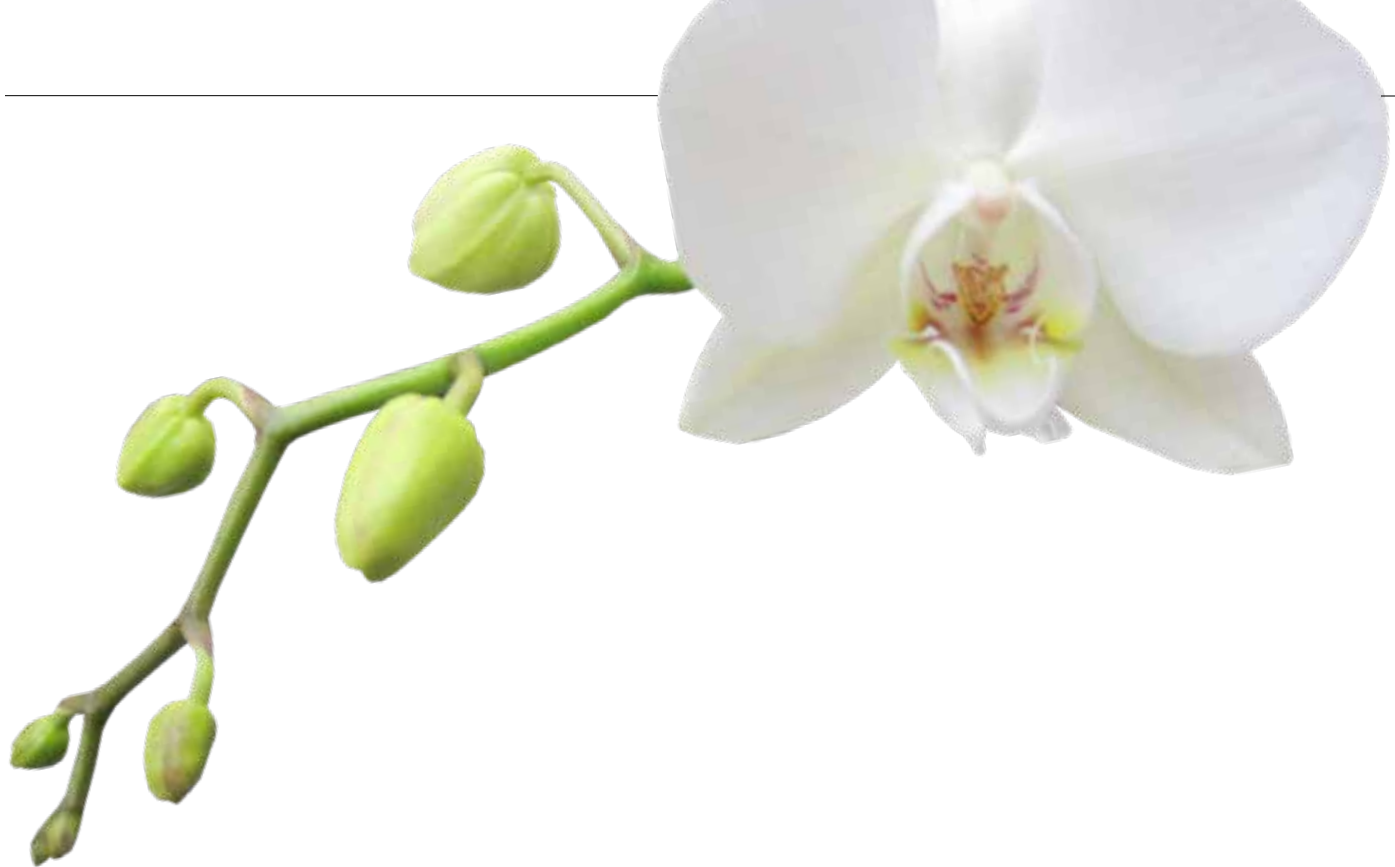
John Timmer came from a family that for generations had faithfully sown the seeds of the Word of God into the hearts of the next. Shortly before his death on March 24, one of his grandchildren wrote, "I just want you to know that Jesus is the most important thing in my life and that your faithfulness to God is [the reason] why."

The Nazi occupation of the Netherlands while he was a teenager was a formative time for Timmer. After the war he became involved with street evangelism and Youth for Christ. In 1952 he immigrated to the United States. A graduate of Calvin College and Seminary, Hartford Theological Seminary, and the Free University of Amsterdam (Th.D. New Testament), Timmer served for 14 years as a missionary to Japan. He then pastored Ridgewood CRC (N.J.) and Woodlawn CRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.), retiring in 1995.

An outstanding preacher and author of nine books, including two for children, Timmer was a recipient of the 2009 Distinguished Alumni Award from Calvin Seminary.

He is survived by Hazel, his wife of 62 years, their four children and spouses, and 10 grandchildren.

—Janet Greidanus



Uncomfortable Conversation

by Chuck DeGroat

It's a Sunday evening, and my friends Bart and Katie are reading the text. They're reading from the book I am preaching through—Song of Songs—a sacred text filled with lust and longing:

*How beautiful you are, my darling!
Oh, how beautiful!
Your eyes behind your
veil are doves. . . .*

*Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon;
your mouth is lovely. . . .
Your breasts are like two fawns,
like twin fawns of a gazelle
that browse among the lilies. . . .*

*Awake, north wind,
and come, south wind!
Blow on my garden,
that its fragrance may spread
everywhere.*

*Let my beloved come into his garden
and taste its choice fruits. . . .*

Sweat beads on the heads of young boys. Faces are fanned by bulletins. Hearts beat faster. Dopamine surges.

Perhaps the furrowed brow I see on the face of an older gentleman when I begin preaching suggests he came to hear a word from Romans or maybe the Heidelberg Catechism, not Song of Songs.

An erotic dialogue between two teenagers smack dab at the center of our canon? Who makes these kinds of decisions? First-century sage Rabbi Akiva was so convinced of its importance that he said famously, "For all of eternity in its entirety is not as worthy as the day on which Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the Writings are holy, but Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies."

Talking about sex is not optional. In fact, it is canonical imperative!

Uncomfortable Conversations

Preaching Song of Songs was one of the most uncomfortable seasons of my pastoral ministry. Awkward giggles rippled through the congregation. Emails arrived, sharing frustration and confusion: "I just don't think

this is appropriate to preach about." Some didn't return for the rest of the series. I wrestled with my own inner critic that whispered to me, "Stupid idea, Chuck. Stupid idea."

And then the real conversations started happening. The 18-year old confessed a pornography addiction. A young high school couple told me they'd been having sex and feeling great shame. An older couple began to talk about decades-long patterns of avoidance and sexual anorexia. Several young women named abuse in their stories. We even opened up new categories of spiritual engagement with God through the historic musings of Bernard of Clairvaux, John of the Cross, even the Presbyterian pastor Samuel Rutherford—the so-called "bridal mystics" whose spirituality was deeply interwoven with the sensual imagination of Song of Songs.

It's perhaps more comfortable to take sermon notes from Luke or Galatians than to hear the desire of teenage lovers in language ordinarily reserved

for the bedroom. But we need to talk. The church needs to talk. And we need to talk about *us*—not *them*, not *those people*, not about selling wedding cakes to gay couples or about the transgender student at school. Sure, these conversations are important, but it's far easier to talk theoretically about other people than it is to engage our own sexual complexity and pain. Maybe *those people* are, in fact, *us*.

I get invitations regularly to help churches process issues of LGBTQ inclusion. I'm grateful that churches want to engage an important conversation and I wish more would. But whenever I get these invitations, I begin by asking how the church engages sexuality in general. Most of the time I get a blank stare, or a long pause, or "We're really not doing much at all."

Has your church engaged in a conversation about single sexuality? Is it a safe haven for those who've been sexually abused or assaulted? Is the pervasive epidemic of pornography addiction being attended to? Is the church actively working on marriages when divorce rates in evangelical churches outnumber the unchurched, according to the Council on Contemporary Families? Have you faced destructive legacies of misogyny couched in theological language around gender roles?

What saddens me is that many find community and empathy outside of the church. The church, in fact, feels like the last place to engage one's story of sexual abuse or confess an addiction, to share about a loveless marriage or name loneliness. While our liturgies invite belonging, confession, reminders of baptismal identity, forgiveness, and a table of grace set by Jesus for us, our posture can be distant, cold, and prudish. What keeps us from engaging? What are we scared of?

Where Are You?

God's very first question in Scripture is a penetrating one: Where are you?

Into our fear and shame, God calls out. God searches longingly as we hide.

We hide and numb in a thousand ways—in busyness or drink, in work or spiritual platitudes. We immerse ourselves in a different drama—the drama of football or *The Bachelor* or

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to be wise
and mature.**

neighborhood gossip—to avoid our own inner drama. It's easier to dip into the titillating romance of a television couple than dive into the barrenness of intimacy in our own lives.

It's also easy to get mad at others, to scapegoat. We externalize our problems—we put them "out there" or on others. We blame "secular culture," that gay couple down the block, the woman who sleeps with all the guys at work, or the liberal pastor who posts inclusive messages on Facebook. Hiding and scapegoating—this is as old as Genesis 3. And it's our story today. Every day. Each and every one of us has a story. Are we mining the depths of our hearts, inviting God to know us in our depths? Or are we too concerned with the story of someone else?

Sometimes we needed to be reminded of the wisdom of old friends like C. S. Lewis, who said, "Every man should keep a fair-sized cemetery in which to bury the faults of his friends." Or the 19th-century urban preacher

Charles Spurgeon, who wrote, "It is always easier for us to want to purify other people and attempt a moral reformation among our neighbors. . . . [Yet] how much have I helped to make her what she is?"

Where are you? How are you hiding? How does your church contribute to a culture of fear, shame, and untold secrets?

I've had the sacred privilege as a pastor, professor, and therapist to listen to hundreds and hundreds of stories over some 20 years or more of ministry. I've met some really courageous people who've experienced God's "Where are you?" They are women and men who invited the Spirit into their complexity and confusion, refusing to numb the ache or kill the longing.

A single woman in her 30s who longs to be married wrestles with unfulfilled desire. She tells me that she could have settled several times—for abusive men, for a guy who'd provide for a good life but who isn't able to connect, for someone less emotionally and spiritually mature. But she doesn't. Yet her soul craves connection. Her being craves sexual intimacy. She isn't willing to cut off desire. She's a Christian, after all, whose tradition ennobles her desire for sex and connection as creationally good. Are her questions and longings welcome in the church?

A young pastor is caught looking at same-sex pornography. Being found out feels like a relief, as his pattern of hiding has led to lies and disconnection from his wife. He begins a scary conversation with his therapist about his sexual confusion, naming truths he never dared name in premarital counseling or in seminary. Though an elder calls him a "pervert" who should never step into a pulpit again, the young pastor goes on the courageous journey to explore his story as his wife also discovers unexplored pain in her own life she had never faced. Can the church walk alongside this couple?

A married woman in her 60s isn't willing to settle anymore. Her husband

belittles her. Though he's a beloved coach and teacher at their Christian school, he's a bully at home. He forces her to have sex. The words "I don't deserve this" come out painfully; she says she feels selfish saying them. Years of church teaching on her sinful depravity have convinced her that guilt and shame and unhappiness is her burden to bear. And yet something within isn't willing to accept this anymore. She's beginning to believe God delights in her, longs for her joy and glory, and smiles on her. After many tries and multiple refusals by her husband to go to counseling, she greets him at the door one evening, handing him the keys to the house and a note with her new address. God delights in me, she remembers, even as he hurls insults at her as she walks off. Is her story too messy for the church?

Mature Conversations

I sometimes wonder: Is it possible for us to engage in messy and complex conversations around sex, abuse, addiction, misogyny, homosexuality, and more? Are we capable of having mature conversations apart from Facebook skirmishes? Sometimes I wonder. But then I have an experience like the one I had just a few years ago, and I'm reminded once again of how beautiful the church can be.

On a wintry afternoon, I sit in a gathering with people who disagree on many things—so-called progressives and conservatives. They are sharing stories with one another. It's not an academic debate. They're not arguing about the meaning of Bible verses. They are simply listening and storytelling.

I sit with a man, likely in his 50s—a tall Dutch drink of water with an etched jaw and leathery hands. He's a longtime elder in the Christian Reformed Church. He leans in to listen to a young gay man who, through tears, tells of growing up hearing that people like him are hell-bound. The elder, a theologically astute man, asks questions. What was it like to

go to church? How did you tell your parents? How did it feel to hold this secret for so long? How does it feel telling me your story? The brave young man all the while knows that he is sharing his story with a very conservative brother in Christ.

After some time, the elder shares his own experience. He talks about his story—how deeply he values God's Word and the gift of trusted teachers who taught him the Bible. He softens as he shares about decades in a loveless marriage, many of those years spent in separate bedrooms. Through tears he talks about a breakthrough: He came to terms with his fear of intimacy, his shame, his abuse, how he hurt his wife. Both men are now in tears.

There is no magical moment of theological agreement. The young man expresses his desire to be married to another man. The older man is quiet at first. He then tells his young friend that this is hard for him to hear, given his convictions, but that he's glad the young man can say it. He doesn't try to fix the young man. He doesn't suggest a therapist. He doesn't quote a verse. He stands in his truth, but with empathy for a fellow sojourner. I suspect he can do this because he has navigated many personal battles at some cost, and platitudes don't often help.

They've connected as human beings, these two men, with precious stories and profound pain. Empathy abounds. The weathered elder says, "Listen closely . . . if you ever come through my town and want to go to church, you come, you sit right next to me, and we will worship together." And then he leans in, placing his hand on the young man's shoulder, calling upon the Heidelberg Catechism for comfort: "Son, you belong. You belong, body and soul, to your faithful savior Jesus, to the church. Never forget that."

We're all in tears. It's a picture of spiritual maturity I will not soon forget.

We need to talk. We need to talk about sex and intimacy, about shame and loneliness, about addiction and

assault. Our teenagers need to talk. Our singles need to talk. Those in lifeless marriages need to talk. We cannot afford to demonize, scapegoat, or avoid any longer. We need our conversations to be wise and mature.

If the church cannot host the complexity of this hard conversation, then it cannot honor the breadth of its sacred canon, with stories of rape and misogyny, adultery and addiction, oppression and abandonment, with an erotic love poem right smack dab in the middle of it.

There is no how-to. I can't point you to a surefire curriculum. I have some thoughts on how the church can engage, and some personal experiences of doing it as a pastor. I can tell you this: It begins with courage, perhaps the courage to explore your own story first. And it is seasoned with Christ-like empathy.

I didn't know what I was getting myself into when I preached Song of Songs. I'd rather be comfortable, and I wasn't. But as the sacred text does, it gave us room, even permission, to talk. Thanks be to God. **B**



Chuck DeGroat, professor of pastoral care and counseling at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Mich., is the author of *Leaving Egypt* (Faith Alive) and *Toughest People to Love* (Eerdmans).


'They Are All Grown Up'

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.”
—Ephesians 4:15

WE SAY THESE WORDS when watching through teary eyes a young child entering grade school. We whisper them when a young teen graduates from middle school and then again at high school graduation. We say them to mark the passage of a young adult into a career assignment and at a wedding. Each time we marvel at the reality of growth.

The women and men pictured on the next pages are marking a milestone this month. They have all completed at least 19 years of formal education. Some have completed more. Some have done these years of education sequentially. Others have spaced between the 19 years a lot of additional life experience. Likely, as they are declared a candidate, persons in each of their lives are saying with gratitude and a touch of wonder, “Thank you, God, they made it!”

Yet the truth is they are not all grown up. They will need our help and the Holy Spirit’s as they grow into Christ and as they serve the church as ordained pastors. It is equally true that we also are not grown up. We need the service and partnership of pastors and others in our lives.

Each year we marvel and thank God for a new batch of candidates. We are also grateful for the service of seminary professors, mentors, and local congregations in bringing them to this point. Let’s pray for them all as they anticipate and discern their next steps and as they keep growing. 

For contact information, biographical information, eligibility status, and testimonies from each of the candidates, visit the candidacy committee website at crcna.org/candidacy.



David Koll,
director of candidacy

CANDIDATES



Steven Berkenpas



Calvin D. Chen



Dan Crapo



Jason Dahlman



Abigail DeZeeuw



Steven Dykstra



Benjamin Gandy



Benjamin Gresik



Elias Groenendyk



Chadd Huizenga



Steven M. Hull



Albert Kae



Timothy Keep



Darren Kornelis



Debra J. Koster



Noah J. K. Kruis



Marcel Kuiper



Todd Kuperus



Benjamin Landegent



Christopher Lee



Derrick Lee



James Lee



Anthony Matias



Scott Mulenburg



Jonathan Owens



Benj Petroelje



Hayden Regeling



Jason Ruis



Courtney Saldivar



Brian Schouten



Minbo Paul Shim



Matthew M. Slack



Eric Snyder



Gale Tien



Rebecca Tjapkes



Norman Underland



Robert Van Zanen



Jenna Veenbaas



Benjamin Verkerk



Christopher Walker



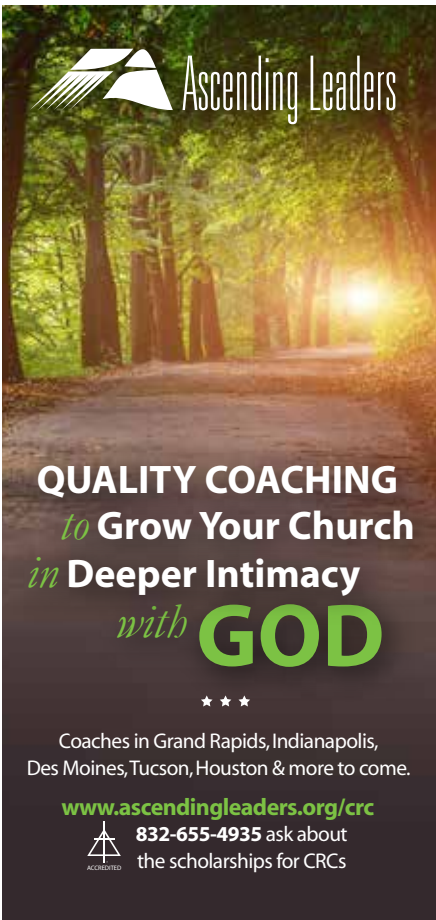
Michael Yang



Josiah Youngquist



James Zwier



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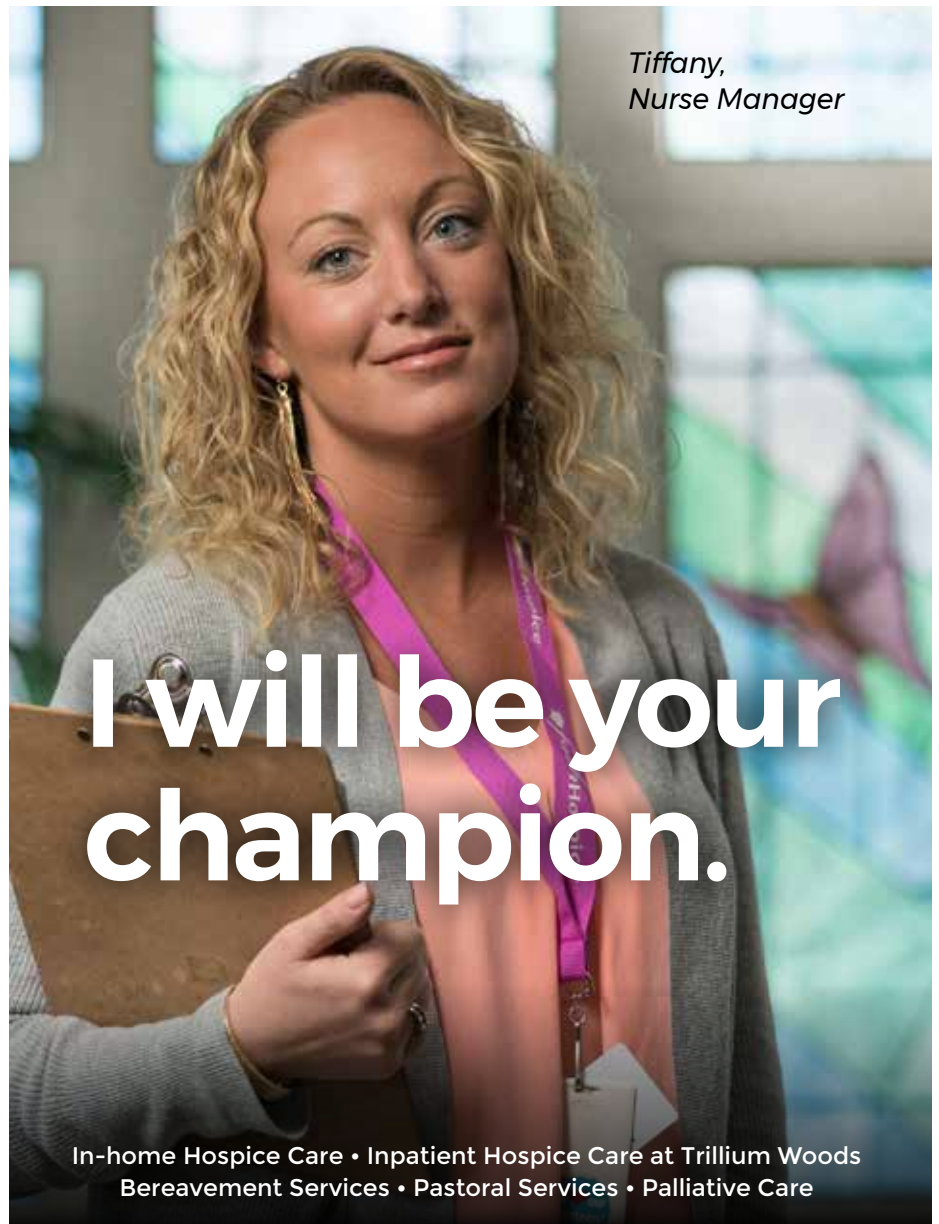
Pastor of Discipleship
Elmhurst Christian Reformed Church
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Let's Go Hunting



THE WORLD is full of things to discover. All you have to do is look and listen! Next time you're bored, go on one of these "hunts" with your friends or family.

Alphabet Hunt

Sometimes things in nature look like letters of the alphabet. For example, many twigs and tree trunks are shaped like a "Y." If you look carefully, you can find lots of different letter shapes in nature.



Take a cell phone or camera outside on a nice day. Look at plants and trees through the viewfinder to find letter shapes. Take pictures of the letters you discover. Go hunting with a friend or with your family and see if you can find all 26 letters of the alphabet!

Nature Hunt

If you're taking a trip to a park or a forest, plan a nature scavenger hunt! First, make a list of things you might find. Your list could include things like these:

- » A bird
- » An animal
- » Something red
- » A yellow flower
- » A bug
- » A spiderweb
- » A bumpy rock
- » A squirrel

Before you go, print one copy of your list for each person. Then see who can find all the things on the list. Check them off with a pencil or take a picture of them with a camera.



Sound Hunt

Not close to a park or forest? This is a great hunt to do in a city. Grab a friend or family member and find a comfortable place to sit. Then make a list of all the sounds you hear. The quieter you are, the more sounds you will discover. Listen for things like these:

- » dog barking
- » bird singing
- » phone ringing
- » person talking
- » door shutting
- » siren
- » wind blowing
- » car starting
- » music playing

Whenever you hear a sound, write it down. After 15 minutes, compare lists. Who discovered the most sounds? What was the most interesting sound you heard? **B**



Sandy Swartzentruber works for Faith Formation Ministries and is a member of Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. She loves to discover new things.

A New Apologetic

AS A CAMPUS PASTOR, I've talked with several students who've been dismissive of the Bible. It didn't surprise me to come across critical opinions of the Bible; what has surprised me is when a student concedes that the evidence is compelling, yet shrugs it off, as if something could be true and still not matter.

I was delighted that the British biblical scholar R.W.L. Moberly put his finger on my problem in his book *The Bible in a Disenchanted Age*. How can the Bible be a vehicle for faith in God in our "disenchanted world," where God and faith—and therefore the biblical story—seem ever less meaningful?

This small book is his attempt to defend the traditional Christian belief that the Bible is God's Word in human words, but his argument breaks with traditional defenses of its historical reliability or the logic of divine revelation.

He shows how the Bible is both like and unlike other great works of literature that deserve our attention, pointing out that we have become too quick to overlook classics. "If countless others have found a book worthwhile," he says, "then if we don't—at least on the first reading—it may be that the problem lies in us more than in the book."

He builds a case for taking the Bible seriously, but he goes further to affirm the church's belief that the Bible is Scripture—an authoritative revelation from God. A key notion for him is that of *privilege*. Why should we privilege the biblical canon, looking—as Moberly puts it—"here" rather than "there" for truth and meaning?

First, everyone has a canon of some sort to make sense of a complex world. So there's no reason to dismiss offhand the fact that Christians privilege the Bible. Second, a privileged perspective (the biblical canon, for Christians) is closely linked to the community that endorses this perspective and lives by it: the church. It's the people of God who make this perspective plausible and compelling for others. As one comes to trust the people who trust the book, one comes to trust what it tells us of the living God; faith in God then helps one trust even more his revelation to us in Scripture. For Moberly, this is how we can invite people to trust the Bible enough to take it seriously in our disenchanted age.

Written with humor and charity, the book is challenging without being difficult and learned without feeling heavy. I suspect that, like me, pastors, teachers, and others who love the Bible and work among the "disenchanted" will find it just about right. (Baker Academic) **B**



Todd Statham is the Christian Reformed campus minister at the Okanagan campus of the University of British Columbia.



Mrs. Oswald Chambers: The Woman Behind the World's Best-Selling Devotional

by Michelle Ule

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

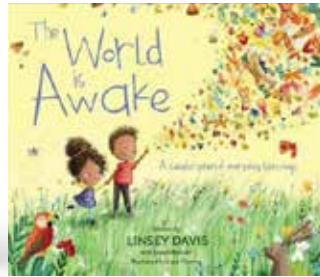
Gertrude Annie "Biddy" Hobbs grew up in Victorian England and married Oswald Chambers. From the beginning, their marriage was focused on spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. After Oswald's tragic death in Egypt, Hobbs returned to England. A destitute widow with a young child, she heard God's calling to type all of her notes from Oswald's lectures and sermons to prepare them for publication. Hobbs published 30 books, including the famous one-year devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*. In this biography of a humble, hard-working, resilient Christian woman, author Michelle Ule reveals God's faithfulness and blessing on the marriage and life of two people who longed to do their utmost for him. (Baker Books)



I Can Only Imagine

reviewed by Kristy Quist

Directors Jon and Andrew Erwin have turned the story behind the hit Christian song “I Can Only Imagine” into an engaging and inspiring film. Bart Millard (J. Michael Finley), lead singer of MercyMe, wrote the song after the death of his father, who had been abusive. The movie shows the pain of that childhood as well as the lifelines he experienced in the church and in music, particularly Christian music. The film doesn’t hide from the darkness and pain of abuse, yet it is full of hope for forgiveness and grace. On disc now. (Lionsgate)



The World Is Awake: A Celebration of Everyday Blessings

by *Linsey Davis*
with *Joseph Bottum*

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen
Feddema

Two children enjoy all that they encounter during a day the Lord has made. Outside their home, butterflies, grasshoppers, and other creatures abound. At the zoo they admire bears, otters, and elephants, each one created for God’s glory. A visit to a farmers’ market displays harvest bounty. Afterward, the family enjoys a delicious meal at home—another reason for thanksgiving to God. In this rhyming, vibrantly illustrated picture book, young children will be encouraged to see and understand that God’s goodness permeates their lives and that everything is a gift from him. (Zonderkidz)

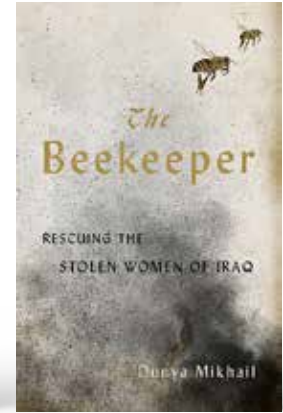


Come to Me

by *Wendell Kimbrough*

reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

As worship leader at his church, Wendell Kimbrough wrote a song for each week’s psalm. In *Come to Me*, his second collection, Kimbrough encounters many of the psalms of lament. These psalms remind us that God hears our sorrows and our questions, and Kimbrough does not shy away from hard questions. His stark setting of Psalm 83, “O God, Do Not Be Silent,” for example, shows how we struggle with understanding how tragedies can occur. Kimbrough’s songs have simple enough melodies that they can be quickly learned by a congregation; the lyrics come nearly verbatim from the psalms.



The Beekeeper: Rescuing the Stolen Women of Iraq

by *Dunya Mikhail*

reviewed by Kristy Quist

Iraqi-American poet and journalist Dunya Mikhail tells the stories of many women who were kidnapped by the Daesh, also known as ISIS. Many of these stories come to her through Abdullah, a beekeeper who works tirelessly to rescue women from captivity through an extensive network of people. The women’s stories are devastating: husbands and fathers executed, women sold into sex slavery, and young boys sent for indoctrination. Mikhail writes as a journalist, but she also uses the language of poetry to conjure both the devastation and beauty of her home culture. *The Beekeeper* is a heartbreaking and important book. (New Directions)

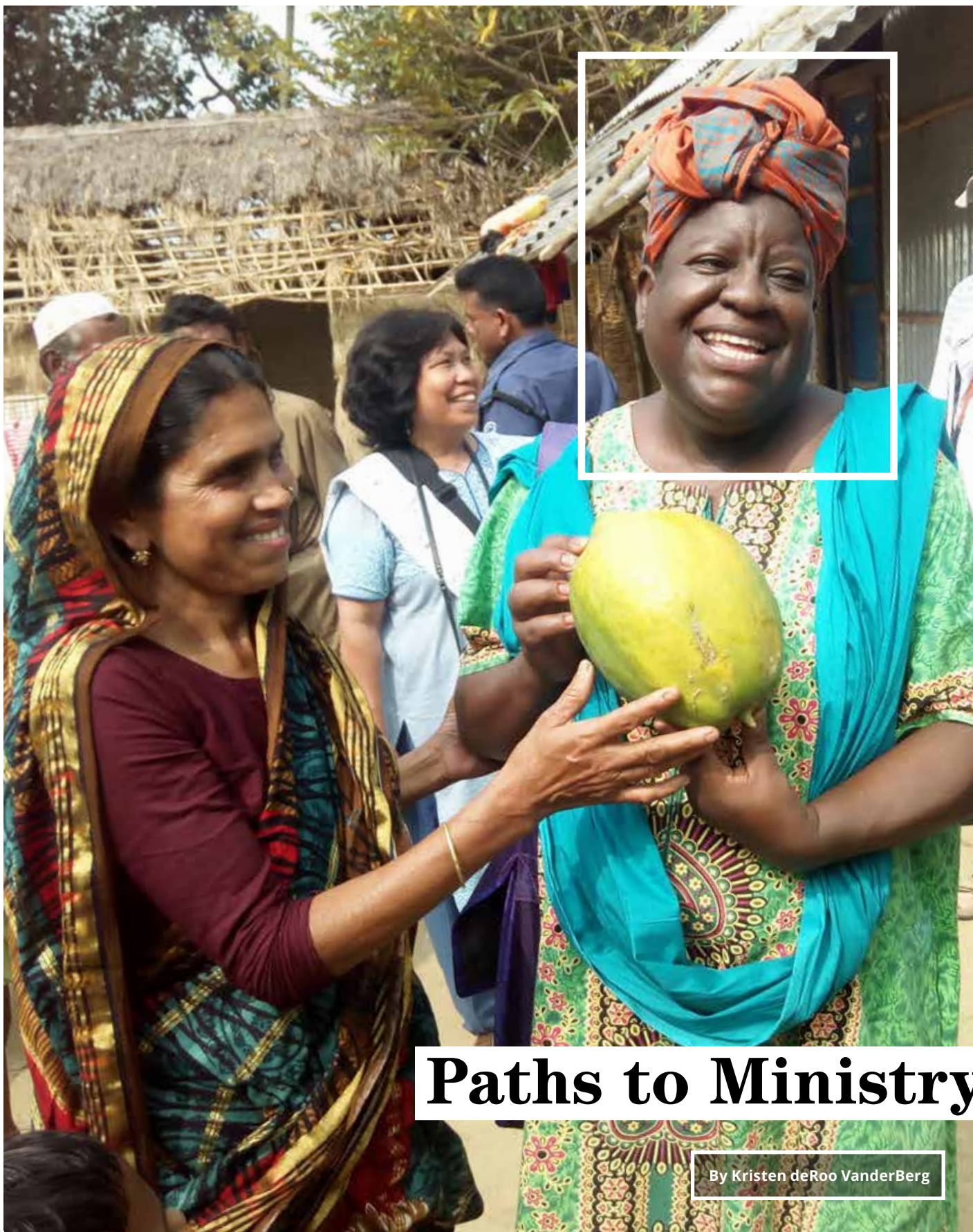
The Lowdown

More Work: Lexham Press continues to offer new translations of Abraham Kuyper’s works in public theology; recent releases include *Pro Rege Volume 2* and *On Islam*.

Choosing Sides: *Forever on Your Side*, a new album from Christian rockers NEEDTOBREATHE, drops July 13. (Atlantic)

Book Bonanza: Did you know that The Network, the social networking website for the CRC, has a page called “Books by CRC Authors”? Go to network.crcna.org to check it out!

Ready? Ready Player One comes out on DVD July 24; see thebanner.org for our review.



Paths to Ministry

By Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

This year synod received 43 new candidates for the office of Minister of the Word. The Christian Reformed Church in North America celebrates with these men and women the completion of their studies and looks forward to seeing how God will use them.

Serving as an ordained pastor is one way God can use people for ministry, but there are many other types of service. Here are a few stories of men and women serving God's kingdom through the Christian Reformed Church in a variety of ways. They share how God called them to their particular areas of ministry, and they provide some advice to those considering similar types of service.

Barbara Barungi Kayanja

Hometown: Kampala, Uganda

Title: East Africa Ministry Team leader, World Renew

My ministry story: About two years before I joined the East Africa Ministry Team with World Renew, I started reflecting on my role as a Christian in community development. At that time, I had worked for and built many secular organizations—community-based health care, microfinance, microenterprise development, and global health leadership—but had a certain emptiness. I had done it all for people, but had not done anything for God. This was followed by an overwhelming desire to return to church and support development within a church setting. I googled Christian organizations working with churches in East Africa and found CRC News. It sounded so much like what I was looking for. The material was very helpful at an individual level for my Christian growth, and, as a pastor's wife, I found so much we could use in our local church. I signed up for the newsletter and started my journey of learning about the CRC. Later, I learned about the World Renew position opening and applied.

Advice to those considering a similar call: Invest in times of quiet listening for God's direction. This was my strongest tool. I did not let ideas that came through my mind just pass. Instead, as I reflected on ideas, it became clear that this is what God wanted me to do. The biggest challenge was knowing exactly what God wanted me to do, how, and when. I invested time in reflection and seeking direction from God. I prayed about it and made sure I was not doing what I wanted but what God wanted.



Ron VandenBurg

Hometown: St. Catharines, Ont.

Title: Senior producer of children's ministry at ReFrame Media (Back to God Ministries International)

My ministry story: I have always loved theater and storytelling. I did high school and college productions and worked in children's theater. When I taught at Christian schools, I directed school dramas and wrote drama curriculum for schools. At Jubilee CRC (St. Catharines) we told the story of Jesus' life with the music of Michael Card and a cast of 120 people. Then, in 2007, I sent an unsolicited *Kids Corner* script to senior producer Barb Brouwer. She liked the script. It was recorded, and I got more chances to write. Today, through the *Kids Corner* website, our creative team tells God's story every day.

Advice to those considering a similar call: As God's people, we get to tell God's big story. If you are thinking about serving in this field, find other artists who also want to tell God's story. Find storytellers in your medium and find people who are creatively using other media. Collaborate. Then find people to share and to listen.

Tami Kuipers



Hometown: Tinley Park, Ill.

Title: Regional advocate for Disability Concerns, Classis Chicago South

My ministry story: I was working part time at our local Christian school when I heard about an opening at Elim Christian Services for a classroom aide. The hours fit my family's schedule, so I applied and got the job. I was placed with a nonverbal middle schooler who had autism. At first, I felt out of my element. I prayed every day for the Lord to teach me how to help this child. By the fourth week we had clicked. I was at Elim for the next two years, absorbing everything I could learn about

special education while I finished my degree at night. After seeing various Elim parents struggling with the legal end of special education, I knew that was where I wanted to focus after graduation. I landed a job with a law firm that specializes in special education, disability, and mental health law and have worked there for 13 years. About 10 years ago, I saw a blurb in our church bulletin that the regional advocate for Disability Concerns was retiring and that Disability Concerns was looking for someone to fill the position. I kept telling myself I couldn't do it or that someone else was better qualified. I think I saw it for six weeks before I finally felt that nudge from God to email and see what it was all about. I volunteered and haven't looked back.

Advice to those considering a similar call: Remember that "God does not call those who are equipped; God equips those God has called." This was true for me. I'd also encourage anyone starting out with a ministry in their church to feel free to contact Disability Concerns or the team at Orland Park CRC. We will be glad to help people on their journey. And that's what it all is: a journey unique to each congregation and its specific needs. No two churches will ever look the same when it comes to a disability ministry, just as no disabilities are the same. Even if a diagnosis might be like someone else's, each person is a unique individual with specific needs to address.

Cindy Stover



Hometown: Hamilton, Ont.

Title: Justice mobilizer, Canadian Ministries of the CRCNA

My ministry story: I previously worked with a youth organization that led mission trips to developing countries. I was unprepared for the questions many people had when they encountered extreme poverty

for the first time—questions about why local governments distributed services differently from at home, or why healthcare/education/safe housing were huge obstacles in many of the communities that hosted us. As I began to search for the answers to these questions, I learned about the larger systems that affected the lives of the people we were serving. I realized that while it was important to spend time building relationships with our host communities, our work for justice would be truncated if we didn't also address the systemic issues that cause extreme poverty and actively keep many people marginalized.

Advice for those considering a similar call: So much of what sparked a fire in me to work for justice has been the result of relationships with those who are most affected by injustice. This has helped me recognize my privilege and the blinders I have to systemic injustice, and it has

taught me how to be an ally supporting the causes, advocacy, and passions of those who have become my friends. I recommend just getting out there and meeting people. Whether it's with a newcomer family in your community, Indigenous people at a local Friendship Centre, environmental activist groups in your city, or street-involved youth at a nearby drop-in, spend some time building an authentic relationship with someone you could learn from. Don't tokenize people or make them feel like projects, but dedicate yourself to spending time with them, sharing stories and hearing their perspective, and then stand in solidarity for the things that matter to them.

Ken Lee



Hometown: Tokyo, Japan

Title: Missionary with Resonate Global Mission in Japan

My ministry story: When my pastor asked me to lead a mission trip with my church to Japan, I was like Jonah—an unwilling missionary. I was born in South Korea and later immigrated to California. If you know a bit of history about Japan and Korea, you might know we don't mix too well. The Japanese people had done nothing to me, but because of the way I was educated, I really didn't want to go to Japan. I went with a group of young people, and we led worship and activities in churches. I remember noticing a young lady one day sitting in the middle of the crowd. After the program she came up to me and apologized. "Pastor Ken, I'm sorry," she said. "Our forefathers had done bad things to your people." At that moment, God made me realize there was a hatred and resentment within me. I ran out, cried, and repented. Back home, I was trying to decide where God wanted me to go as a long-term missionary. As I was praying, this young woman's face

popped up, saying, "Please come to Japan." Three years later, on Aug. 15, 1999, I was commissioned to Japan.

Advice to those considering a similar call: My advice is to make sure you have the calling. To me, that's very important. Without my calling, I think I would have left a long time ago. Being a Korean, even though I'm Korean American, in Japan there still is friction. But because I was assured that that's where God called me, I have stayed.

Jane DeGroot



Hometown: Spring Lake, Mich.

Title: Coordinator of Safe Church Ministry, Classis Muskegon

My ministry story: I first sensed a calling to Safe Church Ministry when I learned that someone close to me had been sexually abused as a child. I came to the conclusion that if someone I knew well could suffer abuse

without my knowing it, then others might also be suffering without my knowledge. That motivated me to listen more carefully. It also opened the door for me to serve on the initial Safe Church Ministry team of Classis Muskegon until it disbanded in 2012 due to lack of funding. As an elder of our church, I attended a classis meeting in October 2016 at which pastor Ken Krause (Fellowship CRC, Big Rapids) announced an upcoming Safe Church conference sponsored by the denomination. My interest was piqued. Soon after, I registered and even encouraged several friends from Classis Muskegon to attend with me. At the conference we heard stories from people who had suffered abuse, learned about abuse in general, and witnessed the healing effect of the truth being told. I returned to our church convicted to revitalize the Safe Church team in our church as well as in Classis Muskegon. I offered to make a presentation about it at our next classis meeting. From there I was given permission to go forward with organizing a Safe Church team.

Advice to those considering a similar call: If you haven't been involved yet, I recommend starting by attending the Safe Church Ministry Conference Sept. 21-22, 2018, at the Prince Conference Center in Grand Rapids, Mich. You will receive plenty of resources to go back to your local church to start a Safe Church team. Also, keep listening to people's stories. Don't assume, as I did, that because I didn't know about abuse it therefore didn't happen. Statistics show that one in four girls are sexually abused by the age of 18. The church is not exempt from these statistics. We must show that we care enough to prevent abuse from happening in the future. Say yes when God calls you to this work.

Ronald Chu



Hometown: La Habra, Calif.

Title: Connections regional catalyzer for California

My ministry story: I serve as the global ministry pastor at TtoKamsa Mission Church. In this role and in other positions, I have always acted as a catalyzer—someone who causes things to happen. I am one of the

first English-speaking Korean-American pastors in the U.S. I had to catalyze ministries starting in many Korean churches. Catalyzing included challenging people, providing training, and encouraging and coaching leaders in churches. I realized along the way that I enjoy equipping others more than doing things myself. I was more blessed to see God at work in others I had helped than I was when I was in the lead. There was a great fun in enabling others to be/do more than they thought they were capable of.

Advice to those considering a similar call: First, understand that ministry is not about us. If we want our names in the spotlight, this can't be done. Enjoy being used. We can do the work and invest in people and ministries, but we should work to put others in the spotlight. Second, pray for wisdom. Often we must think "outside the box." A kingdom mindset is also very important. We serve God's church, not a local church. At the same time, we serve God's church through local churches. More than anything else, enjoy helping and equipping people to be their best. I compare myself to a sergeant in the army. I'm not an officer, but I train others to be officers. We strive to make others great!

The View from Here

Let Love Be Our Guide

WE JUST GOT BACK from another date. This time it was longer and more involved, but we also gave each other plenty of room for time apart.

I'm talking, of course, about the meeting on Calvin College's campus of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America and the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. What has come to be referred to as the Pella Accord drew us together again on the same campus with a number of joint activities.

The future-focused section of the Pella Accord, approved by both synods in 2014, is this: "We declare that the principle that guides us, and the intention that motivates us, is to 'act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel us to act separately.'"

And so we participated together in worship, in workshops, and in combined assemblies. We dined together, walked together, and had countless opportunities to develop personal relationships.

We also worked together in joint committees. These committees tackled four topics: interfaith

engagement; congregational renewal and transformation; the future of CRC and RCA collaboration; and the future of the CRC and RCA via new creations.

Although no specific actions resulted from the work of these committees, at least two of them provided context for new joint steps.

The two synods approved a joint Interfaith/Interreligious Committee to guide the interfaith efforts of our denominations. I trust that this goal identified in 2009 will continue as core to our effort: "The goal of interfaith dialogue is to foster better understanding between persons of different faiths and to enhance channels of communication that build community cooperation and peacemaking."

Also, it seems likely that we will continue weaving together our efforts at congregational renewal and transformation, making discernment a key component while refining a compelling, biblically based vision that will not just combine current efforts but will produce fresh approaches and life-giving results.

Yet the nagging question remains: Where will all this lead?

I hope we can live faithfully with ambiguity, for there's no detailed road map. What John Calvin said, and what guides us in our Church Order, about church practices and change seems to speak to both the CRC and the RCA:

"But because [our Lord] did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do (because he foresaw that this depended upon the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages), here we must take refuge

in those general rules which he has given, that whatever the necessity of the church will require for order and decorum should be tested against these. Lastly, because he has taught nothing specifically, and because these things are not necessary to salvation, and for the upbuilding of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age, it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones. Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause. But love will best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe" (*Institutes*, IV.X.30).

All will be safe, if we let love be our guide.



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

Spanish and Korean translations of this article are available at TheBanner.org.

이 기사의 한글번역은 TheBanner.org/korean에서 보실 수 있습니다.

Este artículo está disponible en español en TheBanner.org/spanish.

Voice against Injustice

THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD SALMA is a bright and friendly girl who dreams of completing her studies and becoming self-reliant.

But Salma's dream, like the dreams of many young girls in Bangladesh, is at risk.

Bangladesh is a place where gender inequality is deeply ingrained in cultural attitudes and practices.

Salma's father believes he has the right—the duty, even—to arrange marriage for his young daughter. "It's my decision to marry off my daughter, and there is no way to stop me," he said.

Advocates for change suspect he has no knowledge of all the dangers of child marriage.

If Salma were to be married too soon, her dreams of education and independence would be shattered. Her health might also be compromised by pregnancies when her body is still so young.

Indeed, her father's plan to arrange his young daughter's marriage violates Bangladeshi law, which now prohibits early childhood marriage for these reasons. Even so, his mind was made up.

Thanks to a community becoming aware and empowered to speak out against injustice, this is not how Salma's story ends.

One such voice belongs to Nurjahan Begum, a key leader in the fight against injustice in Salma's community.

Nurjahan is a member of the Peace and Justice Committee (PJC) of PARI, one of World Renew's partners. Both World Renew and PARI approach community development from the conviction that all people, male and female, are made in God's image.

Members of the Peace and Justice Committee receive training on how to identify and stand against issues such as domestic violence and gender inequality.

Nurjahan heard about Salma's planned child marriage from her own daughter, who attends school with Salma. Her



Salma, center, stands with her parents.

concern quickly turned to action as she gathered members of the PJC to plead with Salma's father to reconsider.

When it became clear that he would not listen to them, Nurjahan went to the local government.

In her meeting with the chairman of the Union Council, Nurjahan found an ally. The chairman went directly to Salma's father to warn him not only that child marriage is illegal—a punishable offense—but also that he was putting his daughter in grave danger.

Salma's father and the whole community listened. The early marriage was prevented, and Salma is thrilled to be entering seventh grade.

Salma is part of a changing story in her country and in her community. Because of stories like these, World Renew continues to form strong partnerships with faith-based organizations seeking to raise awareness and restore hope in areas where inequality and oppression exist.

—Staci DeVries, *World Renew*

Exploring Ministry Calling as a Team Effort

WE DON'T HAVE TO DISCOVER

God's call on our own. Sometimes God speaks to us through many people over a long period. Just ask Karlos Palacios.

Palacios is a church planter at Iglesia Comunidad de Fe Poinciana Christian Reformed Church, a Resonate Global Mission partner church plant in Poinciana, Fla.

Palacios said his calling to ministry started with service opportunities in his church, The New Horizon CRC (Paterson, N.J.). As he joined the choir and read Bible verses

during services, people soon recognized his leadership abilities.

"Some of the elders constantly encouraged me to be a pastor," Palacios said.

With that encouragement, Palacios began exploring a call to ministry by studying theology at Kuyper College and later through Calvin Theological Seminary's (CTS) online program.

But he still wanted to make sure he was following God's will for his life.

"I wasn't sure, so I preferred to take my time and wait for God's ultimate revelation," he said.

After continuing to pray and seek God, he again heard a call to ministry, this time through a pastor who proposed he get involved with a type of ministry he'd never considered—starting a new Spanish-language church in Florida.

"That was the turning point," said Palacios.

While one of Resonate's purposes is to support church planters like Palacios during the planting process, a new partnership with CTS will allow potential church planters to explore their callings much earlier.

In the 2017-18 academic year, Resonate sponsored a two-semester church planting course at CTS. Students learned about various aspects of church planting, covering biblical foundations, theological concepts, practical strategies and skills, and spiritual disciplines.

"Not only did I form deep and lasting relationships with other peers and professors who were asking some of the same questions I was asking," said one student after completing the class, "but it felt like we became more aware of what God's Spirit was doing in and through each of our lives."

As he joyfully pastors his church plant in Poinciana, Palacios finally feels as if he's where God wants him to be. He is grateful for all the people who have supported and guided him along the way and for his experience at CTS.

"I've seen God working in my call to ministry through the encouragement of other Reformed pastors, teaching me that since it is his church and ministry, he provides other servants to work together."

—Allyson Wierenga,
Resonate Global Mission



Students got an in-depth look at church planting with a new course at Calvin Theological Seminary.

God's Transformational Power

ANSHU KACCHAP'S life had been one of uncertainty and instability.

Born and raised in a non-Christian family in northern India, Kacchap and her two younger brothers lost their parents at a very young age. Their grandmother took care of them until she too died when the children were still young.

The siblings then went to live with their aunt, who treated them as servants. Kacchap had to do all the household chores just so she and her siblings could get something to eat at the end of the day.

Kacchap wanted to study but had no money to pay the school fees. As a child, she went to work as a domestic helper to support herself and her brothers. Although life was difficult, she and her brothers eventually enrolled in school.

During her school days, Kacchap heard about Jesus. "Something in my heart continuously reminded me of the love of Jesus," said Kacchap.

She eventually completed school, including college, then took a nursing course and found work as a nurse. Still, Kacchap had a sense of emptiness in her life.

"I always had this vacuum and longed for truth," said Kacchap. "Though I was worshiping my gods, so much turmoil troubled my life. I began to get restless and longed for fellowship."

A friend invited Kacchap to a house fellowship where she began to grow in faith. "Jesus gave me peace and rest," she said. "I know now that he is the true and trustworthy God."

Kacchap desired to grow deeper in her faith and knowledge of God. Searching for Christian resources that could help her grow, she visited the office of Good Books Educational Trust, a partner in India of Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI).

There she discovered the *Masihi Ahwan* (*Christian Calling*) magazine and a Bible correspondence course. She enrolled in the Bible study.

As Kacchap continues to grow in faith, she told the Hindi ministry leader for BTGMI, she has more compassion for people like her who have suffered without Christ. "I desire everyone to know Jesus' love," she testified. "He is the only one who can give eternal rest and joy."

Kacchap desires prayer for her family, including the aunt who mistreated her as a child, to come to Christ.



Anshu deepened her faith through fellowship with other believers and a Bible study correspondence class.

—Nancy Vander Meer,
Back to God Ministries International

DEADLINES: 8/7/18 for September ; 9/4/18 for October. Subject to availability. Details online.

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General

20 YEARS IN MINISTRY With gratitude to God, the congregation of the Silver Spring Christian Reformed Church (Md.) is celebrating Rev Douglas and Mrs Diane Bratt's 20th anniversary of ministry with us.

MEETINGS OF CLASSIS

CLASSIS ZEELAND will meet on Thursday, September 20, at 4PM, at the Drenthe CRC. Agenda deadline is August 8. REV. RON MEYER, S. C.

CHURCH'S 75TH ANNIVERSARY

BETHANY CRC - Bellflower, CA is celebrating our 75th Anniversary. Please come and celebrate with us on September 8 & 9. Details are available at www.bethanycrc.org or (562) 866-1812.

Retirement

JERRY HOEK (Calvin Seminary 83) will retire after 26 years as pastor of Faith CRC, Nashville. A special homecoming service is planned for September 2, 2018. He formerly served as pastor of Peace CRC-Cedar Rapids, Iowa, from 83 to 92. Jerry and his wife Claire will remain in Nashville, near their children and grandchildren, and plan to travel as her health permits.

REV. DR. JOHN A. ALGERA Madison Avenue CRC celebrates the retirement of the Rev. Dr. John A. Algera after 40 years of faithful ministry! We will have a retirement dinner on Fri. Aug. 10, 2018 at 7:00pm at The Bethwood in Totowa, NJ. For tickets or to purchase an ad or give to the love offering or to send your fondest memory, please go to the church website www.macrc.org or contact the Committee Chair Lenore Maine @ lmlyvette@gmail.com or call 973-279-3132.

Miscellaneous

HYMNALS Crownpoint Christian Reformed Church on the Navajo Reservation is looking for Worship His Majesty hymnals, published by Gaither Music Company, copyright 1987. If your church has a box of these that is not being used, please contact Anna Christensen @ kip.anna.c@gmail.com.

CLEANING HELP WANTED Retired physician and wife have downsized to condo and need house cleaning help 3 to 4 hours per week. Our last lady was with us for over 15 years. References required. Reply by e-mail to barrl@msu.edu or by phone to 616-774-2894.

Church Positions Available

SEEKING PASTOR Prairie Lane CRC in Omaha, Nebraska is seeking a fulltime lead pastor to start immediately. Please contact Mike Hostetler for information: 402-981-2648 mike@hostetlerhome.com

PASTOR - After a thoughtful transitional process, FELLOWSHIP CHURCH in west Toronto seeks to implement an exciting new ministry strategy and is inviting a teaching pastor to join them on this journey. We want to build on our strengths of a strong and vibrant internal community to grow in faith and capacity as we reach out to serve our neighbourhood and city. In close collaboration with our new Ministry Director, our prospective pastor will pursue a holistic ministry that encompasses both personal disciple-

ship and social concerns, equipping our members to serve in God's Kingdom, as articulated in a healthy Reformed world view. We want to share the message of Christ's saving love for people and the whole creation. We intend to partner with other local churches and ministries that share our vision wherever possible. Proven ability to inspire the congregation through teaching the Word in an experiential manner within a diverse and multicultural environment is required. Please contact Bill van Geest at billvangeest@gmail.com for more information by June 15, 2018. Website: www.fellowshiptobcicoke.com

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRIES Modesto, CA CRC is seeking a full time Director of Youth Ministries. See detailed description at http://www.modestorcrc.org

SEEKING PASTOR Covenant CRC in Sioux Center, IA invites a pastor to walk with us as we seek to deepen our unity and our mission. A superb candidate will be committed to the Reformed faith and to excellent preaching and teaching. He or she will enjoy ministering to persons of all ages, thrive through collaborative and creative planning, and will work with us to develop a unifying vision. He/she will seek to foster community within the congregation and send us out in service. Contact the Search Committee at dennis.vanderplaats@dordt.edu or call 712-449-8203.

PASTOR: Gateway Community CRC in beautiful Abbotsford, BC is seeking a full time Pastor of Preaching and Congregational Care for our congregation of 745 members. We are seeking a people-oriented individual who has a strong desire to faithfully preach the Word, nourish the spiritual growth of the congregation through pastoral care and teaching and to join an energetic team. Visit gatewaycrc.org for church profile and full ministry role description. Contact Marcel deRegt, Executive Pastor, at marcel@gatewaycrc.org or call 604-859-5908

YOUTH DIRECTOR Calvin CRC in Holland, MI is looking to hire a PT Youth Director to love and disciple our youth. Inquire to dspeolma@calvinministries.org to ask for a job description, compensation details, and to set up an interview.

PART-TIME YOUTH DIRECTOR Lakeside Community CRC in Alto, MI is seeking a youth director to lead our high school and middle school ministries. Must love Jesus, love students, and be able to teach from the Bible. For more info, contact Dave Bosscher at pastordave@lakesidecommunity.org.

BETHEL COMMUNITY CHURCH of Edmonton is looking for someone to come alongside our Lead Pastor in a dynamic pastoral team. Key responsibilities would include small groups/house churches, young adults, and preaching, with other responsibilities to be determined based on the selected individuals gifts in consultation with the Lead Pastor. An experienced, ordained individual is preferred, but we are open to the Holy Spirit's surprises and will welcome applications from other capable people, even if unordained. Check out discoverbethel.com for more information about our growing and increasing multicultural church. Email info@discoverbethel.com to send a resume or make inquiries

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.

PASTOR Calvary Christian Reformed Church of Lowell, Michigan, a rural community that is growing. We are seeking someone that is devoted to Biblically Sound preaching while striving to build Quality Relationships with members of all ages and needs. Someone who also has a strong desire for community Outreach and Evangelism Please send letters of inquiry to Jim Folkersma, President of Council. Call 616-240-1890, or Email at JJFolke@comcast.net or the church office at Office@calvarylowell.org.

DIACONAL COORDINATOR Classis Zeeland is looking for a skilled and enthusiastic Coordinator for the Classis Zeeland Diaconal Conference. This paid position requires approximately ten hours per week with flexible scheduling. For a detailed job description and application process, please contact Rev. Mark Neymeijer at neyfamily6@juno.com or 616-895-6735.

DIRECTOR Living Hope Community Church, Fox Lake, WI, is seeking a full-time employee serving as the Director of Worship Arts and other ministry responsibilities. Visit livinghopefoxlake.com for more details.

SEEKING PASTOR - Team Ministry Immanuel CRC in the growing city of Hamilton, ON is seeking a full time Pastor - Pastoral Care and Outreach. This pastor will be part of collaborative team ministry in a co pastor model. We encourage interested individuals to review the job description at the Immanuel CRC website. Send cover letter and resume as email attachments to searchteam@immanuelministries.com

PASTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP/YOUTH Community Christian Reformed Church of Roselawn, Indiana, is seeking to fill a newly created position in the areas of discipleship and youth. A detailed job description for this position can be found on our website at cccroselawn.com.

WORSHIP LEADER The Ann Arbor CRC is looking for an individual to help plan, facilitate, and lead worship services. This individual will help the AACRC learn the language of reformed worship through practice and participation. And, help create a culture of hospitality and openness in our worship services. Contact hr@aacrc.org for more information.

EXEC. DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS Sunlight Community Church in Port Saint Lucie, Florida is seeking a seasoned executive to manage the administrative and business functions of this dynamic, growing church (www.sunlightcc.org). For more information, contact Jay Smit at 772-398-2579 (jay@sunlightcc.org) or Scott Vander Ploeg at 772-879-6326 (scott@sunlightcc.org).

PASTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP CrossPoint Church, Chino, CA (35 mi E of Los Angeles) is seeking a Pastor of Discipleship. Visit www.crosspointcrcweb.org/employment to obtain a Ministry Description and Church Profile.

LEAD PASTOR POSITION Britt, IA CRC is searching for a full time lead pastor. Interested persons should contact the search committee at cburrscollins@gmail.com or view our website www.brittcrc.org for more information.

MT. VIEW CRC in Lynden, Washington is seeking a full-time Senior Pastor to shepherd our flock of 120 professing members. For more information on this position please contact Kevin Sterk, Search Committee Chairman, at kdkidsncows@frontier.com

TWO CO-PASTORS Desiring to grow in our faith and mission, Woody Nook CRC in Lacombe, AB is seeking to call two pastors. We desire to have a team of three co-pastors who

will share the tasks of preaching, teaching and pastoral care while each pastor will provide organizational leadership for a key area: Preaching & Worship, Faith Formation or Community Development. If you wish to begin this conversation or have more information, you are invited to contact: Search Committee: wncrc.calling@gmail.com, Pastor Dayna Vreeken or Pastor Neil de Koning

Anniversaries

70TH ANNIVERSARY

BRASSER Roger & Ruth, will be celebrating their 70 wedding anniversary this coming August 7th. Celebrating with them will be their four children, Wayne (Chris), Karen (Larry), Verna (Dan) and Harvey (MaryAnna), 9 grandchildren, 14 great grandchildren. The Lord's faithfulness has been wonderful. Address: 2479 So Clermont St., Apt 331, Denver, CO 80222



TELLINGHUISEN, Ray & Sadie (Kok) 402 Kandiyohi Ave, Prinsburg, MN, 56281 will celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary on August 24. Children: Marge (Perry) Breems, Phyllis (Paul) Moes, 11 grandchildren, 9 great-grandchildren. We love you both! You have been such a gift to us and we thank God for His love, faithfulness and blessings in all of our lives!

65TH ANNIVERSARY

VANDER ARK Gordon and Saramae, of 7131 Union SE, Grand Rapids, MI. June 18, 1953. Children: Kris and Ed Timmer, Steve and Mitzi, Dave and Theresa, Jill and David Martin, Heidi and Jeff Wenke. 18 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren. We thank God for 65 years of God's faithfulness.

60TH ANNIVERSARY

EBBERS Gerhard and Teuny (Stolker) of 1909 Mapledale Court, Sheboygan, WI 53081. July 26th 2018. Celebrating God's abundant Love and Grace. Congratulations Mom and Dad. We Love you. Gerald and Yvonne. Marilyn, Joyce and Tom Nagel, Rick and Gwen, Ken and Lucinda. Your 10 grandchildren and 4 great -grandchildren.

VAN ZYTVELD Jack & Jane (Volkema) 2105 Raybrook SE #5030 Grand Rapids, MI 49546. Celebrating their June 28 anniversary were their children: James (Marlise), Don, David (Karen) Grandchildren: Jonathan, Matthew (Allison), Katherine, Rachel, Cecilia, Henry. Great grand-daughters: Makenna, Kendall. The LORD's love & faithfulness stand firm forever. Ps 89:2.

KOEKOEK Arnold & Carol (Bouma), of 1132 1st Ave SE, Sioux Center, IA 51250, will celebrate their 60th anniversary on July 18, 2018. Celebrating with them are their four children, Jeanne (Dan), Alan, Suzanne (Lanny), Adele (Michael), 12 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren. God is so good!

ZYLSTRA Doc (Ron) & Joyce of Lynden, WA celebrate 60 years of marriage on August 20. Love, Your kids Lauren & Doreen, Dean & Karrin, Tim & Michelle, Tom & Bridget, 14 grandchildren, 3 great grandchildren & daughter in-law Trisha & grandbaby Fletcher in heaven. Praise Him from whom all blessings flow!

50TH ANNIVERSARY

VAN TIL Sam and Judy (Koning) of Crown Point, IN will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on July 11, 2018. Children: Cheryl and Steven Putt, Doug and Amanda Van Til, Curt and Kara Marcus, and Jana Van Til. Grandchildren Sam, Joseph, David, Grace, Joshua, and Mabel. We praise God for his faithfulness and thank him for his many blessings.

HOWERZYL Jim and Eileen (Scholten) Howerzyl will celebrate their 50th anniversary on July 5. Their 4 children,

spouses, and 9 grandchildren join them in praising God for his faithfulness!



ERDMAN Chuck and Donna of Elmhurst, IL celebrated 50 years of marriage on June 21st, 2018. We are thankful for God's faithfulness throughout the years! With love, Chuck & Jackie (Devin, Zack), Christy & Bob (Jake, Luke, Charles, Carson), Caryn & Richard.

Birthdays

100TH BIRTHDAY

LILLIAN DEBOER The children and family of Lillian DeBoer (nee Dykstra), born July 29, will be celebrating her 100th birthday at Sunset Manor, where she is still living independently. "Mom," "Grandma," "Sis," and "Aunt Lil" is loved and appreciated by her children, grand-, great, and great-great grandchildren, one brother, three sisters-in-law, and a number of nieces and nephews. Greetings can be sent to her at Sunset Manor, Apartment 1061, Jenison, MI 49128

95TH BIRTHDAY

RUTH (STEVENS) FONDSE July 25. Her life shows the fruit of God's Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Her family, fellow-worshippers, friends and neighbors all know this truth. She continues to praise God in singing and playing the piano at Christ Community Church in Sheboygan. She lives and gardens at 1612 N 2nd St, Sheboygan, WI 53081

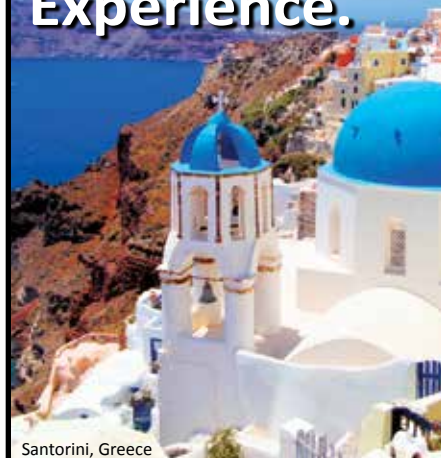
GLADYS I. (KOOI) GRITTER of 2121 Raybrook Ave. SE Apt. 362 Grand Rapids, MI. 49546 will celebrate her 95th birthday on July 23. Her children: Bob and Ruth, Ken and Mari, Cindy and Vince Gargagliano, Judy and Jim Kleinwolterink, her grandchildren, and her great grandchildren are grateful for her Christian love and example. There will an open house at the Raybrook Friendship Room on Saturday July 21 from 2-4 P. M.

Obituaries



BAKER, John H. died on April 21, 2018, at the age of 91. Born May 29, 1926, he grew up on a dairy farm in Uxbridge, Massachusetts. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan and an M. D. from Tufts University Medical School. While at Calvin, he met Marilyn J. Orlebeke, and they married in December 1955. While Whitinsville was and would remain his beloved hometown, Dr. Baker had a strong interest in the wider world, and in 1963 he joined the Foreign Service of the U. S. Department of State as a medical officer. Over the course of his Foreign Service career, Dr. Baker received the Department of State's Superior Honor Award three times and served in various places including Moscow, Beijing, Yemen and Afghanistan. After John retired from the State Department in the fall of 1989, he and Marilyn returned to Whitinsville. John and Marilyn were active members of Pleasant Street Christian Reformed Church. In 2013 they moved to Salisbury, Maryland, where their daughter Ruth Baker and son-in-law Maarten Pereboom live. Marilyn passed away in May 2015. Dr. Baker is survived by his younger sister, Helen Dykstra of Danville, New Jersey, his son David and daughter-in-law Mary Lucasse of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and their sons Joe and Alex, his son Paul of Chicago, Illinois, and Paul's daughters Hannah and Rachel, and Ruth and Maarten and their sons Max and Ben. A memorial service for John and Marilyn Baker will be held in Whitinsville, MA at the Pleasant Street CRC on Saturday, July 28, 2018 at 11:00 am. Per their wishes, their ashes will be interred at Pine Grove Cemetery in the Town of Northbridge, Massachusetts.

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Santorini, Greece

2018 GUIDED ITINERARIES:

From Madrid to Lisbon
September 12 – 27

Reformation Tour
September 20 – October 3

History & Heritage Tour of Europe
September 30 – October 11

CALL/CAA South Africa
October 5 – 20

Safari Tour of Kenya & Tanzania
November 2 – 17

2019 GUIDED ITINERARIES:

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land
March 11 – 23

Cultural Tour of Cuba
March 20 – 30

The Gospel Comes to Italy
March 28 – April 9

Netherlands Waterway Cruises
April 12 – 20 AND April 19 – 27

Tour of the Balkans
September 10 – 25

**Ancient Empires
Mediterranean Cruise**
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BOERSMA Catherine "Kay" (Triezenberg) of Grand Rapids, MI, age 98, passed away peacefully on June 11, 2018. She was preceded in death by her husband, William Boersma and her daughter-in-law, Susan Boersma. She is survived by her children Jim (Kathy) Boersma, Lin (Dave) Hoeksema, Bob (Sharon) Boersma, Jan (Bob) Schelhaas and Laurie (Dave) Monet, 17 grandchildren and 28 great grandchildren.

BOOT Marjorie, passed away on Friday, May 25, 2018 in Grand Rapids, MI. Marjorie is predeceased by her husband, Robert E. Boot. She is survived by daughters Sheri (Chuck) Ippel of Grand Rapids, MI and Susan Meyerer of Sandia Park, NM; son Scott (Sue) Boot of Kalamazoo, MI; eight grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

BUTEYN, Dorothy F. (Slagter), 82, of Minneapolis, MN, went home to be with her Lord on April 30, 2018. Preceded in death by her husband, Donald J., grandson, Nathaniel Kromminga, her parents, and siblings. She will be dearly missed by her children, Mary, Robert, and Elizabeth; their spouses; and grandchildren Margaret and Abigail Kromminga, John Buteyn and Jean Johnson (Buteyn) and spouses, and Benjamin and Caroline Van Hoever. Her family misses her faithful and frequent prayers on their behalf, gives thanks for her life, and looks forward this summer to the arrival of her two great-granddaughters, the anticipation of which brought her great joy. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gifts.

DE JONG Dr. George De Jong went to be with his Lord on April 8, 2018. He had celebrated his 100th birthday January 7, 2018. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 54 years, Agnes, (nee Van Soest). He is loved and missed by his children Shirley (Dr Ron) Stavinga, Judy (the late John) Van Vossen and Bruce (Diane) De Jong and his six grandchildren, seven great grandchildren and their families and by his many nieces and nephews and his sister-

in-law, Helen Mc Fall. We thank God for his 100 years of steadfast faithfulness.

FEIKEMA Roger went to Heaven on June 8, 2018. He was born in Highland, Indiana on November 5, 1933 and relocated to Bradenton, Florida with his family in 1977 after having honeymooned there with his bride Evelyn in September of 1957. Roger awaits a joyful reunion in Heaven with those he leaves behind: his loving wife Evelyn; his children Donna and Jeff Brussee; David and Heather Feikema; Dianne and Mark Pickhardt; and Denise Feikema; along with his twelve grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

FRIEND Norma Jean (Omta) 85, of Sunnyside, Washington, went to be with her Lord and Savior on February 12, 2018. She was preceded in death by her husband, Nicholas Friend. She will be missed by her children, Nick (Cathy) Friend, Judy (Ron) Boersma, Nanci (Jim) Campbell, Jim Friend, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Her life of service was a blessing to many.



HOFMAN, Cobi, nee Jorritsma, age 87 died in the Lord on May 31, 2018 in Grand Rapids, MI, predeceased by Rev. Tymen Hofman after 55 years of marriage. Surviving sons Jim and Bev Hofman of Palos Park, IL, Ron and Heidi Hofman of Grand Rapids, MI, Ken and Sandy Hofman of Grand Rapids, MI. She had 13 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren. Surviving siblings are sisters Jeanette Van Grouw, Sharlene Tjaarda and brothers George (Marvelee) and Bill (Janet) Jorritsma, and in-laws Jim and Doll Strikwerda, Bertha Hofman, Joanne Hofman. She lived a life of faithful service and knew her true hope in Jesus. Memorial contributions to Tymen and Cobi Hofman Scholarship Fund, Calvin Seminary.



IWEMA Jennie, nee Voss, age 88, went to be with her Lord and Savior on June 8, 2018. Longtime resident of Willowbrook, IL. Born and raised in Oak Lawn, IL. Beloved wife for 64 years to the late Henry "Ike" Iwema (2015). Loving mother of June (Jan) VanderLeest, John (Maria), Grace (Bill) Schaafsma, Mary (Ken) Buys, Sharon (Michael) Tafoya, Henry Jr. (Ardythe), Paul, and Christine (Jim) Buitter. Dear mother-in-law of the late Paul Powers. Cherished grandmother of 22 and great-grandmother of 32. Fond sister of Grace (Henry) Kamp, Peter (Louetta) Voss and the late Jacob (late Johanna) Voss, Henry (late Grace) Voss, Sadie (late Rich) Smits, Ted (Peggy) Voss, John (late Fran) Voss, Ann (late Clarence) Haak, and Marie Pierik. Dear sister-in-law and aunt of many.



LUCASSE Philip R., age 90, passed away May 5, 2018 in Grand Rapids, Michigan surrounded by his family. Phil is survived by his wife of 64 years, Carolyn, daughter Anne Lucasse and son-in-law Mark Wiersma of Jos, Nigeria; daughter Mary Lucasse and son-in-law David Baker of Chapel Hill and their sons Joe and Alex; daughter Susan Lucasse of Grand Rapids, Michigan, Anne's daughter Caitlin Brauer, her husband Max and their daughter Anna of Baltimore, Maryland, and Anne's son's Timothy Shannon and his wife, Kristin of Lansing Michigan. Memorial contributions may be made to Camp Roger or the Fuller Ave CRC Global Outreach Fund.

MULDER Edwin T., age nearly 80, of Munster, IN, passed away March 4, 2018. Beloved husband for 58 years to Helen (Vande Kamp). Loving father of Douglas (Barbara), Mark (Tami), Phil (Kim) and Heidi (Robert) Van Kuiken. Blessed



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with 13 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren. To God be the Glory.

RIBBENS Clarice (Vande Kieft), 95, of Blacksburg, VA, died peacefully on May 16, 2018. She was predeceased by her parents, Rev. John & Katie (Bogard) Vande Kieft, her sisters, Marjorie & Ruth, & her husband of 60 years, Rev. William Ribbens. She is survived by her children, Marjorie (Jim) Gray, Greenbelt, MD, Nancy Jager, Washington, NH, Bill (Martha) Ribbens, Belding, MI, Joyce (Dave) Campbell, Greenbelt, MD, Cal (Kathy) Ribbens, Blacksburg, VA, 10 grandchildren, 7 great-grandchildren. "To God be the glory."

SLAGER Ralph E. of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on Sunday, May 6, 2018. His wife, Harriet (VanderKlok), predeceased him in 2017. He is survived by his children, Dan, Dutch, and Ruth (John) Lemmenes; grandsons Berant (Heather), David, and Matthew; and great-grandsons Michael and Cole.

STEK Nadine Ruth, age 91, of Grand Rapids, MI, went to be with her Lord on Friday, May 11, 2018. Preceded in death by her husband, Rev. John Stek, and her daughter, Ruth Paauwe, Nadine is survived by her children Douglas and Lisa Stek, Stanley and Cyndy Stek, David and Janice Stek; her son-in-law Douglas Paauwe; 17 grandchildren; 22 great grandchildren; brother Marvin (Jeanette) DeBruin; and her sister Evelyn (Thaymer) Jonker.

TIEMERSMA Adriana "Ada" Johanna Dekker (nee Tiemersma) lived in the Chicago area all her 101 ½ years, finishing her earthly sojourn on May 23, the last of her siblings to die. Widowed of her beloved husband John Adrian Dekker in 1984, she leaves behind children Marilyn (Peter) Roeters, Beth "Betsy" (Henry) Kluck, Rev. James (Rose) Dekker, five grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren and aunt of many nieces and nephews. Re-named "Great Dekker" by first great-grandchild Stephanie, many fittingly and endearingly so addressed her since. When asked why she visited Oak Forest Hospital monthly on Sundays for 50 years, Mom

claimed "I'm working for stars in my crown," even though she knew Grace knows no stars, just grateful, imperfect saints like she was. In fact, her last words for some time before Jesus welcomed her were "Thank you" and "Good." It doesn't get any better than that. Thanks be to God.

VAN EEK ELLEN (Ploegstra), Burlington, ON. On May 11, 2018, the Lord in his infinite wisdom took Ellen, age 86, from Arie, her husband of 64 years, after a lifetime of partnership in ministry. Selfless mom of Calvin (Gloria), Jane (George Nieuwenhuis), Esther (Simon du Toit), Shirlene (Michael Abma), John (Julie). Loving grandma of 22 and devoted great-grandma of 4. Faithful sister to her only remaining sibling, Thelma Drenth, and to her identical twin, the late Shirley Hesselink and four other siblings who preceded her. Many remaining extended family members also mourn her death. Memorial contributions to Friendship Ministries or The Bible League. Arie now lives at #212, 3290 New St., Burlington, ON L7N 1M8.

VOGEL Cora, passed away May 13, 2018 in Bloomer, WI. She was born July 1, 1924 near Fremont, MI, the daughter of Peter and Nellie Geldhof Vogel. After graduation from 8th grade she worked odd jobs in the Fremont area. Later she attended the Reformed Bible Institute and worked as a "Bible woman" with the Navajo people in New Mexico. She then continued her education completing high school by correspondence, and graduating from Calvin College, becoming a school teacher. She taught Christian schools in Fremont, MI, Paterson, NJ and Oak Lawn, IL. She did administrative work at the Reformed Bible College and Calvin College. Before retiring she worked in adult education in the West Michigan area. Upon retirement she was busy many years as a volunteer in Guinea, West Africa; in Kentucky, Mississippi, and in Micronesia. She was preceded in death by her parents, five brothers and two sisters. Although she never married she had many brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who know she continues her life of faith and work in God's eternal Kingdom.



YONKER Dorothy A., nee Persenaire, age 94, went to be with her Lord and Savior on May 23, 2018. Beloved wife for 73 years to Wendell. Loving mother of Wendy Sue (Eric) Van Vugt, Thomas (Judy) Yonker and the late Cathy (David) Larsen. Cherished grandmother of Joshua (Deborah) Larsen, Anne (David) Vander Weele and Cate Jamison; Erin (Craig) Haan, Heather (Austin) Ramirez and Timothy Van Vugt; Jennifer (Chad) Harris, Kyle (Heather) Yonker and Chad (Lorien) Yonker. Dearest great-grandmother of 20. Fond sister of Phillip Charles (Phyllis) Persenaire, Donna (John) Leo and the late Betty (late Conrad) Douma, Phyllis (late John) Groot, Jean (John) Rosier, June (late Earl) Wolff. Kind sister-in-law of Kenneth (late Mary) Yonker and the late Norris (late Peggy) Yonker. Dear aunt of many nieces and nephews.

Employment

PASTORS for two open positions Friendship Christian Reformed Church, a 30+ year, suburban church located 15 minutes south of Grand Rapids, MI, is seeking a Lead Pastor of Worship and Discipleship and a Pastor of Congregational Care and Outreach to shepherd and develop our congregation of approx. 600 professing members. We are a welcoming, multigenerational church, blessed with debt-free, excellent facilities, with passion for growing in God's word and putting our faith into action through vibrant worship, community & global outreach, fellowship, and discipleship of all ages. This is a great opportunity to join a committed ministry team, reaching many with the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. For more information, please visit our website - <http://www.friendshipcrrc.org/> - and/or contact Dan Wierenga, Pastor Search Team Coordinator, at: dwierengaconsulting@gmail.com, (616) 308-3438

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CAMPUS MINISTER London Christian Reformed Campus Ministry Committee seeks to hire a full-time campus pastor for its existing campus ministry at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario. The successful applicant must be committed to the Reformed faith, be self motivated, have advanced academic and/or professional degrees; (an M. Div. is not necessarily required) and has experience working pastorally with young adults. Relating well to religious and internationally diverse groups on and around campus, while being an incarnational presence in both the academic and wider communities. Nurturing healthy relationships with students and campus ministry workers from various denominations and faiths as well as relating to students with a variety of mental health challenges is part of the context for this ministry. The successful candidate must

be able to work within the Fanshawe College Counselling and Accessibility's Spiritual Wellness program as a supervised partner from the local community. The candidate will seek to develop an ongoing relationship with a local Christian Reformed Congregation and volunteers where the campus ministry may have its volunteer support base. Interested applicants should send a cover letter, resume, the names and contact information for two references, and a brief vision for campus ministry to Harry Verburg, Chairman of the Board for London Campus Ministry, 27 BATTERY CT., STRATHROY, ONTARIO CANADA N7G 3H7. A full Classis Mandate and job description is available upon request. For more information please contact: (e-mail) hverburg12@gmail.com Deadline for applications is: July 31st, 2018

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Listening

It's easy to surround ourselves with others who think and believe the same things we do.

THE ROOM WAS QUIET as the two men shared their stories. Both told of heartbreak and loss. One man's son had died at the hands of Israeli soldiers. His son had been protesting the lack of opportunities for his people on the West Bank of Israel-Palestine. The other man's son had also died—the victim of a Palestinian suicide bomber. The men came from opposite sides of the conflict in Israel-Palestine.


How was it that these two men could stand here and call each other friend and brother? It defied common sense. They should hate each other.

All the stories are full of pain. Take the time to listen. This was some advice our group received the first morning we were in Israel-Palestine. We had been encouraged to take time to listen to the people while exploring this land.

Somehow, these two men had taken the time to listen. In doing so they were able to hear the pain in each other's story and to recognize the humanity in the other. Their stories were achingly similar. There was no doubt that these stories were full of pain. But instead of being driven apart, by taking the time to listen, the two men found a connection in their pain.

Every day we encounter people who have their own stories to tell. We live in a time when it's easy to have interactions online instead of face to face. It's easy to surround ourselves with others who think and believe the same things we do. This can make it even more difficult to understand those who have different experiences and opinions. Instead, it can lead to suspicion and even anger. It becomes *us* against *them*.

All the stories are full of pain. Take the time to listen. By doing so, we can hear the pain and the joy in each other's stories and recognize the humanity in those who are different from us. Maybe today that person is the cashier at the grocery store or your neighbor down the street. Maybe it's someone in your own family. Maybe it's someone in your church who holds social or political opinions that don't align with your own or who simply prefers another style of music in worship.

In 2 Corinthians 13:11, Paul calls us to "strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace." Each person has a story. If we take time to listen, we may find that we have more things that bind us together than we thought. It takes a little more effort and a little more work to take the time and listen. But we aren't in this alone. As Paul goes on to say, "the God of love and peace will be with you." 



Rebecca Tjapkes is a recent graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary and a candidate for ministry in the CRC. She and her family are members of Ferrysburg Community Church (Mich.).

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