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- » Album: *A Short Story about War* by Shad
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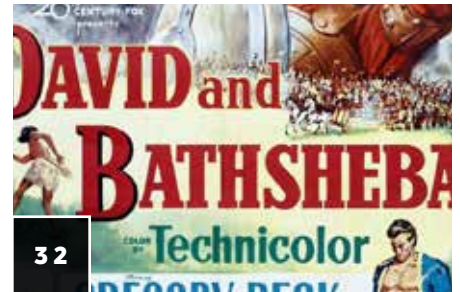
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We Are All Biased

Seek first to understand, then to be understood. That's being intellectually just.



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.

CURRENTLY ON DISPLAY at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., is a rare Bible from the 1800s used by British missionaries to convert and educate slaves. This “slave Bible” selectively excluded about 90 percent of the Old Testament and 50 percent of the New Testament. They included passages that seemed to reinforce the institution of slavery (such as Eph. 6:5) but omitted passages that spoke of equality (such as Gal. 3:28). It is one of many injustices toward Africans and one reason why Black History month is needed to remind us and help us rise beyond our past failings. It is also one of the clearest examples of deliberate cherry-picking from Scripture to support an agenda.

We too often unintentionally cherry-pick Scripture passages and teachings to confirm our cherished beliefs and positions. Our fallen sinful nature has what psychologists call a confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms our preexisting beliefs or opinions. The more emotionally charged or deeply entrenched the belief, the more likely it is that confirmation bias will occur.

In our Internet age we can almost always find information that confirms our opinions and ignores those that discredit them. And social media algorithms constantly recommend a diet of information that aligns with our preferences. This inflates our sense of always being right.

Thanks to confirmation bias, we might, even unintentionally, focus on biblical passages and teachings that support our opinions and ignore or downplay those that contradict them. Like the aforementioned “slave Bible,” we cherry-pick proof texts and

teachings out of context to support an agenda.

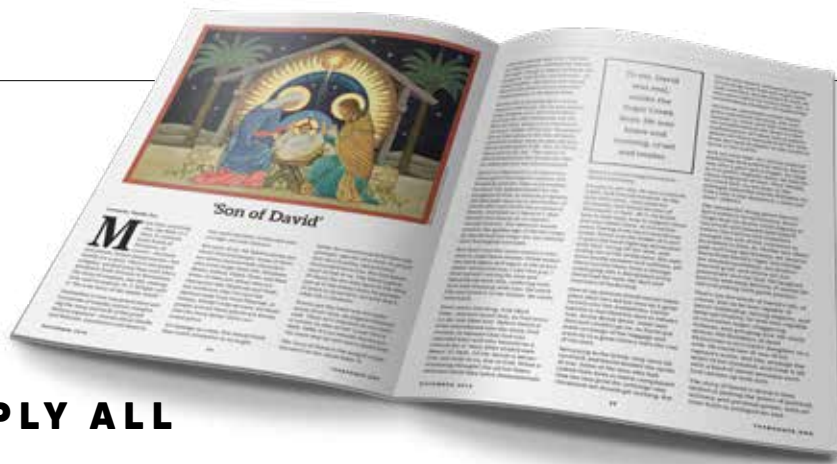
Our fallen human nature dislikes being wrong; we subconsciously want to protect our self-esteem. Hence, we are motivated to prove our opinions and our tribe’s positions to be correct. Our confirmation bias easily kicks in without our realizing it. Combined with our fallen nature’s potency at finding faults in others (finding the speck in our neighbor’s eye) and missing faults in ourselves (the logs in our eyes), we too easily think we are always theologically or biblically right (Matt. 7:3). We accuse each other of deliberately ignoring biblical truths.

We are all biased. And before you think that you are less biased than others, we are all hypocrites too (see “Beware the Yeast of the Pharisees,” p. 10). Are we doomed to biased opinions and intractable beliefs?

I believe we can mitigate our biases. First, we need to cultivate intellectual humility. We must remember the biases of our fallen natures and realize that we may not be as right as we think we are. One of the best ways of cultivating intellectual humility is to identify the faulty reasoning, weak biblical support, and inconsistencies in our own opinions and positions. Find the intellectual logs in our own positions before seeking to find faults in others’.

Second, we need to commit to truly understanding other opinions and positions. Not simply knowing superficial or straw-man versions of them, but understand them well enough to explain them in a way that those who hold them will agree. Seek first to understand, then to be understood. That’s being intellectually just. Only then will we be able to offer accurate critique.

Third, we need to love the truth more than winning arguments, even if it means being corrected. Submitting ourselves to truth, no matter how painful, is better in the long run. I believe these practices of intellectual humility, justice and submission to truth can help us find common ground. **B**



REPLY ALL

'Son of David'

I would like to thank Leonard VanderZee for the article "'Son of David'" (Dec. 2018). Very good! The majority of us who read *The Banner* are not theologians, and we so appreciate a good, down-to-earth article. Keep writing, and thanks again.
» Leona Stukkie // Grand Rapids, Mich.

I was disappointed to see the picture on the cover of the December issue (illustrating the "'Son of David'" article). I also found it ironic that the following article was about the importance of the Heidelberg Catechism, which suggests in Lord's Day 35 that this cover is a clear violation of the second commandment. I expect that the denominational magazine would be consistent in their convictions and would adhere to the Ten Commandments as taught in the catechism.
» Peter Beimers // Woodstock, Ont.

Editor's Note: As the Heidelberg Catechism's Lord's Day 35 clearly suggests, the second commandment's prohibition is tied to the context of worshiping or serving God through those images.

The Mind of Christ

As a candidate for ordination and as someone who is married to a minister, I can feel the tension Shiao Chong is talking about in not being able to please everyone ("The Mind of Christ," Dec. 2018). I also appreciate the pastoral wisdom he gives in challenging readers to set down our pride and listen to one another for the sake of the gospel and Christ's kingdom.

If I could sum up my call in a sentence, it would be to create spaces where people can be vulnerable with one another and listen well to each other so that we can better love God, each other, and ourselves.

» Abby DeZeeuw // Moline, Mich.

Upon reading Shiao Chong's December 2018 editorial "The Mind of Christ," I was reminded of Mark 3:25: "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." Jesus' words describe the CRCNA's current trajectory. Missional and evangelical vitality have been lost, regular attenders remain in cultural cliques, and the denomination hemorrhages membership. Any discussion of Christian love is meaningless without considering God's just wrath on humankind. This concept has been lost to many, with eternal consequences.

» Wesley Kwong // Portland, Ore.

Thank you for your work as *Banner* editor. As you mentioned in your latest editorial ("The Mind of Christ"), you cannot please everyone. God has well-equipped you for the job. Your appeal to us to have the mind of Christ is very much needed. Your call for progressive and conservative Christians to practice Christ-like humility with each other is right on. What may help us do so is to get beyond politically charged terms. The Bible calls for a balanced life of three integrated emphases: piety, doctrine, and transformation. These can be seen in the name "Christian," sharing Christ's anointing as prophets, priests, and kings. So much of our division is the result of one emphasis devaluing the other two. Christians are to cherish all three integrated roles.

» Doug Aldrink // Dublin, Ohio

Hebrew (Mis)spelling

Great article and interesting observation about the link between beauty and covetousness ("God's Garden: Pleasing to the Eye and Good for Food," Dec. 2018). I noticed that the spelling of "chamad" in Hebrew on page 13 didn't look right. The "dalet" and the "chet" are reversed. Since you read Hebrew right to left, the first letter should be the "chet." It's been 45 years since I first studied Hebrew, so I am stunned that my eye caught the error!

» John Terpstra // Fort Collins, Colo.

Languages in the CRC

I noticed in the December issue that some materials were printed in both Spanish and Korean but not in French. Neither Spanish nor Korean are official languages in the U.S., but French is one of the two official languages of Canada. Please note that I have nothing against publishing stuff in Spanish or Korean, but if you're going to do that, you should also publish it in French. The French-speaking community in Canada is one of the founding communities of this country, and there are more francophones attending Montreal CRC now than in the past. They are gradually replacing the Dutch immigrants who have moved away.
» Michele Gyselinck // Montreal, Que.

Editor's note: Currently, there are 40 Spanish-speaking and 109 Korean-speaking CRCs but only three French-speaking CRCs.

We Can Do Better

Word Play

Thanks for the fantastic work you do month after month in producing *The Banner*. I read it nearly cover to cover. Thus I was prepared to complete the crossword puzzle (“Word Play”) in the Nov. 2018 issue until I realized the clues didn’t match the puzzle. I made notes, counted spaces, tallied letters, and re-read articles looking for missed details. But alas, I could not solve the puzzle. Woe is me.

» Kerrie Howard // Hettinger, N.D.

Editor’s note: Alas, woe is us! As we confessed in our December issue, we messed up on the November “Word Play”. Please try again!



As I Was Saying

Find the latest blog posts online at TheBanner.org:

- » The Spiritual Discipline of New Year’s Resolutions
- » Don’t Plant a Church; Mobilize It
- » Why Gene-Edited Embryos Are a Terrible Idea

AS A LIFELONG MEMBER of the Christian Reformed Church, I grew up hearing two very different narratives. One emphasized how the CRC and the Reformed tradition have much to offer the greater Christian community with our understanding of Scripture. A phrase I often heard went something like this: “We are very strong in the intellect but may need some growth in the heart.”

At the same time I heard another narrative more subtly voiced through modeling. This voice told me that Scripture can be used to prove things. We were great at finding proof texts. When the denomination discussed an issue, the different “sides” found texts to support their arguments. When we received brochures from denominational agencies, they often included Bible verses related to its message.

Recently I was asked to teach a curriculum that consisted of Bible verses used as proof texts and followed by questions. In one example, participants are asked to read from a parable in Luke 14. Jesus says that if someone wants to build a tower, “Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost?” The curriculum’s follow-up question is, “Does Jesus want us to plan?” Now, I am not against planning, but what if we read James 4:13-14 instead? (“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.”) Does God want us to plan?

We should never take texts out of context, and we need to be very careful when using verses as proof texts. Even when we use proof texts well, we are modeling a dangerous use of Scripture.

I propose modeling an obedient stance of standing under Scripture to learn from it rather than using Scripture to say what we want it to say.

I know I am asking us to change something that has been ingrained in us for generations, but we can do better. I propose that instead of using proof texts in our educational publications, we teach others to use Scripture the way it was intended. I propose modeling an obedient stance of standing under Scripture to learn from it rather than using Scripture to say what we want it to say. I’m aiming high here, but I also propose we have an honest discussion about the proper use of Scripture in our literature, devotions, and educational materials. In too many of our publications we either take texts out of context or suggest that this is the proper use of Scripture.

We can do better. **B**



Dan Walcott taught high school Bible for 40 years at Illiana Christian, Holland Christian, and Hillcrest in Jos, Nigeria. He is currently the pastor of Bethany CRC in Holland, Mich.



Beware the Yeast of the Pharisees

Shiao Chong

R*ecovering hypocrite.* That's what my student leaders had printed on T-shirts for orientation days when I was a campus pastor. The point was that all Christians are recovering hypocrites. None of us has always been consistent in following Jesus.

Some disagree, arguing that hypocrisy is intentionally pretending to be what you are not, so though we all struggle in our spiritual lives, only those who pretend otherwise are hypocrites. But a closer look at Scripture reveals that the biblical use of hypocrisy is broader than that.

Jesus told his disciples to beware of the "yeast of the Pharisees" (and of the Sadducees and Herodians)—that is, their teachings and their hypocrisy (Matt. 16:6, 11; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1). Since the New Testament mentions the Pharisees a lot more than the

Sadducees, I will focus on them. In charging the Pharisees with hypocrisy, Jesus applies the term to both intentional and unintentional behaviors.

These days, the word *Pharisee* has come to be almost synonymous with religious hypocrisy. But it was not always so. The Pharisees were highly respected by most people during Jesus' time. Pharisees believed they could fulfill God's injunction to "be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:44-45) by creating a community committed to purity, fasting, prayer, tithing, and separation from whatever was "unclean." They were devoted to obeying, protecting, and propagating all of God's laws. For that reason, the apostle Paul counted being a Pharisee as something to boast about (Phil. 3:4-6; Acts 23:6).

In fact, the Pharisees were so desperate to keep God's laws that they started making "fences" or hedges

around those laws. They developed contemporary applications of God's laws to help prevent them from inadvertently breaking those laws. For example, just to be safe, they extended God's command not to work on the Sabbath to not even picking grain to eat or healing people on the Sabbath.

Over time, these "fences" accumulated and were orally passed down through the generations as authoritative for those serious about keeping God's laws. These are the traditions that Jesus opposed: "Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matt. 15:3). In that specific case, Jesus was responding to the Pharisees' complaint that his disciples didn't wash their hands before eating—a "fence" to prevent accidentally consuming anything unclean. The Pharisees essentially were accusing Jesus and his disciples of being lax with God's purity laws. In response, Jesus went to the heart

of the Pharisees' problem: In trying to keep God's laws by maintaining their "fences," they failed to realize they were actually contradicting God's laws. He cited the example of absolving people of their responsibility to provide for their parents—an application of God's commandment to honor our parents—by devoting their financial gifts to God instead. Thus, a Pharisee "fence" of devoting money to God became a way to nullify one's obligations under the fifth commandment.

Have we, in our own zeal to be holy, to keep our churches pure and obedient to God's laws, erected our own "fences" or traditions? In our own tradition, for example, have we been so afraid of violating the sacrament of the Lord's Supper that we fenced off the table from anyone other than those few who believed they were truly worthy? Or so fearful of drunkenness that we forbade any alcohol at all? And what about banning card playing, dancing, and watching movies?

More recently, perhaps, have we been so fearful of being racist that we have fenced off all cultures other than our own as immune from criticism? Or so fearful of being unloving that we have fenced off uncomfortable conversations around sin and repentance? Have we, like the Pharisees, confused breaking our own "fences" with breaking God's laws?

In their zeal toward faithfulness, the Pharisees strove to meticulously tithe everything to God, down to their spices. But Jesus accused them of focusing so much on the details of their traditions—the trees—that they lost sight of the forest: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!" (Matt. 23:23-24).

I doubt the Pharisees intentionally neglected the call to justice, mercy, and faithfulness from Micah 6:8. But Jesus was still ruthless in his critique of this inadvertent hypocrisy.

Jesus' words are a warning for us today. What "gnats" are we so focused on that we have inadvertently swallowed "camels"? Have we

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been straining out cuss words but swallowing racism or sexism? Have we been desperately straining out non-inclusive language while swallowing non-biblical worldviews?

In another example of unintentional hypocrisy, Jesus called an entire crowd hypocrites for not knowing how to interpret the present time even though they knew how to interpret the weather (Luke 12:54-56). Reformed thinker Calvin Seerveld defined this as "living in the neighborhood of the Truth but being unaware of

what the score is" (*Biblical Studies and Wisdom for Living*, p. 237).

Like that crowd, we may be adept at reading the stock markets or interpreting the political climate but fail to recognize the spiritual climate. Or perhaps we have misread our spiritual climate, identified the wrong enemies, and offered the wrong solutions.

Because the Pharisees were so highly respected as paragons of religious zeal and virtue, Jesus' denunciation of them as "whitewashed tombs" (Matt. 23:27-28) would have shocked most Israelites in his time. Would we be shocked and offended if Jesus called us hypocrites?

According to a 2007 Barna survey of young Americans (16-29 years old), 85 percent of non-churchgoers think Christians are hypocritical, and 47 percent of regular churchgoers agreed.

I believe they are right. We are all recovering hypocrites, intentionally or otherwise. That ought to humble us, make us reluctant to judge others (Matt. 7:1-5), and make us examine our hearts and our motives. Yeast works gradually, almost invisibly, slowly spreading through the whole lump of dough. It is not easy for us to identify it or to resist it.

By God's grace, a different yeast is also at work in our lives and in the world—the yeast of God's kingdom (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20-21). As we immerse ourselves in God's Word, in a faithful Christian community, and in faith-forming practices, we allow the Holy Spirit to work that yeast into our lives, enabling us to grow into a more sincere, less hypocritical faith and love. **B**



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

BIG QUESTIONS

Stewardship

At a store checkout the clerk asked if I'd like to contribute to a charity by adding a dollar or two onto the bill. I found it awkward saying no, especially in front of other customers. I wanted to say that my husband and I are thoughtful givers and we decide together where our contributions will go. Is it right for businesses to ask customers for contributions to charities?

I've encountered the same situation, and, like you, find it awkward. In part, it's that we try to be thoughtful and conscientious in giving; being asked for a spur-of-the-moment decision doesn't fit that pattern even though the amount is small. It's also that we may not be familiar with the cause being collected for and haven't had an opportunity to do due diligence to make sure that the organization handles contributions well. Are the contributions being applied to the need rather than to overhead costs of the organization or simply to support fundraising activities? Checking with charity watchdog organizations like Charity Navigator or the Better Business Bureau is always a smart idea.

Another part of our discomfort is concern over how we appear to others even if we are standing in line with people we don't know and may never see again. Let me make a confession: The temptation for me is to reply "Not



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohorquez

today!" to try to leave the impression that I really am a generous person and if only it were a different day I would contribute. We humans really are a silly bunch when it comes to projecting and protecting our public images!

Let me encourage you to continue doing what you are doing. Be thoughtful. Evaluate the ministries and causes that you support. Be thankful that Christian Reformed ministries such as Resonate Global Mission and World Renew have excellent track records and use support wisely and efficiently. And when asked for contributions, feel free either to contribute or to say no. If you feel the need to say more than that, simply say, "Our family plans all its giving through our church and gives to causes we decide on together."

Rolf Bouma is pastor of academic ministries at the Campus Chapel in Ann Arbor, Mich., and teaches in the University of Michigan's Program in the Environment.

Church/Bible/Doctrine

Are commissioned pastors allowed to perform the same tasks as ministers, such as administering the sacraments and performing weddings and funerals?

The Church Order assigns to ministers of the Word the tasks of preaching, administering the sacraments, church education, and equipping members for

Christian service. Ministers are also, along with elders, to supervise the congregation and each other, exercise discipline, see to good order, engage in pastoral care and evangelism, and encourage members to do the same.

The job description for commissioned pastors (formerly called "evangelists" and then "ministry associates") has been and still is in constant flux but includes all the above. Here is what Synod 2018 is proposing for adoption by Synod 2019: "The task of the commissioned pastor is to bear witness to Christ through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, church education, pastoral care, evangelism, and other ministries."

As you can see, we're talking six of one and a half dozen of another. Most commissioned pastors, however, are given only some of these responsibilities. One worship leader I know only plans and leads in the liturgy.

As for funerals and memorial services, we only insist that they "should reflect the confidence of our faith" and "provide opportunities to minister love, provide comfort, give instruction, and offer hope to the bereaved." Any person, ordained or unordained, may be in charge. If the family has a friend who is a high school principal, say, and the minister has just moved out, there is no law that says she or he may not lead.

Our Church Order does not require that only ministers of the Word may officiate at weddings. It says that they “shall not solemnize marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God”—and that presumably applies to any others as well. Mentioning “ministers” here is purely descriptive, not prescriptive. However, in all the provinces and in some states, the officiant must be licensed by the government. So commissioned pastors should be registered before they proceed. The couple should not have to discover years later that they’re not legally joined together.

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

Vocation

What is the role of self-denial in a Christian perspective on calling?

Self-denial is at the heart of Christian calling. How different this is from popular conceptions of calling! Such ideas of calling center on actualizing yourself, on doing something you love to do and deeply enjoy. Frederick Buechner’s famous description of calling as that “place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” can easily confirm popular conceptions. But are our callings essentially about self-fulfillment and finding our deepest gladness?

Many aspects of our callings involve suffering and sacrifice. Martin Luther said that anyone who really wants to experience self-sacrifice should get married and have children. John Calvin said Christians should “prepare themselves for a hard, toilsome” life. Beginning with Christ, God’s firstborn, God “follows this plan with all his children.” The call to follow is the call to take up the cross. The call to care for a severely ill spouse, parent, or child holds moments of profound joy. But it also carries a heavy load of pain and suffering.

The more we love others, the more we open ourselves to suffering.

Many of the menial paid jobs to which some of us are called involve self-sacrifice in the service of fulfilling needs of the community and providing for one’s family. Even forms of paid work that are considered self-fulfilling involve denying one’s desires for the sake of larger goods. A stunning musical performance, for example, is preceded by hours and hours of often tedious preparation.

As we soon enter the season of Lent, let us reflect upon the role of self-denial and hope in Christian callings. Some, like Jesus and the martyrs, are called to sacrifice their lives in faithfulness to their calling. Most Christians carry the cross through denying themselves in service to others in their callings. In addition to experiences of deep self-fulfillment amid suffering love expressed in their callings, Christians have the assurance that “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Luke 9:24, NRSV).

Douglas J. Schuurman is a professor of religion at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn.

Digital Life

I know big technology companies are keeping track of our every move online. But what about privacy among family members and friends online?

As with most things, it depends. Privacy is when we put up boundaries, and when someone without permission crosses them, it’s a problem.

Most of us get this. If there’s a fence, we don’t climb over it. If the light turns red, we stop. We know when we cross state or provincial lines. Boundaries online, though, are not literal, and we don’t always know or agree on the rules.

For example, let’s say you follow your nephews and nieces—the ones who allow themselves to be followed, that is—on Snapchat. The current version of Snapchat has a somewhat hidden feature where you can see the somewhat precise physical location of the people you follow. Let’s say one day you notice your niece go first to an out-of-town hospital and later to a nearby drugstore. What do you do? If you were driving by the hospital and saw her walk into the emergency entrance, you know what you’d do: you would immediately stop and ask if she needed help. But online, with more than 150 miles between you, if you were to call her, I’m guessing she’d think it was a little creepy. You’d be breaking a rule of some kind.

What you might do in person doesn’t play the same way online.

Here’s a more extreme example: Most of you, even if given the chance, would never walk up to a podium in front of 5,000 people to announce that you had enjoyed a delicious bowl of oatmeal for breakfast. So why do we think we need to do this online? Yet we do it day after day—and, well, we should stop. We’re wasting our time and other’s attention.

Until we learn and agree on the rules, I’d suggest we err on the side of revealing less about ourselves online—to a smaller and more trustworthy group—and behave online like we do in person.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of ministry support services of the Christian Reformed Church and art director of *The Banner*. He is a member of Covenant CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Got a Big Question for any of our panelists? Email it to editorial@thebanner.org with “Big Questions” in the subject line.

Church Focuses Community Support on Family Leadership

NEWS

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Photo by Greg Chandler

On Tuesday nights throughout the fall and winter, Lee Street Christian Reformed Church in Wyoming, Mich., hosts a community outreach program designed to help kids succeed in school and help their mothers and fathers become better parents.

Through its Family Leadership Initiative (FLI), the congregation has built connections with its neighbors, providing shared meals and an atmosphere of support and encouragement for children and parents alike. The program is held at the Godfrey-Lee Public School's early childhood center.

"The school has been very generous in letting us be here," said Beth Meekhof, a longtime Lee Street member. Meekhof and her husband, Brian, have served as site coordinators for the initiative over the last two years. "It's a little less intimidating for a family from the community to come into this school than the church."

On a typical night, families gather to enjoy a meal prepared by church volunteers. After the meal, the children have a short Bible lesson, get help with their homework, and play games, Brian Meekhof said.

Meanwhile, parents have their own lesson for the evening. "We talk about

Church volunteers serve a homemade meal at a weekly Family Leadership Initiative.

how to 'do family.' We might have a topic about conflict; we might have a topic about what's a good neighbor. We try to build family and we try to build community," Beth Meekhof said.

Israel Alvarado said the discussions include parents sharing ideas about what works and what doesn't work for them. "It's a way to learn from each other. I may facilitate the conversation, but there's a lot of experience in the room," he said. Alvarado started this initiative in 2010 while pastoring a Spanish-speaking Reformed Church in America plant that met at Lee Street. He now attends Calvin Theological Seminary and still participates at FLI.

Lee Street's weekly gatherings are part of a wider movement. FLI is a project of Gatherings of Hope, a collaborative effort of congregational leaders and learning communities providing support, education, and coaching to local churches. Funding support for the initiative has been provided by the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation.

— Greg Chandler

Kalamazoo Dairy Project Contributes to Hunger Relief

A unique dairy-based “rent a cow” project has brought three Christian Reformed churches in Kalamazoo, Mich., together with Growing Hope Globally (formerly Foods Resource Bank) and World Renew to help alleviate hunger around the world.

Since 2007, Kalamazoo’s Grace CRC, Heritage CRC, and Third CRC have been “renting” cows, that is, covering the costs for their feed and care at Red Arrow Dairy in Hartford, Mich., which is owned by a member of Grace CRC. The value of the milk produced by those cows is donated to the work of Growing Hope Globally and, through that organization, funds projects with World Renew. On average, the money the milk brings on the market has been about twice the cost of renting the cow, according to



Abby Timmer meets a young calf at a 2015 Dairy Day.

Simon Tuin, pastor of Heritage CRC, thus doubling the churches’ contributions.

Tuin said the \$40 weekly cost of “renting” the cow is spread across the congregation in creative ways. “We invite individual members to rent a cow for a week or a month. The rest of the congregation holds the ministry up in prayer, receives the reports, and is invited to celebrate the great work.” To maintain interest in the project, Heritage has named their cow Daisy; the congregation also enjoys occasional celebration gatherings at the dairy. The other two congregations raise funds for the cows through regular giving and offerings and are also welcomed to the Dairy Days.

Growing Hope Globally, which works with smallholder farmers through 47 food security programs in 27 countries, reports that the churches’ fundraising is further increased by the contributions of many in the project. “By partnering with the dairy and five agricultural suppliers, nearly triple [the amount given] is raised to support lasting solutions to hunger.”

According to Rachel Conley, an associate regional director for the organization, besides Kalamazoo’s dairy model, many Christian Reformed farmers in six states support Growing Hope Globally by using a crop-based model. These projects allowed the organization to contribute \$481,807 to World Renew hunger relief in 2017. John Vander Ploeg of Grace CRC said that over the years Kalamazoo’s dairy project, combined with Grace’s separate crop-growing project, has raised close to a half-million dollars for Growing Hope Globally.

Growing Hope Globally allows participants to direct the funds of their projects. In recent years, Kalamazoo’s Dairy Growing Project has elected to send its funds to World Renew for Nicaragua.

— Anita Ensing Beem

NOTEWORTHY

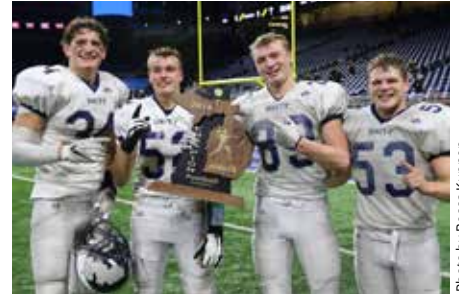


Photo by Becca Kunnen

Four seniors from the Unity Christian High School football team with their Division 5 state trophy: TJ VanKoevering, Isaiah Heun, Caleb Heyboer, Troy Kunnen.

Unity Christian High School in Hudsonville, Mich., was recognized with the **Division 5 high school football state championship** in November 2018. The final game was a 42-7 victory against Portland (Mich.) High School at Ford Field, home of the National Football League’s Detroit Lions. It’s the first state title in football for the Crusaders, led by head coach Craig Tibbe, who attends Second Christian Reformed Church in Byron Center, Mich.

Three members of Emo Christian Reformed Church were sworn in to new or continuing roles on the municipal council of Emo, Ont., in December. Harrold Boven, Lori Ann Shortreed, and Warren Toles make up 75 percent of the four-member council. Boven is brand new to the role, having been elected in October.



Photo by Gertie Postma Boven

Harrold Boven reading the declaration of office.

Task Force Recommends Refinements for Annual Synods

Shorter speeches. More delegate and leadership training. More time for intentional dialogue.

Those are some of the recommendations coming from the Synod Review Task Force, appointed by Synod 2016 to review the principles and practices of the Christian Reformed Church's synod (annual leadership meeting).

Rev. Williams Koopmans, reporter for the task force, said, "There are numerous changes that are being proposed, none of which are truly radical or drastic. It is more helpful to see the extensive list of recommendations as a fine-tuning of a system that already works well but can be improved in terms of preparation and training, election of officers, and making strategic and optimal use of the allotted time."

In addition to looking at the procedures for major assemblies in other denominations and ecumenical bodies, the task force analyzed the evaluations by delegates and advisers of three recent synods and looked at the time allocations of Synods 2016 and 2017.

Those evaluations showed that delegates expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the way synod operates but see areas that can be improved.

Speeches Are Too Long

According to the task force, a perennial concern in synod evaluations is that delegate speeches are unnecessarily long and that certain delegates speak repeatedly, to the detriment of fair discussion. The task force recommends that speeches be limited to three minutes, except in cases where English is a second language or interpretation is required.

Delegates and advisers, especially first-timers, can find the extensive agenda and fast pace of synod a challenge. The recommendation is to provide enhanced training through online and printed



materials and in sessions led by trained educators before synod begins. The task force also recommends having an on-site mentor/guide available to familiarize young adult representatives and ethnic minority persons with synodical procedures.

Agenda summaries and easy-to-read guides would provide additional training. A further recommendation is that all delegates be encouraged "to be aware of power dynamics" that can happen in synod discussions.

For additional continuity, the task force recommends encouraging classes to send one or more delegates to two consecutive synods. It also recommends requiring each classis to include at least one woman or one ethnic minority person in its delegation.

Rules Are Confusing

Synod operates with Rules for Synodical Procedure, similar to Robert's Rules of

Order but recognizing the ecclesiastical nature of synod. However, ambiguity in some of the Rules for Synodical Procedures can be confusing for officers and delegates alike. The task force is recommending a number of amendments and clarifications. It would also like to see a parliamentarian appointed to aid the officers of synod.

The task force also recommends that by 2020, synod will elect three officers at the end of synod to serve at the following synod, allowing them to attend meetings of the Council of Delegates (which acts on synod's behalf between the annual meetings) and participate in training related to synodical governance and procedures. The position of second clerk would be eliminated.

More Time to Dialogue

The task force recommends that synod also provide a space for purposeful dialogue on agenda items, whether in advisory committee meetings or plenary



Photo by Karen Huttenga

sessions. It recommends the process of a Native American talking circle or other method to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard.

The dialogue is intended to be among synod participants, not with people who aren't there. The task force noted that use of social media has been a challenge in maintaining the deliberative nature of synod. "Live streaming provides the opportunity for social media contact, influence, and strategizing to be communicated by non-delegate observers to delegates at synod during the course of deliberations. This can cause interference with the deliberative nature of the delegated assembly," the task force wrote. It considered recommending a 30-minute delay in the live stream but found the cost to be prohibitive. It opted instead to emphasize appropriate boundaries during the orientation training.

The task force noted that there is a growing desire that synod include increased opportunity for vision casting. "While it is not consistent with the governance purpose

and goals of synod to structure as a visioning rally . . . synod nevertheless should be a place to celebrate, refine, and reflect on the vision of the CRCNA." It sees a possible solution in occasionally holding a "themed" synod revolving around one particular topic through its worship times and presentations. Prayer would become more central to worship and a more intentional feature of synod's work sessions.

In a time of tightening budgets, the task force is also recommending that synod continue to be supported by ministry shares but introduce a modest contribution by classes in the form of a delegate registration fee and partial payment of travel costs.

Rev. Thea Leunk, chair of the task force, said that in her view the greatest enhancement to synod from the recommendations is creating more space for dialogue. "Synod will be more inclusive of all the voices of the delegates present, and that will result in more engagement with and understanding of each other," she said. "Synod can be a model of how to engage gracefully as a church in meaningful and sometimes difficult conversations."

The entire report to synod is available in English and Korean at crcna.org/SynodResources.

—Gayla R. Postma

Recommendations from Synod Review Task Force:

- » Put a time limit on delegate speeches.
- » Offer more delegate and leadership training.
- » Discourage use of social media.
- » Select officers at the end of each synod for the following year.
- » Provide more time for dialogue.
- » Send out a summary of the *Agenda for Synod*.
- » Appoint a parliamentarian to aid synod officers.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. John Allen Nash

1947-2018

A pastor and church planter at a time when there were few African American leaders in the CRC, John Nash died on Nov. 3 after a two-year struggle with cancer.

Nash came to faith in Christ while in the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam War. Following discharge, he graduated from Fayetteville (N.C.) State University with a B.S. in elementary education and became a prominent leader in the discipleship and training of African-American students.

In 1976 he joined the staff of Atlanta's mayor, Maynard Jackson, and was responsible for establishing the prayer room at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. With his pastor's encouragement, Nash enrolled at Atlanta's Interdenominational Seminary in 1981, graduating with an M.Div. After further studies at Calvin Theological Seminary and ordination, he planted Christ Community (CRC) Church, Atlanta.

For the next 25 years, Nash taught at Atlanta's Beulah Heights University, where he is fondly remembered as the animated professor in tennis shoes with a unique style of teaching.

From 2011 until his death, Nash served what is now called New Beginnings International Worship Center in McDonough, Ga. He is survived by Kathy, his wife of 42 years, three sons, a daughter-in-law, and four grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Persistent Faith, Patient Work, Prolonged Partnership in India

In October a team from New Hope Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Monroe, Wash., visited an orphanage under construction in southern India. Pastor Rob Jansons and four others went as part of an ongoing partnership with local believers determined to care for those who experienced great losses from the 2004 tsunami. The partnership began because of the persistent plea of one teenage girl.

In 2014, S.* emailed churches in North America requesting assistance. It had been 10 years since her Christian family had taken in 50 children orphaned by a tsunami on Dec. 26, 2004. The building they were renting wasn't large enough to accommodate them, and funds for that space were running low. One church responded.

Sylvia Boomsma, then-secretary at Geneva Campus Church in Madison, Wisc., a Christian Reformed church, promised to pray for relief for those running the orphanage. She also contacted a family friend, Dr. Roger Butz, who often traveled to India as a board member of International Christian Outreach and Relief (INCOR), a mission board in western Washington. Butz traveled to India in the fall of 2015 to meet S. He saw the group of 55 people occupying a house of about 3,200 square feet with an outdoor hand water pump and unfinished floors.

Returning home, Butz approached his pastor and fellow INCOR member, Jansons, about the orphanage. They planted the seed for New Hope Fellowship to be involved.

Two years after Butz and Jansons first discussed it, the congregation, partnering with INCOR, voted to purchase land in the south Indian village and determined to raise funds for a building suitable for 55 people to be called New Hope Children's Home.



New Hope Children's Home under construction, Oct. 2018.

In October Jansons and the visiting New Hope team offered encouragement to those working on the project and received updates on the building's progress. Noting that Christians in remote areas of Asia can feel isolated, Jansons, who has traveled to many parts of India since 2002, said the teams' presence on these trips can be a huge encouragement.

According to Jansons, the family and the children they care for hope to move into the new building by spring 2019. Once the first floor is complete, they will occupy that space and finish the second story when funds are available.

The team hopes to find sponsors for the children to assist with food, education, clothing, and medical care. S. plans to raise a garden on the land.

— Eliza Anderson

**The Banner is not identifying the town or the full name of S. in this story due to hostility in India to people practicing any religion other than Hinduism.*

'Breathing Space' Offers Yoga, Psalms

Take a deep breath. Slow down. Unplug for awhile. With North American culture's relentless pace and high levels of anxiety, who couldn't benefit from these suggestions? That's partly why Ken Bieber, pastor of outreach and discipleship at River Terrace Christian Reformed Church in East Lansing, Mich., proposed that the church offer yoga classes.

"Everyone is stressed," Bieber said. Because of yoga's growing popularity and its health benefits, including promoting relaxation and lowering stress, he sees the classes as a way to both serve and build relationships with people from the neighborhood, which includes nearby Michigan State University.



Jennifer Hehl (foreground) leads the Breathing Space class in a yoga pose.

Art Teacher Participates in Dakota 38+2 Memorial Ride of Reconciliation

Breathing Space yoga classes began in September 2018 and meet twice weekly. Attendance ranges from four to 14 participants. Jennifer Hehl, a certified yoga instructor, leads attendees through hour-long sessions in stretches, deep breathing, and slow exercises. Throughout, Bieber reads psalms, ancient prayers, or short meditations, bringing a devotional dimension to the sessions. "It's pretty intense," he said.

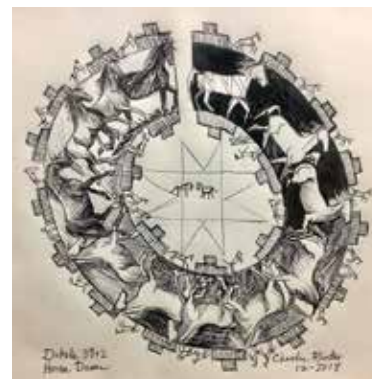
Breathing Space was funded by a \$3,000 grant from Ignite, which supports innovative and new ministry initiatives in the CRCNA. The funds, which will support the program through May 2019, cover instructional and equipment costs. Classes are free to participants.

Attendees range in age from their 20s to their 70s; each week so far, at least one person without a connection to the church has attended. "For some it can serve as the one real connection to a church," Bieber said.

Mother and daughter River Terrace members Lori Young and Elizabeth Young enjoy attending classes together. "I am always conscious of my goal to spend more time than I do communing with and meditating on God, and this sounded like a creative way to do just that," said Lori.

"The class is a no-judgment zone, which makes it welcoming to everyone regardless of your experience or comfort with yoga," Elizabeth said.

— Susan Vanden Berg



Drawings by Elmer Yazzie



From December 10-26, riders on horseback traced a 330-mile journey through South Dakota and Minnesota to remember history and pray for reconciliation. Elmer Yazzie, a Navajo artist and teacher at Rehoboth Christian School in New Mexico, rode and sketched with the group in 2018.

His participation in the annual Dakota 38+2 Memorial Ride was anticipated a year in advance. "At Christmas of 2017 I announced to my family that I would be absent next Christmas," Yazzie said. The ride has been taking place since 2005. It's a coming together of Dakota people, people from other American Indian tribes, and settlers to mark—as an act of reconciliation—the execution of 38 Dakota people on Dec. 26, 1862, the end of what is known as the Dakota War of 1862. (Two more Dakota leaders were executed three years later after being found in Canada—that is the "plus two" in the ride's name.)

Yazzie said he first learned of the ride through his daughter Sierra, who works as a counselor in the Minneapolis Indian Center and had become acquainted with it during her work there.

Yazzie captured the journey through many sketches and drawings, sharing them with followers of his Facebook page during the 16-day trip.

There was an extra journey for Yazzie, who drove with a horse trailer and three horses from New Mexico to South Dakota, beginning Dec. 7, and home again from Minnesota on December 27.

— Alissa Vernon

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

Church Worldwide: Canada Reverses Abortion Rights Proviso to Summer Jobs Program

Faith-based organizations in Canada are welcoming changes to the federal government's summer jobs program that remove language interpreted by many to require support for abortion.

"It's encouraging to see that the government has heard and responded to our concerns," said Julia Beazley, director of policy for the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

The change is "an admission that last year was clearly a violation of freedom of speech and religion," said Ray Pennings, executive vice president of Cardus, a nonpartisan faith-based think tank.

The change is a retreat for the ruling Liberal Party, which set off a firestorm in late 2017 by adding a new stipulation to the 2018 Canada Summer Jobs Grant application form.

In order to get funding from the program, which provides financial assistance to nonprofits and businesses that want to hire summer students, groups had to check a box attesting that their "core mandates" respected, among other things, "sexual and reproductive rights and the right to access safe and legal abortions."

Many faith groups protested, saying the attestation violated their right of freedom of belief and their freedom of expression under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The government tried to clarify its reason for the change, saying it welcomed participation by all religious groups. But about 1,500 faith groups and businesses that submitted applications without agreeing to the attestation were rejected. An unknown number of groups didn't apply at all.

The issue also prompted at least nine court challenges from church groups and private businesses.

Although the government initially defended the change, the office of

Employment Minister Patty Hajdu initiated behind-the-scenes meetings with several key evangelical and Catholic groups in an effort to address their concerns.

The result is a new application form for 2019 that drops the reference to core mandates and instead focuses on activities that are ineligible for funding.

"We want to be very clear that this isn't about beliefs, but rather about ensuring the projects and activities don't undermine or restrict the legal rights of Canadians," Veronique Simard, press secretary to Hajdu, said in an email.

The new language specifies that government funds cannot be used for activities that, among other things, "actively work to undermine or restrict a woman's access to sexual and reproductive health services," that discriminate on the basis of "sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression," or that "advocate intolerance, discrimination and/or prejudice."

For the EFC's Beazley, this is a positive change. "Now the focus is on activities, not on the beliefs and values of organizations," she said.

Pennings agreed, noting all the new form asks "is for us to be law-abiding citizens."

The outpouring of criticism from faith groups, businesses and individuals across Canada, as well as the court challenges, are considered key to moving the government on the issue. Another factor, however, is next year's federal election.

"They (the Liberals) have enough on their plate to worry about without adding a number of lawsuits and angry churchgoers," said Barry Bussey, director of legal affairs for the Canadian Council of Christian Charities (CCCC), which had also opposed the original language.

— Religion News Service

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Mountainview CRC in Grimsby, Ont., has been a past recipient of the jobs funding for its summer day camps. The church did not check the 2018 attestation box and funded the hiring of its young adult staff by other means. Mountainview does intend to apply in 2019.

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is the national association of evangelical Christians in Canada. The Christian Reformed Church is a member.

Of the changes, Mike Hogeterp, director of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, said: "The revised attestation is an improvement on last year's version—in that sense, I appreciate the government's efforts to respond to the concerns voiced by many faith communities." Hogeterp said he's glad of the EFC's public comments supporting the change. "Governments most certainly hear a lot of negativity from the Christian community, so it's important to express thanks for helpful steps like this." He also echoes the Canadian Council of Christian Charities' Barry Bussey's request for better clarity on some of the key statements in the attestation and intends to watch the upcoming process of application and approvals carefully.

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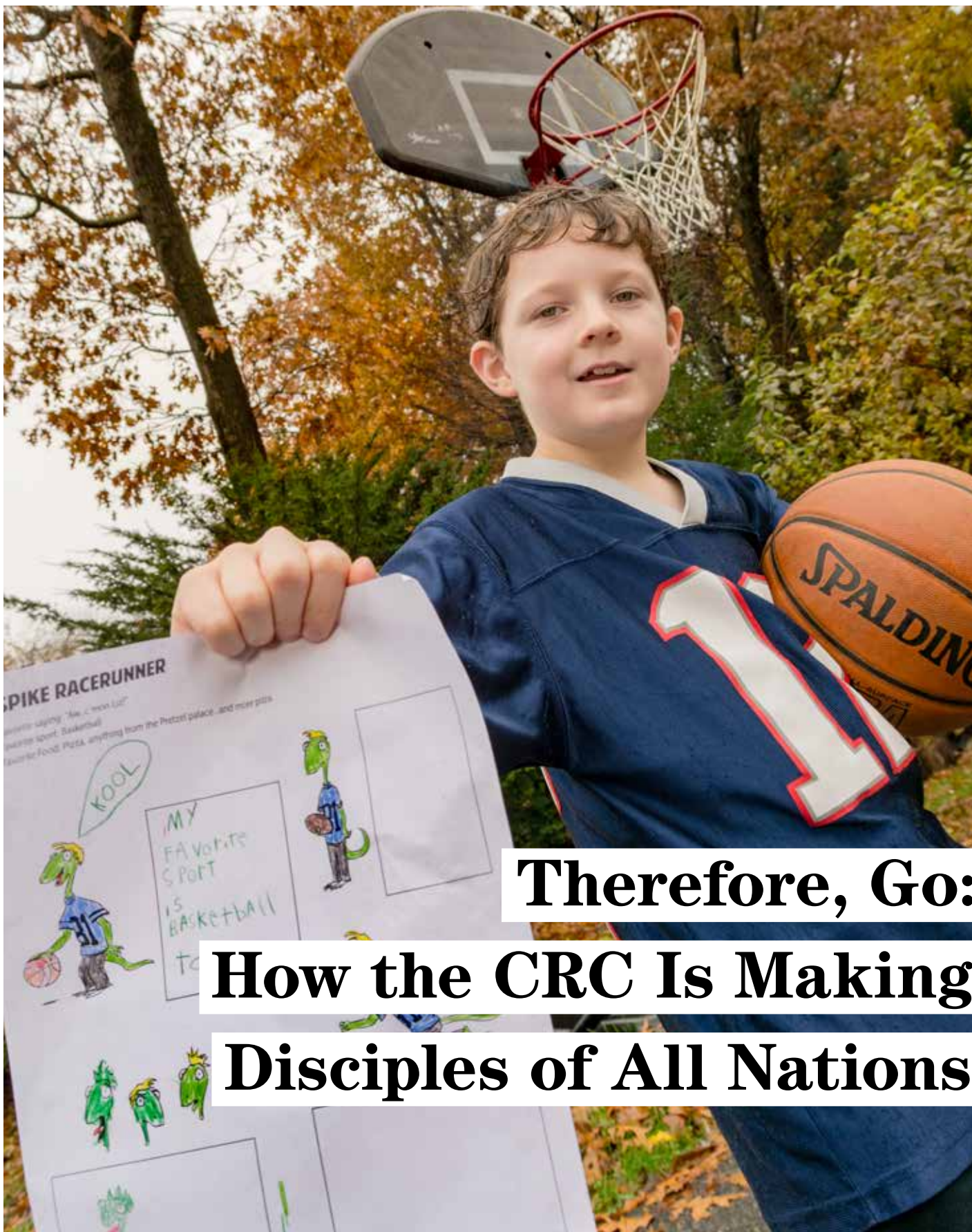
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**Christian
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**Therefore, Go:
How the CRC Is Making
Disciples of All Nations**

Nancy VanderMeer, Lauren Postma, and Brian Clark

When Dmitry heard a radio message that touched him, he decided to write a message of thanks to the program's producers in Russia. He didn't expect the conversation to go any further.

"I didn't really expect to hear back from you," Dmitry told Back to God Ministries International's (BTGMI) Russian ministry team. "I mostly wanted to share the burden in my soul. So you can imagine my surprise when you sent a reply."

Dmitry grew more surprised as the Russian ministry team continued to correspond with him, connecting him to churches in his area and sending him Bible studies so he could grow in his faith.

Though God can use one-off conversations or messages like the one Dmitry first heard, the Christian Reformed Church in North America strives to nurture lifelong disciples around the globe.

The following stories show how this discipleship takes place among different generations of people living in our own communities and to the ends of the earth.

Discipling Children in North America

Spike, Morrie, and Mumbly Pete play a key role in developing Micah Benjamin's faith.

But "I have a lot in common with Liz," Micah said, expressing his allegiance to his favorite lizard character in an online audio drama.

Micah lives in Holden, Mass. Two years ago his family discovered *Kids Corner* and its characters from the lizard town of Terrene. The stories and characters help kids grow into lifelong followers of Jesus.

Jeremiah Benjamin, Micah's dad, appreciates how the *Kids Corner* characters get Micah and his three siblings thinking about real issues while entertaining them at the same time.

"A good example is [Terrene character] Chamy's science and evolution background, which makes it a struggle for her to reconcile her view of nature with the existence of God. Our kids have always grown up hearing about the Lord, and now they understand a little bit why some people might have a different perspective," he said.

Micah Benjamin, 9, enjoys playing basketball just like Spike, a favorite *Kids Corner* character.

Micah agreed. "I think the stories are really funny and the characters are all interesting. I've even learned some things!"

A few times when the Benjamins were too sick to go to church, they listened to an episode of *Kids Corner* and used the online discussion guide. "I appreciate that the new website ties all the resources together in one place for a given episode," Jeremiah said.

He also sees how the audio series helps build a foundation of faith for his children: "As the kids get older, I want us to be more involved with serving others. That's challenging in today's fast-paced, busy lifestyle, but we try to slow things down and make time to talk about God's Word. It definitely helps when the kids are being fed biblical values even when we're not at church or doing a devotional together."

Discipling Young Adults in Mexico

Fernando grew up in Querétaro, Mexico, where he was raised to practice a "fusion faith" of Roman Catholicism and ancient Aztec beliefs. When he started university, however, he began searching for the truth.

Fernando got involved in *Compañerismo Estudiantiles A.C.* (Compa), a local campus ministry program. In fusion faith, people take pieces and ideas from various religions that fit their own ideas. Compa, however, set Fernando on course with Christ.



Fernando (back, yellow shirt) has learned how to live out his faith through campus ministry with Resonate's James Lee (far left). Also pictured are James' wife, Barbarita Lee (far right), and Fernando's family.



Being surrounded by the familiar mix of faith and ideals on campus made Fernando uneasy. He wanted to commit to true Christianity, but the path forward was not always clear.

When listeners hear BTGMI radio programs, they often feel compelled to share and discuss them with other members of their community.

"I get bombarded by Roman Catholic syncretism 'fusion' at my school," Fernando said to James Lee, a Resonate Global Mission missionary. A local leader asked Resonate to disciple young men in the Compa program. Lee began to walk alongside Fernando, encouraging him and helping him work through his spiritual troubles.

One of those students, Oscar, was looking to grow in faith. Like Fernando, Oscar had begun to question his fusion faith. Fernando and Oscar now meet every week to discuss the Bible using questions Fernando prepares with Lee's help.

"To be a true Christian in the university and also in society is to embrace the cost of discipleship," said Fernando. "It is not easy to follow Jesus, but nothing is impossible to God."

"I have seen the growth of Fernando's commitment to God every week as he prepares the weekly Bible study with me and shares the good news at his campus," Lee said.

Finding support in Lee and Compa, Fernando realized he didn't have to wait until graduation to start living out his faith by serving God and his people. He could start serving right away.

Fernando and Oscar have become close friends. The two have found truth and encouragement by studying the Bible with one another, and they teach each other how to remain true to their faith while walking through a campus full of differing religious ideas.

Fernando wanted to pass on the torch Lee lit for him as a disciple. He wanted others to know the truth of Christianity too. He approached many of his classmates and asked if they had questions about life or religion and invited them to a Bible study.

Discipling Adults in Indonesia

As Christians in Indonesia mature in their faith and advance through life's stages, BTGMI's ministry team there offers four types of daily devotionals for different

When We Share Our Faith with God's Family, Lives Change

age groups. A few years ago, these devotional booklets reached a new type of audience: prisoners.

Rev. Glann Siahaya delivers the booklets to a prison in Indonesia's Maluku province. There, Siahaya recognized the opportunity to disciple people who often feel as if their lives are at a standstill.

"[Siahaya had] the desire to guide and awaken prisoners so they could experience a good and meaningful life," said Hetty Limarya, former interim ministry leader for Indonesia.

As inmates began reading the devotionals, they felt encouraged. Just a few months ago, 20 prisoners began meeting twice a week with Siahaya, reading and discussing the biblical messages together and praying for one another.

Because churches are few and far between on most of Indonesia's many islands, discussion groups like the one in the prison provide discipleship opportunities. Gifts to BTGMI send trained leaders to more than 300 active groups like these.

As a denomination, we strive to work together to disciple believers everywhere, from our own congregations to around the world. As we preach, teach, and live out the gospel within and beyond our church communities, we walk alongside people of all generations as they grow into the likeness of Christ. **B**

BUSY. OVERWHELMED. CHAOTIC.

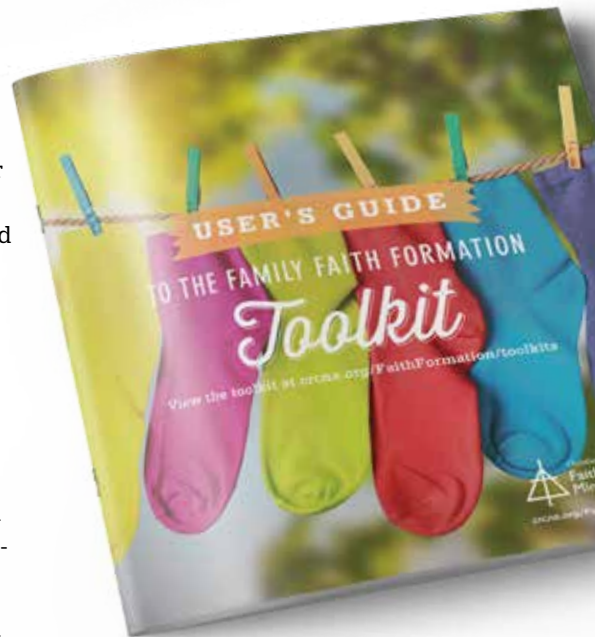
These are the words I most often hear when I ask people to describe today's families. Because of this busyness and the shifts in society and parenting, churches everywhere are seeing a decline in both attendance and engagement from young families.

I recently traveled to Peoria (Iowa) CRC to talk about Faith Formation Ministries' new Family Faith Formation Toolkit. Pastor George Den Oudsten had presented a series of sermons called "Faith Stories" and "Tell Your Children." On the last weekend of the series, the congregation invited me to share with them the history and importance of family faith formation.

We gathered on Saturday night with three other churches to discuss the changes in our society over the last century and how they affect families' abilities to form children's faith. We talked about how to help churches become places where young parents live into their faith in such a way that their kids also grow in their own faith.

I met again with Peoria CRC families during Sunday school. Using the Building Blocks of Faith Toolkit as our guide, we talked about how everyday conversations can become faith-forming moments for kids and their parents. Starting with the idea of "I Belong," family members shared stories of when they felt God's love. Everyone learned how to say "I love you" in a different language and took turns saying it to everyone by name. The room filled with smiles and the idea of what it feels like to belong and be loved.

Next we discussed "I Am Called and Equipped." Participants shared what they wanted to be when they grew



up or why they are in their current professions. Then the group told each person one thing about the gifts we see in them. "You love to help your sister when she reads. I think you might make a great teacher someday," was one example. We also shared verses about God doing good works in us and equipping us for service.

It was a great blessing to witness the conversations around each table. What a testament to the wisdom of our God in creating families and commanding us to "teach your children"! We are God's family, and when we share our faith, lives change.

The Family Faith Formation Toolkit and Building Blocks of Faith are available for free at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.



Trudy Ash is a Regional Catalyzer in the Midwest Region (Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin) for Faith Formation Ministries.

The View from Here

An Institution of Discipleship

LET ME TELL YOU A STORY. Recently, a Christian Reformed church member from Thorold, Ontario, felt called to minister to inmates at a local prison. He met one man who was feeling stuck. He'd read his Bible, but only a few pages at a time. It just didn't ring true to him.

Then the CRC member was given some materials produced by the Canadian Aboriginal Ministries Committee that he passed along to the inmate. The materials helped provide a link between Christianity and Indigenous culture. When the inmate engaged with these materials, it struck a chord. Suddenly the gospel message made sense. The man started to read his Bible more and asked questions. It was a moment of a wandering sheep being welcomed back into the Shepherd's fold. It opened up doors for that inmate to what Peter described as "perfecting" oneself into increasing Christlikeness (2 Pet. 3:14; Matt. 5:48). That's discipleship.

We often think of discipleship as activity between an individual and God, or possibly between two people with one "discipling" the other, as in the beautiful example above. But let's stretch this a little. Can you imagine an entire church, classis, or even denomination "doing" discipleship? I think the answer is a resounding "yes."

Consider this example from the Bible. Peter, James, and John were called out of their careers to follow Christ. For years they watched their rabbi, Jesus, learning about, thinking

Can you imagine an entire church, congregation, or denomination "doing" discipleship?

about, and dwelling on Jesus' teaching. By concentrating on Jesus and not on themselves, they understood that everything they received from Jesus was forming them for leadership, together, in whatever version of the kingdom Jesus was bringing.

How different this seems from the world we live in! Pastor Tim Keller, an American pastor, theologian, and Christian apologist, has described our current age like this: "The individual quest for autonomous expression and fulfillment is the driving value. In other words, the dominant culture that pervades all of us is to focus on ourselves."

This desire to focus on ourselves can permeate our church. Think of your church and ask yourself a few of these illustrative questions.

- » When you think about council meetings, congregational meetings, or small groups, how much time is spent on internal "business" as opposed to corporate and God-centered worship, prayer, and spiritual discernment?
- » Is the ministry of your church connected as much to national and international ministry efforts (such as the Centre for Public Dialogue, Back to God Ministries

International, Resonate Global Mission, and World Renew) as it is to its own local setting?

- » What portion of your church budget is dedicated to internal fellowship matters compared to outreach and evangelism?

I ask these questions so that we all might consider appropriate, Christ-centered postures of corporate discipleship.

With this in mind, I'm very pleased with the reorientation outlined in our shared ministry plan, *Our Journey 2020*. The second major goal of that plan states this desired future: "Our churches will be vibrant communities, radiating grace. As we preach, teach, and live out the gospel within and beyond our walls, we nurture people of all generations as they grow into the likeness of Christ Jesus." That's an outward focused, other-centered goal!

The ministries and agencies of the denomination have shifted their posture to enable support of local congregations as they live out this vision. I look forward to seeing how God will use us—as congregations, classes, and a whole denomination—to continue fostering discipleship together.



Darren Roorda is Canadian ministries director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Dividends of Empowerment and Resilience

JAMILA AKU, A PEASANT FARMER in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, gives thanks to God for giving her and her husband a baby girl.

In their first five years of marriage, Jamila and her husband, Abdulahi, suffered three stillbirths and the death of a six-day-old baby—terrible losses that brought the couple great pain and sadness.

During Jamila's first four pregnancies, she and Abdulahi had never visited a clinic for prenatal care nor sought any medical advice. They thought that going to the hospital for medical care was unimportant, and they believed in traditional remedies.

But with the introduction of a maternal, newborn, and child health project in her community, Jamila had the opportunity to join one of the program's cluster groups. Her husband and mother-in-law initially protested her participation in the project, regarding it as a waste of time. But with the intercession of program staff and village development committee members in her area, Jamila's husband and mother-in-law eventually relented and allowed Jamila to participate in the peer education meetings.

Two months into the program, Jamila became pregnant for the fifth time. She listened keenly to lessons on prenatal care, pregnancy danger signs, and baby care, and she participated actively in group discussions.

As expected of program participants, Jamila also shared what she was learning with her husband, who listened carefully and eventually understood the need for his wife to receive prenatal care. Abdulahi accompanied Jamila to the health



Through participation in a maternal, newborn, and child health project in her community, Jamila and her husband learned more about prenatal and medical care.

facility for her first prenatal care appointment, and Jamila faithfully attended all following prenatal appointments until she safely delivered a baby girl in June 2017.

After their daughter's birth, Jamila and her husband followed the program and clinic's advice on baby care, including exclusive breastfeeding. Staff and village development committee volunteers visited Jamila to encourage and support her in her efforts.

Jamila's fifth pregnancy, safe delivery, and the survival of the baby have changed Jamila and Abdulahi's thoughts about medical care, especially prenatal care. Jamila now encourages family members, friends, and community women on the

importance of prenatal care, breastfeeding, and general hygiene.

As a result of Jamila's story and the stories of other project participants, more women in her community and neighboring villages attend prenatal care appointments, and more deliveries are happening in healthcare facilities.

Parents increasingly see the need to have their children immunized. In one village in the Idevi community, development committee members contributed money to enable three pregnant women to attend prenatal clinics regularly.

—David Tyokighir, *World Renew*

Ecumenical Grant Helps Toronto Churches Talk about Affordable Housing

LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING is a huge issue in the greater Toronto area of Ontario. Three churches in central Etobicoke, a western suburb of Toronto, are working together to try to address this issue with help from a grant from the Christian Reformed Church.

Fellowship CRC, Bloordale United Church, and St. Philip's Lutheran Church in Etobicoke are part of a

group of 10 churches known as the Central Etobicoke ministerial. This ministerial does pulpit exchanges in January, has built Little Free Libraries, and supports a local food bank.

When the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee of the Christian Reformed Church in North America announced that it would provide \$500 grants to Canadian congregations interested in doing more ecumenical

activities with other churches in their area, Fellowship CRC applied. Together with Bloordale and St. Philips, they used the grant to host the Etobicoke Affordable Housing Forum on Oct. 29.

The forum included Jeff Neven, a CRC member who is now the executive director of Indwell, an affordable housing organization in nearby Hamilton, Ont.; Richard Antonio, chair of the Peel Poverty Action

Calvin Seminarians Wrestle with Racism in Reading Autobiography of Frederick Douglass



Danjuma Gibson, associate professor of pastoral care at Calvin Seminary, chose the autobiography of Frederick Douglass this fall for the the school's Book of the Semester Town Hall because of its challenging firsthand account of slavery, racism, and injustice in the 19th century.

The town hall was comprised of table discussions prompted by videos and three excerpts from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*.

Videos included a video blog by Gibson, who visited Douglass'

birthplace while conducting research for his recently published book, *Frederick Douglass, a Psychobiography: Rethinking Subjectivity in the Western Experiment of Democracy*.

The theme of clergy using Scripture to sanction slaveholding sparked concern and discussion.

"There is still a culture in the church . . . that will encourage and support terrible misreadings of Scripture," said Matt Mulder, a third-year M.Div. student.

Participants also discussed how a person once opposed to slavery could later so easily adopt it. One excerpt chosen by Gibson recounted the sudden transition of the wife of Douglass' slaveholder from a kind woman who taught him how to read into a cruel woman who abused him.

Gibson challenged the groups to expand their conception of victimhood, considering how those who have been in power and abused that power are also dehumanized—"not in

the same way, as far as victimization (of those they abused), but how their Christian character . . . has been dehumanized when they participate in the same evil."

The event concluded with a sense of hope even as the seminary community continues to wrestle with how faith and culture inform each other.

"Because of his [Douglass'] faith in Jesus—even after . . . [living] this life where he escapes from slavery, when there is war, when there is reconstruction, and then the Supreme Court strikes it all down—his hope was that the kingdom of God would still be manifested on earth," concluded Gibson.

Though Douglass knew the law would eradicate all he had fought for, Gibson said, his life "is a perfect example of hope—hope that doesn't say, 'I'm dependent on a positive outcome,' but hope that rests in the promises of Christ."

—Christianne Zeiger, Calvin Seminary

A Barnabas to Many Young Pauls

Group; and Sean Gadon, director of Toronto's Affordable Housing Office.

"The audience was a small but diverse group of community people who are passionate about the need for housing, particularly for the most vulnerable," said Mark Broadus, ministry director at Fellowship CRC.

Neven told this assembled group about a new affordable housing development being built 10 kilometers (about six miles) away from Etobicoke in southeast Mississauga. Antonio used stories to explain the real-life burden of those in the region who are precariously housed. And Gadon explained Toronto's strategy for affordable housing, including some positive examples that don't often make the news.

"One outcome of the meeting was an opportunity for the three church leaders to meet with the local Member of Provincial Parliament, Kinga Surma," said Broadus. "We were able to tell MPP Surma about the huge housing need in her riding [district], along with other poverty-related concerns."

Other Canadian churches who are interested in receiving an ecumenical grant are encouraged to email pelgersma@crcna.org.

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
CRC Communications director

THE CHURCH IN CAMBODIA is young, and so are its leaders. That's why Resonate missionaries Gil and Joyce Suh come alongside young, first-generation Christian leaders such as Narith* to disciple, train, and mentor—like a Barnabas to many young Pauls.

Narith is a leader of a ministry in Cambodia called Gatekeepers. Gil describes Narith as "an extremely gifted young leader"—but he's also married with children, and in Cambodia it's difficult to support a family through ministry alone.

Narith has an innovative, entrepreneurial spirit and wanted to be financially independent. With his family's and the ministry's best interests at heart, he fell victim to a bad business scheme and almost went to jail.

That scenario is not uncommon in Cambodia. The country is still recovering from the Khmer Rouge era, and there is a leadership vacuum. Christians in their mid-20s and early 30s are stepping into leadership positions with little or no support. They are first-generation believers, and many of them are not part of a denomination that provides guidance and encouragement.

"They're vulnerable," Gil said. "The pressures are much on them. Temptations are great. Persecution is also great. It's almost like a tree without deep roots. When the storm comes, how are we going to withstand? Unless you have that deep root—basically meaning their maturity in Christ, that connectedness—they're very vulnerable."

After the business scam, Narith needed someone to confide in, someone who could offer guidance. But in Cambodian culture, it is difficult to talk about shameful circumstances. Leaders are discouraged from sharing

their weaknesses and struggles. Narith's friends no longer spoke to him, and he became isolated.

God used Gil to restore and mentor Narith.

Just as Barnabas encouraged Paul, Gil got involved in Narith's life. Because there are so few places for leaders in Cambodia to talk about their well-being, Gil spent much of their time together asking about Narith's personal life.

"If a leader's family or personal life is struggling, their ministry is



Gil Suh (left) meets regularly with emerging leaders in the Cambodian church to encourage and mentor them.

undermined or jeopardized," Gil said. "I believe the health and development of these young leaders is crucial for the growth of the church."

Because Gil came alongside Narith, Narith now encourages other Christian leaders through his ministry, Gatekeepers. He encourages them to be vulnerable and to offer support to one another.

"I see now he is making an impact in the lives of other leaders," Gil said.

*Name changed for privacy

—Cassie Westrate,
Resonate Global Mission

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953 Now Blessed Be the Lord Our God

PSALM 72:18-19

1 Now blessed be the Lord our God,
the God of Israel,
for he alone does wondrous works:
his glorious deeds excel;
for he alone does wondrous works:
his glorious deeds excel.

2 And blessed be his glorious name
through all eternity;
the whole earth let his glory fill:
Amen: so shall it be,
the whole earth let his glory fill:
Amen: so shall it be.

Words: Psalm 72:18-19; Scottish Psalm, 1620, alt., F.D.



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What Can You Do about Plastic Pollution?

IN 1907, a man named Leo Baekeland made a discovery that changed our world forever. He figured out how to use chemicals to make plastic. This new product was so useful that people began using it for all sorts of things. Today plastic is everywhere—in your home, in your family's car, in your clothes, and in your toys. But a lot of that plastic ends up where it doesn't belong. Because plastic doesn't decompose, plastic pollution is a big problem. But it's a problem you can help solve!

Plastic by the Numbers

There are more than **7 billion** people on Earth, and almost all of us use plastic. Half of all the plastic in the world is used to make things we use only once and then throw away. These are "single-use plastics."

- » We use **2 million** plastic bags every minute.
- » We use **half a million** plastic straws every day.
- » We drink water from **50 billion** plastic bottles every year.

Sadly, lots of that plastic trash ends up in lakes and oceans, where it harms fish and wildlife. In the Pacific Ocean, somewhere between California and Hawaii, there's a floating "island" of plastic trash that's twice the size of the huge state of Texas. Much of that trash comes from single-use plastics.

Try This at Home!

Try this experiment. For one week, collect all of your family's plastic trash in a bag. Try to collect every single piece of plastic, no matter how big or small it is. (Wash out your plastic food containers so your trash collection won't smell.) At the end of the week, count how many


pieces of plastic are in the bag. Are you surprised by how much plastic you used? If your city or town offers recycling, be sure to recycle all that plastic trash after your experiment.



Use Less

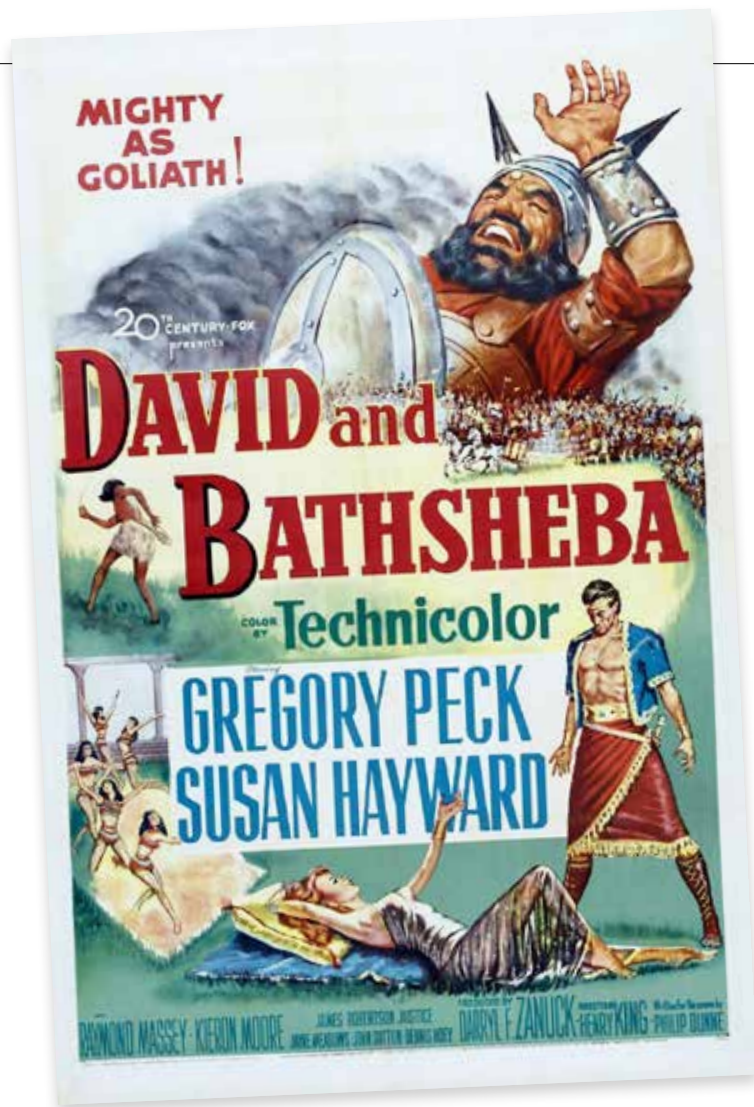
Our job is to take care of God's creatures and creation. Reducing our use of plastic is an important part of that creation care. Here are three easy ways to **use less** throw-away plastic.

- » Put your lunch in reusable containers instead of sealed plastic bags.
- » Use a refillable metal water bottle instead of drinking bottled water.
- » At the grocery store, encourage your parents to choose fresh food or food that comes in boxes or cans instead of food that comes in plastic containers.

Can you think of more? Write them down and then share them with your family. 



Sandy Swartzentruber works for Faith Formation Ministries and is a member of Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.



and what they said—but not a lot beyond that. They don't give us much information about what people were thinking or feeling, or what their motivations were. According to the story in 2 Samuel 11, King David saw Bathsheba taking a bath. He sent for her, she came to him, and she became pregnant. Why did David do what he did? How did Bathsheba feel about it? We just don't know. In the film version, Hollywood capitalized on the lack of detail, giving its own spin to the story.

But Hollywood isn't the only place people do that. We all put our own spin on Bible stories, interpreting the bare facts and connecting the dots in ways that make sense to us. The way we do that reveals important things about us: our assumptions, our prejudices, our cultural norms, and our worldview.

Take, for example, what one biblical commentator says about Bathsheba: "One cannot but blame her for bathing in a place where she could be seen. . . . Not, of course," he quickly concedes, "that this possible element of feminine flirtation is any excuse for David's conduct." He continues to guess about Bathsheba's state of mind: "Her consciousness of the danger into which adultery was leading her must have been outweighed by her realization of the honor of having attracted the king" (Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, 309-310).

Put this side by side with the take of author April Westbrook, who writes that many houses at that time were built with an inner courtyard completely surrounded by walls. You would have every reason to think you had privacy there, having no idea that someone might be spying on you from the rooftop of a nearby building. And

#HerToo

Christina Brinks Rea

A movie poster from the 1950s shows Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward starring in the film *David and Bathsheba*. Muscular and bare-chested, Peck stands over a scantily clad Hayward as she reclines on a pillow. Her hand is outstretched toward him as if beckoning him closer. It all looks a little quaint and old-fashioned now, but at the time it was so racy that in some places there were reportedly riots protesting the release of the film.

Biblical narratives are often detail-sparse and economical. They tell us the bare facts—what people did

After it's too late
and the damage
has already
been done, God
still has the
final word.

it doesn't matter who's spying on you—whether a king or a pauper, it's not an honor. It's a violation. Furthermore, going from a solitary wife in a noble household, as Bathsheba was, to a low-ranking wife in a king's harem was not exactly a step up in the world, and not the stuff of girlhood dreams by any stretch. Connecting the dots in a very different way, Westbrook concludes: "Bathsheba is a respected and pious Israelite woman whose life is interrupted dramatically by the king, who decides one night to engage in voyeurism" (Westbrook, *And He Will Take Your Daughters*, 124).

Reading these two accounts one after the other made me think back on my own visualization of the story. I'm kind of embarrassed to say it now, but for some reason I had always pictured Bathsheba on a roof, too, just a couple doors down from David, taking a bath in plain sight of God and everyone. Why did I picture it that way? I didn't set out intending to blame the victim, but I sort of did, didn't I? Thanks to the #MeToo movement, I've started connecting the dots in very different ways. Of course, I can't say for sure what Bathsheba was thinking or feeling. None of us can. But in the absence of more information, without apology I'll take the part of the one who had less power.

It's common to see this story under the heading "David's Adultery." I wonder if that whitewashes it too much. Why not call it "David's Abuse of Power"? Or even "David's Sexual Assault"? What about "David's Child Abandonment," or "David's Murder"?

How about all of the above? It's a terrible story no matter what you call it. It begins with David's men going to war while David remains at home. David

has reached the height of his power. He can sit back while his underlings do the fighting for him. While they are off risking their lives, he can take an afternoon nap on his rooftop couch. From that vantage point, he spots a beautiful woman taking a bath.

She is married, and her husband is one of David's loyal soldiers, but that doesn't stop David from summoning her to the palace. The text doesn't allow us to romanticize what happens next. "The action is so stark," writes Walter Brueggemann (*First and Second Samuel*, 273). "There is nothing but action. There is no conversation. There is no hint of caring, of affection, of love—only lust. David does not call her by name, does not even speak to her. At the end of the encounter she is only 'the woman'"—a nameless object, David's personal pornography that he clicked away from as quickly as he had clicked onto it.

One wonders if David would have given Bathsheba a second thought after that, and the answer is probably not. But then the news came that she was pregnant, which meant David had a problem on his hands. What he had done would become public. So David has Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, called in from the battlefield. David tries to trick him into sleeping with his wife so David could pass the baby off as Uriah's. David is ready to abandon his own child to hide his sin.

But Uriah is a man of integrity. He refuses the offer to be comfortable at home while his fellow soldiers are risking their lives. He doesn't cooperate with David's plan. Eventually, David sends him back to the battlefield with orders to the commander to put him on the front line and then abandon him to the enemy. This time David's plan works. Uriah is killed, and David takes Bathsheba as his wife.

Eventually, of course, David does confess his sin, but not until he is backed into a corner. He had a lot of help and support in waiting so long to come clean. David did not commit his sins alone. He needed someone to bring Bathsheba to him and carry messages back and forth. He needed the commander of his army to take care of Uriah. He needed everyone who saw what he was doing to stay silent and not speak up for the victims. David had a lot of help from a lot of people.

We've seen a lot of powerful figures fall from grace this past year—actors, television personalities, politicians, comedians, even chefs. For a while it seemed as if every day there was another person disgraced because of allegations of sexual assault or harassment. What was even more surprising than the accusations, though, was the length of time such behavior had gone on. In some cases it was an open secret. Everybody knew. It's just that the perpetrators weren't held to account.

That's because they had a lot of help. In many cases, the accused were respected, successful people who were doing impressive work in their fields. They were surrounded by people who had a vested interest in having them continue that work and who were willing to minimize or

turn a blind eye to bad behavior as a result. They were surrounded by people who may not have approved, but who also didn't challenge.

The same was true in David's case. Uriah and Bathsheba hardly stood a chance. All the forces of power and the status quo were working against them. David was surrounded by people who were cooperating with him, who were helping him cover it up, who were turning a blind eye, or who just stood by and did nothing.

But there was someone who did not stand by and do nothing: God. If you think about it, God might have been the one in this story most interested in covering up David's sin. God spent most of the previous 30 chapters of the Bible bragging about David, whom God called "a man after my own heart." God worked tirelessly behind the scenes to bring David to exactly this place and this position, because God had plans for David and his dynasty. God had a vested interest in David being a respected, successful king. If David fell from grace, quite frankly it's God who looks bad. If this got out, it might make God seem like a poor judge of character who backed the wrong guy. It was in God's best interest to bury this story.

Yet God did not bury it. In fact, God did just the opposite. God saw to it that the story of Uriah and Bathsheba would be told and retold for 3,000 years. This tells me that God has an awfully long memory for injustices done, for abuse suffered, for lives ruined by exploitation or cut short by violence.

There have been countless stories like this in the history of humankind: Countless victims who never stood a chance because they were too young, or too weak, or too poor. People who had all the forces of power and the status quo working against them and no one to speak up for them. People just like Bathsheba and Uriah. So many of those stories seem lost. Perhaps they were never

told in the first place, or they were ignored or forgotten. Justice was never done. Abusers were never called to account. Or if they were, it was too late. The damage was already done.

Those stories aren't just "out there." They are in our congregations. In the U.S., one in four girls will be sexually abused before turning 18, and one in six women will experience some kind of sexual assault. One in six men, too, will be the victim of sexual abuse or assault.


When I first heard those numbers, they seemed so high. Then I became a pastor. I started hearing people's stories—my congregants' stories. I thought about the size of my church and the number of stories I was hearing, and I realized those numbers rang true. I've learned that even in a church, we need to be careful. There are a lot of stories.

What the story of Uriah and Bathsheba tells me is that none of our stories is lost to God. There is a reckoning for Uriah and Bathsheba. God has not forgotten what happened to them, not in 3,000 years. God does not forget your story either.

And God does more than remember. God has the power to redeem. In his execution on the cross, Jesus was condemned by the world. He hadn't done anything wrong, but up against the forces of religious and political power, he didn't stand a chance. He died, a victim of violence, abuse, and murder. It looked for all the world as if that was the end of the story—another casualty of a broken, unjust system.

But that wasn't the end of the story. God raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection was God's judgment on the world. In the resurrection, God looked at the miscarriage of justice that put Christ on the cross, looked at all the people who had colluded to harm an innocent man, and said, "You were wrong. You should not have taken his life. So I'm going to give it back to him." And God, being God, had the power to do just that.

After all is said and done, God still has the final word. After it's too late and the damage has already been done, God still has the final word. Whatever your story is, God still has the final word. Above all the forces of power in this world stands the power of God. Psalm 145 is a beautiful picture of what that power looks like in action: "The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. . . . The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them" (Ps. 145:14, 18-19, NRSV).

That's the God who with goodness and power redeems us. That's the God who with goodness and power gives us back our dignity, our wholeness, and even our very lives, no matter what stories we have to tell. 



Christina Brinks Rea is the pastor at Church of the Savior CRC in South Bend, Ind.

1. How have you previously visualized and understood the story of Bathsheba and David?

2. What can be done in churches to prevent and reduce the shocking statistics on sexual abuse?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

The Belhar Confession

The gift is the gift of Christ's peace that unites us as one body, as one kingdom, as one family. But what about that obligation?

EARLIER THIS YEAR we were standing in the eating area of prison block Number 4 at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, South Africa. The guide was describing for us how the prisoners were treated: the food rationing, the deliberately humiliating body searches conducted in front of the entire cell block, the solitary confinement cells. The conditions she described recalled those of a concentration camp, not a federal prison. The crimes these men had committed? Some had been working in the white part of the city and had not been able to produce their passbook when asked. Others were on the streets after a curfew that mandating that Blacks and Coloreds must be within their township boundaries by nightfall. Still others had attended a political meeting protesting apartheid. All of them were Black.

It was at that moment that apartheid stopped being only history to me—a sad chapter in the story of South Africa. I realized just how deeply evil this institutionalized, legal separation of the races was. It's that evil that the churches of South Africa cried out against in crafting the Belhar Confession.

They did not cry out in anger or ask for retaliation; rather, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) cried out in faith and asked for repentance. Formally adopted in 1986 by the DRMC while apartheid was still law in South Africa, this confession reminded the world of the gospel of Jesus Christ: the gospel of unity, reconciliation, and justice.

It may seem that a confession written in South Africa is a long way from being a relevant confession for our churches in the U.S. and Canada, but the gospel of unity, reconciliation,

and justice needs to be proclaimed and heard in our contexts as well. That God desires the church to “give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another,” to be a peacemaker, and to witness against any form of injustice is a call to obedience for all Christians.

That leaves us with both a gift and an obligation. The gift is the gift of Christ's peace that unites us as one body, as one kingdom, as one family. But what about that obligation? The Belhar also challenges us with questions we need to be asking:

- » How do we—the church of Jesus Christ—still make distinctions between and among us?
- » What differences need to be addressed and confronted instead of silently allowed to exist?
- » Do we celebrate diversity as a church—do we allow it to enrich us?
- » How does the way we live together show the world that we were created in Christ, through him, and for him?
- » How does our unity as the body of Christ mirror the unity of the triune God? How does our community honor the community that is our triune God?

These words—this confession, this call to unity, reconciliation, and justice—demand more in response from us than nodding our heads in agreement. They call us instead to live out our life together as church. I hope that this confession, as a true expression of the gospel, will, as John Calvin urged, “change our hearts, pervade our manners, and transform us into new creatures” (*Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*).

“We believe,” the Belhar states, “that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” Thanks be to God that we have been entrusted with such a message. **B**

Try discussing the author's questions in your small group.



Thea Leunk is pastor of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Mich.

When Deportation Gets Personal: Yésica's Story

How can we stem
the insidious fear
of the stranger
when we are
called to welcome
the stranger?



Emily R. Brink was editor of the 1987 *Psalter Hymnal* and founding editor of *Reformed Worship*. In her work for the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship she has participated in many international worship conferences.

HOW CAN WE KEEP LISTENING

to the litany of woes in our world without becoming numb? What can ordinary Christians in North America do about the continuing multitudes seeking refuge from desperate lives in their home countries only to find increasing limits to their welcome here and elsewhere?

It may be easy to shut our eyes and hearts to nameless throngs, but personal relationships make it much harder. That's been the experience in our church. Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church is an older, established congregation in the city of Grand Rapids, Mich. Ten years ago, responding to changes in our community, we began working toward a bilingual English/Spanish service. Today, a much more diverse congregation gathers for worship in two morning services. Now we know the names and faces of people with stories we cannot choose to ignore. These are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and when one member of our body suffers, we all suffer.

Last year, late on Ash Wednesday night—March 1, 2017—a call for help went out from one of our members from Guatemala. Her niece Yésica had just gotten the news that she would be deported by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) three weeks earlier than had previously been scheduled. Suddenly she had only two days to get ready. She had already come to the difficult decision to take her two boys, ages 4 and 8 months, with her, after agonizing about the possibility of leaving them with other family members.

But now Yésica needed help, and quickly. She was refused the medical records of her children, so one of our

members, a physician, got her those records the next day. She also needed someone to drive her and the two children early Friday morning to the Detroit airport. I offered to drive, and Wendy, one of our members from the Dominican Republic, offered to accompany us. Wendy's presence was of great comfort to Yésica—and to me—as she prayed in both Spanish and English on the way, reminding her of God's love and promises to be her refuge in times of trouble.

As we stepped out of the elevator at the Detroit airport, a Homeland Security officer was waiting for us; he knew exactly where Yésica was because of the ankle tether we hadn't realized she was wearing. The area was filled with anxious families ready to fill the plane headed that morning for Guatemala City. We offered her snacks and also some cash from others in our church, but she refused the cash—we later learned it simply isn't safe for a young woman to carry cash; wiring funds is better. We prayed together, and Yésica and her children headed to security. Throughout all of this, including the ride, the boys were so quiet. We learned the next day from her aunt that when they landed, the younger boy had such a high fever that they spent their first night back in Guatemala in the hospital.

It was a quiet ride home. Wendy and I grieved at this young woman and two young boys returning to such an uncertain future without their husband, father, and extended family. How would she manage and also take care of her children? She had entered the country illegally and had been caught by the authorities. But now this young woman, who had come



Yésica and her family.

because of circumstances we did not know, had a name and a face.

The next day, Saturday morning, our church hosted a workshop called “Church Between Borders: A Guide to Welcoming the Stranger.” I was tired, but wanted to be there. More than 50 people from our church attended, mostly from our English service, hoping to better understand what many from our church and community were going through. The denomination’s Office of Social Justice had prepared the materials, and the three hours flew. We had no idea how complex and lengthy the process is for legal immigration, how few actually make it, and how many fewer now have a chance to come through our immigration or asylum system than in past years.

The morning ended with testimonies. Yésica’s aunt described her life growing up in Guatemala—the kind of life her niece was likely returning

to. A young man in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) spoke up; he had never spoken before in front of a group. His voice breaking, he spoke of coming to the United States as a young boy and now working legally (“It’s so much better!”), grateful that his employer offered tuition support for him to go to college yet terrified that the DACA program might end and that he would be deported. It took courage for both of them to be vulnerable in what we so wanted to provide: a safe setting in our church.

Some of us, wanting to respond more, wrote a letter to our congressman, Justin Amash, himself a son of immigrants. We hand-delivered the letter with more than 50 signatures from our church members to his Grand Rapids office to let him to know we supported the Bridge Act, designed to protect DACA youth. But more than a year and a half later, as of this writing, there has still

been no action on that bill or other attempts at immigration reform. To the contrary, we have seen the horror of parents and children separated from each other at the border. At least Yésica did not have her children taken from her when she came!

This story is only one of many. Other churches are responding similarly to complex pastoral needs. We keep asking how we can be faithful Christ-followers in these days of so much division on so many levels in our world, our countries, our society, and even our churches. How can we stem the insidious fear of the stranger when we are called to welcome the stranger? Aren’t we even called to suffer for the sake of Christ, who suffered for us? Are we afraid to suffer? Haven’t we already died—and been raised—with Christ? What are we afraid of? That’s the important question.

To the extent that we numb ourselves to the suffering of others, including our increasingly diverse neighbors near and far, we have indeed started to die—not to sin, but because of sin. The anesthesia that deadens us to pain—our own (think of the opioid crisis) and of the neighbors we’re called to love—that anesthesia needs to wear off so we can hear again God’s call through the prophets. We need to learn anew—in personal as well as corporate work and worship—the prophet Micah’s call to seek justice, desire mercy, and walk humbly with God. We need to discover that joy can come through suffering. That’s the promise of our suffering but conquering Savior. **B**

Brilliant Books for Black History Month

LOOKING FOR SOME great books to help acquaint kids with heroes of black history? Here are a couple of picture books to share with the children you love.

***So Tall Within: Sojourner Truth's Long Walk Toward Freedom* by Gary Schmidt**

Born in the late 1700s, Isabella felt slavery's poisonous bite even before she was forced to work in the fields. Most of her siblings had been sold as slaves, but Mau-mau Bett, Isabella's mother, never forgot them. As mother and child watched the night sky together, Mau-mau Bett assured Isabella, "Those are the same stars, and that is the same moon, that look down upon your brothers and sisters."


When Isabella was older and forced to work, she thought, "Now the war begun." Did she understand the prophetic power and reach of her thought? Isabella, who much later renamed herself Sojourner Truth, became a warrior for freedom. She relentlessly struggled to free her enslaved children, to be reunited with her dispersed siblings, and to travel through numerous states to tell the truth about slavery to audiences and whoever else would listen.

In this extensively researched picture book, author Gary Schmidt's poetic, metaphor-rich text relates Sojourner Truth's story in a gripping, lively manner. Daniel Minter's evocative and at times ethereal illustrations complete the narrative by capturing the losses, pain, and indignity of slavery and the power, passion, and principles of Sojourner Truth—a follower of Jesus who lived in his strength and called out to him in her grief and humiliation. Ages 8 and up. (Roaring Brook Press)

***No Small Potatoes: Junius G. Groves and His Kingdom in Kansas* by Tonya Bolden**

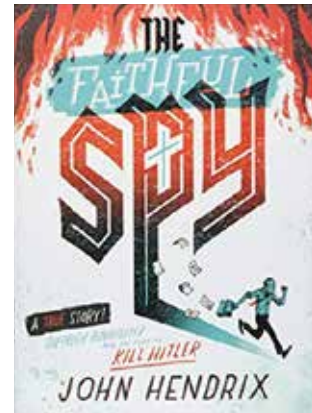
Junius Groves was still a child on a Kentucky plantation when slavery was abolished. As a young man, he joined a mass exodus of African Americans from the South and traveled west to Kansas where land was plentiful.

Willing to do whatever work was available and "always attending to duty and doing more, rather than less, than was required of me," Junius and his new wife bought a plot of land, taking on an outstanding debt that had to be paid within a year. They set to work and grew acres of potatoes. In the ensuing years, Junius' success and wealth grew. In 1902, he was crowned "Potato King of the World."

Author Tonya Bolden's lyrical prose and illustrator Don Tate's simple, charming pictures convey the optimism and vitality of a man who overcame every obstacle by working harder and pouring his love and energy into his family (he and his wife had 12 children), community, church, and farmland. Ages 4 and up. (Knopf) 



Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer and a member of Covenant CRC in St. Catharines, Ont.



The Faithful Spy: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Plot to Kill Hitler

by John Hendrix

reviewed by Francene Lewis

Can you follow God yet break the very rules God has laid down for us to live by? How can you serve your country when its leader deals out death and destruction? *The Faithful Spy* is a gripping illustrated biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his response as a loyal German Christian to Hitler's growing campaign of horror. John Hendrix uses striking illustrations and bold graphic design to tell this powerful story of a man of faith, his struggle to discern God's will for his life, and his daring actions in a time of fear and terror. (Amulet Books)



Delta

by Mumford & Sons

reviewed by Micah van Dijk

On the surface, *Delta* does not offer the vigorous energy of earlier Mumford & Sons albums, but rather something more subtle and much richer. It offers empathy for those who may be suffering or grieving while tackling the challenging themes of death, divorce, drugs, and depression. While an honest look at these hard realities of humanity may not be the feel-good music that fans and critics are looking for, this album has the potential to heal by providing songs with care for and perspective on their current life situations. (Glass Note)



The Hate U Give

reviewed by Natasha Tripplett

Sixteen-year-old Starr has just witnessed her best friend, a young black teenager, being gunned down and killed by a white police officer. While the world around Starr focuses on criminalizing the victim, she uses her voice to stand up for her friend, her family, and her community. Ultimately Starr speaks bravely for all those who live in a world plagued by hatred and racial tension. This movie, based on the award-winning 2017 book by Angie Thomas, gives a rare glimpse into the complexity of feeling pride for living in a misunderstood neighborhood. It also challenges us have the courage to use our voices on issues of injustice. Because it includes some violence and profanity, I recommend it for more mature audiences. On disc now. (20th Century Fox)



Raise Your Voice: Why We Stay Silent and How to Speak Up

by Kathy Khang

reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Kathy Khang explores what causes people, especially women, to withhold or be denied their voice. She unfolds how having no space to speak is not only a justice issue but a limitation on what it is to experience the fullness of *imago Dei*—being an image-bearer of God. Speaking out of her Korean-American experience, she considers Moses, Esther, and the unnamed woman in Mark 5 along with contemporary examples of standing up and standing out for one's convictions. This is an important book for empowering women of color, but it also challenges all people to make room for more voices than just their own. (IVP Books)

The Lowdown

Closer Look: This month PBS stations will air the documentary *Backs Against the Wall: The Howard Thurman Story*. Thurman was an American theologian who deeply influenced the black church and civil rights movement in the United States.

They're Back: Karen Kingsbury's Baxter Family book series has been so popular with adults that she's kicking off a kids' version, *Baxter Family Children*, with *Best Family Ever*, releasing February 5. Ages 8 and up. (Paula Wiseman Books)

Major Awards: February is the month for both the Oscar and Grammy awards. For *Banner* reviews of some of the nominated works, go to thebanner.org.

Is Atheism a Religion?

In their attempt to reach the truth, the New Atheists have swapped their own version of scientific dogma for religious dogma.



Mike Wagenman is the Christian Reformed campus minister and professor of theology at Western University in London, Ont., and part-time New Testament instructor at Redeemer University College.

ALTHOUGH IT ISN'T AN ORGANIZED religion like Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, atheism is a religious worldview. With assurance rooted in faith (rather than in proven fact), the theist says "I believe in god(s)/God," while the atheist with equal confidence says "I don't believe in god(s)/God."

Atheism is a religious worldview because it claims to know something fundamental about reality that hasn't been—or can't be—proven. Like theists, atheists operate out of a foundational faith or belief that shapes their perceiving, thinking, and living in the world.

But it's not as if theism and atheism are forms of "blind faith." Each has gathered from human experience evidence that supports their worldview. For example, neither theists nor atheists have proven whether life has meaning. Theists believe life has meaning because of their primary belief in a good Creator God who guarantees life's intrinsic meaning. Atheists' primary belief that there is no god(s)/God means the universe has emerged accidentally and without inherent meaning and that humans must be the ones to give life its meaning.

Here's where the New Atheists (including Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens) are so puzzling. These brilliant minds invite us to think that because we can't observe god(s)/God through a microscope or telescope, faith is silly at best and dangerous at worst. They do not take into account that the scientific method (which works wonderfully across a large part of human life) simply isn't geared to make definitive metaphysical pronouncements. In their attempt to reach the truth, they have swapped their own version of scientific dogma for religious dogma.

Our culture today has largely exchanged older, pre-modern theistic assumptions about the world for modern atheistic assumptions. Because of the industrial, scientific, and technological revolutions of the past 300 years, life in the Western world today leaves little room for questions of god(s)/God. Christian writer C. S. Lewis said the world today says to us, "You may be religious when you are alone," but adds under its breath, "and I will see to it that you never are alone."

This has resulted in a generally atheistic culture and worldview rather than the theistic culture and worldview of Christendom. Many people have migrated from religious faith and church life to agnosticism, atheism, and secularism. They are the religious "nones" on surveys, or those who call themselves "spiritual but not religious." Young people today live in a world where it is hard to believe in God. Their grandparents lived in a world where it was hard *not* to believe in God. And Western secular governments tend to default to the atheistic worldview in an effort to be inclusive.

Both theism and atheism, therefore, operate out of a primary and foundational belief or faith that results in a particular worldview. Both attempt to offer a comprehensive account of reality. If the goal is, as someone said, "living with the grain of the universe," then you'll live according to how you discern the grain from either your theistic or atheistic starting point.

Did you know that the earliest Christians were derided as atheists? It was because Christians didn't worship the Greek and Roman gods or the Roman emperor as divine, refusing to give their allegiance to anyone or anything other than Jesus Christ and refusing to conform their lives to the pattern of their idolatrous and pagan neighbors.

Christians today would benefit from exploring afresh how the Lord over all calls us not to be conformed to the religious patterns of this atheistic world. What, like atheists, do Christians *not* believe? **B**

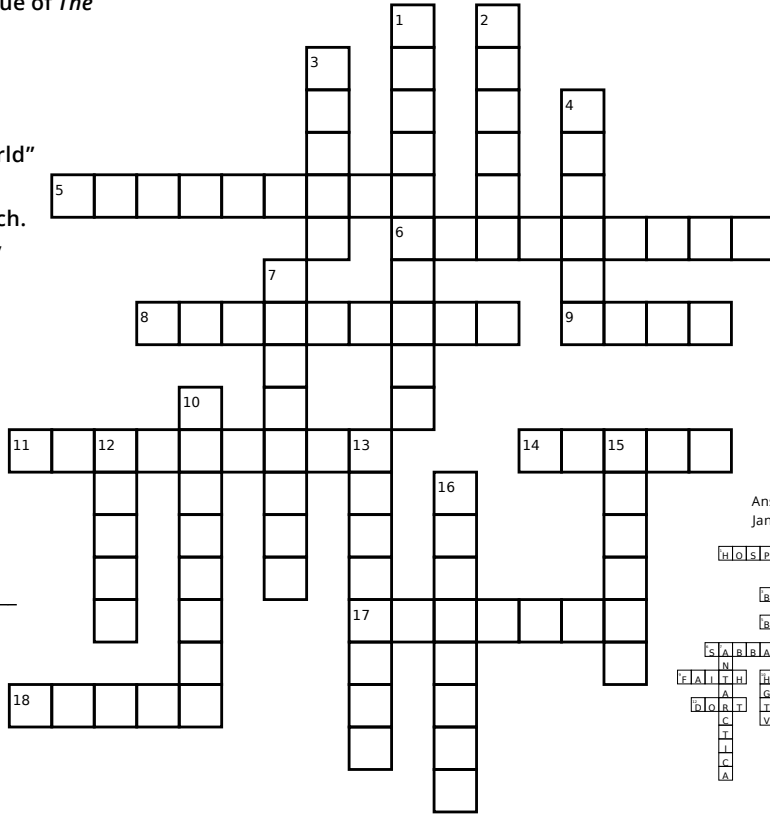
Find clues to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*. See the answers next month!

Down:

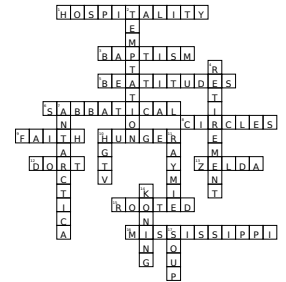
1. The heart of Christian calling
2. Junius G. Groves was “_____ King of the World”
3. Bathsheba’s first husband
4. _____ Leadership Initiative in Wyoming, Mich.
7. Calvin seminarians read his autobiography
10. _____ Bonhoeffer was The Faithful Spy
12. A task force recommends tweaks to _____
13. A social media app
15. _____ 38+2 Memorial Ride
16. Be like him to many young Pauls

Across:

5. Inventor of plastic
6. A western suburb of Toronto
8. What the Pharisees were accused of
9. Breathing Space combines psalms and _____
11. What Christ commanded us to go and make _____
14. A children’s home is being built in Southern _____
17. We should never take texts out of _____
18. Sojourner _____



Answers to the January 2019 puzzle.



Think you can change the world from an office?

We do.

CHANGE can be big, like multi-national big. Or it can be small, like the garage of a start-up small. It’s about what you choose to do on the one hand, and who you are on the other. We are more than our jobs, and God has a calling for each of us, wherever we go.

That changes everything.

Starting with you.



REDEEMER

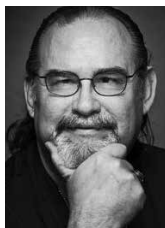
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Jolie Runs Wild

No more waiting
for someone to
push her—Jolie
was suddenly
free to “walk”
by herself.
To run wild.



Rod Hugen is pastor of the Village Church and leader of the Tucson Cluster, a church planting effort in Tucson, Ariz.

JOLIE WAS BORN missing part of her brain and is unable to walk or feed herself or do many of the activities most of us take for granted. My son, Justin, is her godparent and care provider. Jolie loves what she calls “walking,” which is being pushed around in her chair. At age 12, her disabilities may limit her freedom, but not her joy. If put in her chair, she laughs and shouts, “I’m walking!”

My mother’s funeral was on a Saturday. It would be a long day for Justin and for Jolie. Justin brought her to the graveside service and then to the memorial service. It was emotional and tiring. At the graveside Jolie was restless and disruptive. Sitting in a chair while people were weeping, praying, and softly talking was not high on her list of entertainments.

We migrated to the church, and Justin let her sit in the wheelchair while he helped carry in boxes and set up the table of remembrances. He left the chair wheels unlocked, and Jolie slowly figured out how to make it move. No more waiting for someone to push her—she was suddenly free to “walk” by herself. To run wild. Giggling with joy, she rode the chair around the room, smashing into tables, running into people, and taking delight in every delicious moment. In the midst of our sorrows, we couldn’t help but laugh at her unbridled joy.

But freedom has its limits. Eventually we made our way into the sanctuary for the service. Justin pushed Jolie’s chair to the front row and locked the wheels. Jolie was not happy. The memorial service began, and soon we were singing some beautiful hymns. “Softly and Tenderly” and “Amazing Grace” rang out. Jolie loves to sing. At the end of the first song she clapped

and yelled out, “Again!” Locked wheels were forgotten as we sang another. Jolie clapped and smiled again.

When the sermon rolled around, Jolie grew restless. As her attention span weakened, she pushed against the wheel locks. The pastor told of a powerful moment during his last visit with my mom. Mom’s eyes had been closed and she had appeared to be asleep. He prayed over her about the glories of heaven and the joy of being with God. Suddenly Mom opened her eyes and said, “Yes! I see that. Yes!” The pastor told the story with great enthusiasm. When he shouted out Mom’s joyous response to the prayer, Jolie clapped and yelled, “Yeah!”

Jolie’s perfectly timed amen brought a ripple of laughter to the gathered mourners. It reminded us of Mom’s newfound freedom. More songs and tributes to Mom were followed by the beautiful words of the doxology. Jolie responded with enthusiastic cheers. Then the service was over.

The brakes were released once again, and Jolie was pushed to the fellowship hall, where ham buns and fruit salad awaited the church members, neighbors, and family friends who chatted and wept and remembered. But Jolie wasn’t talking. Jolie was running wild. Whipping her chair around the room, she was laughing and giggling, thoroughly enjoying her newfound freedom. I tried to distract her with songs, but she was too busy running wild.

Mom is free too. **B**

DEADLINES: 2/4/19 for March; 3/4/19 for April
Subject to availability. Details online.

Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

General

AGENDA FOR SYNOD 2019 Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the office of the executive director of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda: a. Overtures, communications, and appeals to synod are due no later than March 15 and must first be processed through the local council and the classis. b. Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the Credentials for Synod form, as well as the completed information form for each synodical delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes and the appointed delegates as soon as possible, but no later than March 15. Materials will be included in the printed Agenda if received before the synodically established deadlines. Steven R. Timmermans Executive Director

ANNUAL DAY OF PRAYER Synod has designated the second Wednesday in March (March 13, 2019) as the Annual Day of Prayer. All CRC congregations are requested to assemble to ask for God's blessing upon the world, our nations, crops and industry, and the church worldwide. Councils are reminded that if it is judged that the observance of the Annual Day of Prayer can be more meaningfully observed in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer (U. S.), they have the right to change the date of service accordingly (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 578). The National Day of Prayer (U. S.) is Thursday, May 2, 2019. Steven R. Timmermans Executive Director

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CANDIDACY

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

ELIGIBLE FOR CALL

ELIGIBLE FOR CALL The Council of All Nations CRC is pleased to announce that Rev. Bert Vanderbeek is eligible for call. Please contact him at bert.vanderbeek@gmail.com.

Church Anniversary

CHURCH'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

LIVING HOPE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH of Abbotsford, BC will be celebrating 50 years of God's faithfulness March 1-3, 2019. For more info, visit www.livinghopeccr.ca

CHURCH'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY

LIVING HOPE COMMUNITY CHURCH celebrated 25 years of God's faithfulness. Former members and friends of Living Hope attended a celebration service on January 6th, 2019. To God Be The Glory! Send questions and memories to: info@livinghopefoxlake.com.

PRICES: Most ads are \$0.40^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.32^{US} per character and \$50 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

Birthdays

90TH BIRTHDAY

ARMINTHA SCHEFFERS BOUMA turned 90 on 1/6/2019. She is thankful for 61 years of marriage to John, and for her 5 children, 3 grandchildren, and 5 great grandchildren.

GLEA RIETEMA -SCHOLTEN (widow of Rev. Kermit Rietema) of 3242 S. Oneida Way- Denver, Co 80224 observed her 90th birthday on January 27, 1919. Her husband, Dr. Wm. B. Scholten and her sons Greg, Mark, and David Rietema and daughter, Tina Van Schooneveld praise God for this significant event.

WIL STALLINGA, 607 E. 3rd St., Apt. 405, Pella, Iowa, 50219, will be celebrating his 90th birthday on February 19. We are thankful for a wonderful father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Herm & Marcia Werkman, Brad, Sara, Jack & Jase Werkman

Anniversary

65TH ANNIVERSARY

65TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY Ron & Myra Van Kuiken celebrated their 65th anniversary on January 8, 2019. Children Peter & Kathy Vink, Dave & Gail, Barb, Jim & Diane, Rob & Heidi, Steve & Jill, along with 16 grandchildren & spouses, 17 great-grandchildren, thank God for these many years of blessing!

Obituaries

BOONSTRA, Harold, 97, of South Holland, IL, went to be with his Lord and Savior on Dec. 12, 2018. He was born in Sioux Center, IA. A longtime resident of the Chicago area, he directed church choirs and choral groups for 40 years. He was preceded in death by his wife of 65 years, Ann (nee Weidenaar), brothers Robert and Norman, and a sister Lois Vogel. He is survived by a brother Rudy and sister Mary Ellen Mouw, both of Orange City, IA; children Richard (Trena), Jackie Archer, and Janet Kosmal (Donald); nine grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

DYKSTRA Helen B., age 85, of Denville, NJ, previously of Bradenton Beach, FL, went to be with her Lord and Savior on December 6. She was preceded in death by her beloved husband, Edward G. Dykstra. She was a member of Bradenton Christian Reformed Church and was active there until a year ago when she moved to NJ. Her knitting and baking blessed many. She will be missed by her children; Debra (Mike) Bates, Timothy Dykstra, Carolyn (Shepherd) Mims and her grandchildren; Joshua (Niki) Dykstra, Jonathan (Megan) Dykstra, Paul Rossnagel, Paige Rossnagel, and great grandchild Austin Dykstra. We thank God for her loving example

TO ADVERTISE: Place your classified ad online at thebanner.org/classifieds or email it to classifieds@thebanner.org or fax it to 616-224-0834. Questions? Call 616-224-0725.

FLORENCE, Hibma, age 92, from Grand Rapids, MI, met her Lord on Sunday, December 9, 2018. She was preceded in death by her husband, Clarence. Florence is survived by her children Timothy (Cynthia), Thea (Greg) Hoekman, Gayla Boice, John (Mary Ayers); many grandchildren and great-grandchildren; and siblings Alvin Vanden Bosch, Henrietta Van Essen, Helena Mulder, Dorothy Wiersma, Thelma Hoogland, and Jim Vanden Bosch

POEL Robert Walter, died December 7, 2018 in Grand Rapids, MI. He is survived by his wife Carol Anne (Noordeloos); his siblings Carolyn Lucasse, Mary Jo Poel, Dale (Carolyn) Poel; his children Kathryn (Randall) Engle of Troy, MI; Col. James (Christine) Poel of Fairfax, VA; and Sharon (Scott) Thompson of Washington, DC; and grandchildren Jonathan Engle, Elizabeth Engle, Madeleine Poel, Jacob Poel, and Ellerie Poel.

VANDER VENNEN, Robert of Toronto, ON passed away on Dec. 14, 2018 at the age of 90 after a lengthy illness. Bob had a lifelong interest in the connections between science and religion, and in Christian higher education which honors both. Over a lifetime he moved from doing research in chemistry to teaching to academic administration. He served in the first faculty of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL, becoming academic dean there. In 1974 he took an executive position with the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. He also did foundational work in establishing King's University in Edmonton, AB and in Redeemer University College in Hamilton, ON. He is survived by Mary (Huissen), his wife of 65 years, sons Mark (Alice), Paul (Judy), daughter Kathy, 7 grandchildren, and 1 great-grandchild.

VAN ESSEN, Dr. Willard, died peacefully on Sunday, December 16, 2018, in Grand Rapids, MI. He was preceded in death by his wife, Arlene (Kooistra) and is survived by his children, Douglas (Sandy), Robert (Cherie) and Lori (Brian); seven grandchildren, and five great grandchildren.

VREDEVELD Harvey L., age 85 of Ann Arbor, Michigan went to be with his Lord and Savior on November 30, 2018. Surviving are his wife Joan (Huizenga) of 60 years, children Sharon (Steven) Newton, Bradley (Haiying Gan) Vredeveld, Linda (Eric Shultis) Vredeveld, Kevin (Laura) Vredeveld and 8 grandchildren.

ZAAGMAN, Dirk "Dick", age 86, went to be with our LORD on December 14, 2018. 863 Hillside Ave, Elmhurst, IL 60126. Husband of Florence, nee Teune; father of Lynda Gay (Steven) Nagle, Shawn Derek (Tiffany) Zaagman, and the late Garrett Joel Zaagman; grandfather of 5; great-grandfather of 1; brother of Anton (Margaret) Zaagman and the late Clarence (the late Pearl) Zaagman; uncle of many nieces and nephews.

Volunteers

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: MS Christian Family Services is seeking volunteers to assist in our thrift store and maintenance on buildings. MCFS serves people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. 662-873-4842

Church Positions Available

THE WORTHINGTON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH in Worthington, MN is seeking passionate and energetic pastor candidates to help lead our church into the next chapter of our ministry and walk with Christ. Church profile is available upon request. To obtain a copy, contact Scott at 507-360-0686.

PASTOR: Gateway Community CRC in Abbotsford, BC is seeking a full time Pastor of Preaching and Congregational Care who will help us grow in God's Word and service to Him through the preaching of the Word, teaching, and visiting. For more information visit www.gatewaycrc.org/employment-opportunities or email Marcel deRegt, Executive Pastor, at marcel@gatewaycrc.org.

SENIOR PASTOR POSITION Ladner CRC is seeking a senior pastor to lead us with Reformed preaching and worship, to nurture our spiritual growth, and to equip us to serve our community. Ladner CRC is located in the city of Delta, part of the Greater Vancouver Area. Job description and church profile are available upon request from John Bandstra at johnb.ferryroad@gmail.com

PASTOR Iron Springs CRC is seeking a full-time pastor to deliver God's word through biblical, practical, and relevant preaching. Iron Springs is located in a vibrant agricultural community in Southern Alberta. We are looking for a servant leader with a desire to know their flock and develop people to share God's love with our congregation and our community. Please contact Glorianna Scholten at 403-738-4746 gloriannascholten@gmail.com for more information.

SEEKING PASTOR Charlottetown CRC in Prince Edward Island is looking for a pastor of preaching and equipping to be part of our co-pastor team. Our new pastor will walk with us as we make a transition to become more community oriented. If you feel God speaking to you about our church, please contact peicrsearch@gmail.com.

LEAD PASTOR Fairway CRC in Jenison, MI is searching for a lead pastor. If you've ever wanted to make a difference in your community by partnering with a church that is committed to making a difference, you've found it. We are excited about our future. Check us out! www.fairwaycrc.org/churchprofile or contact Rick Bouwkamp at rickbouwkamp@gmail.com

PASTORS First CRC in DeMotte, IN is searching for 2 full time pastors to provide biblically relevant preaching, pastoral care, and community outreach following the retirement of our pastor, Laryn Zoerhof in June 2019. DeMotte features the benefits of small town living, a great local Christian School (PK-12), and the nearby attractions of Chicago. Job descriptions along with our church

profile, mission statement and a recent healthy church executive survey are posted on our website at www.1stcrccdemotte.org. If interested, please email your resume to 1stcrcc@netnitco.net.

SEEKING A CHURCH PLANTER Calgary Community Reformed Church is seeking a charismatic full time pastor to reach out and grow a new congregation at our church. We are located in South Calgary, in a revitalizing area offering an increased opportunity to minister to the needs of a community in transition. For more information, please email admin@mardaloopccrc.org 403-244-3037

PASTOR We, the Aylmer Christian Reformed Church in Aylmer, Ontario are seeking a full-time Lead Pastor who will help our large congregation grow in God's Word and service to Him through preaching of the Word, teaching and visiting. Job description and church profile are available upon request. Please contact Lisa at bruceandlisavk@hotmail.com or call 519-520-1220 for more information.

LEAD PASTOR: First Cutlerville CRC in Byron Center, Michigan is seeking a lead pastor to join their church family. The people of First Cutlerville seek to glorify God by worshipping Him wholeheartedly, witnessing His love to all people and by working to bring His kingdom to every area of life. Please visit <https://www.fvcrc.org/> and email search@fvcrc.org for more information.

SEEKING PASTOR Charlottetown CRC, PEI Canada, is looking for a "Pastor of Preaching and Equipping" for our Co-Pastor team. Contact us at peicrsearch@gmail.com



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www.dordt.edu — About Dordt — Job Openings

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PASTOR OF EDUCATION Fellowship CRC in Brighton, ON is seeking a full time Pastor of Education to lead the educational ministries of our church with a special focus on the younger generation. Please visit brightoncrc.org for more information

WORSHIP AND COMMUNITY LIFE: Fairway CRC in Jenison, MI is seeking God's direction to fill this full time position. Our new director of worship will also lead our Education and Outreach teams in efforts to serve our local and greater community and to seek and grow disciples of Jesus Christ. For a full description of the position visit www.fairwaycrc.org or to apply email cover letter and resume to our search committee at skdb94@gmail.com

Employment

PASTOR OF FAITH FORMATION Hope Christian Reformed Church of Brantford ON is seeking a Pastor of Faith Formation and Discipleship. This exciting new full time position will be part of a team ministry working alongside our senior Pastor. We are a vibrant, large congregation in a growing community in southwestern ON. If interested please contact Nancy Game at info@hopeccr.ca

PASTOR Terra Ceia CRC in Pantego, NC is seeking a dynamic, personable, full time pastor committed to help us grow in God's word and make a difference in our community. We are committed Christians seeking a strong leader. For more information please contact the search committee at bkelder23@gmail.com, please visit terraceiacrc.org. Address: 3298 Terra Ceia Rd. Pantego, NC 27860

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