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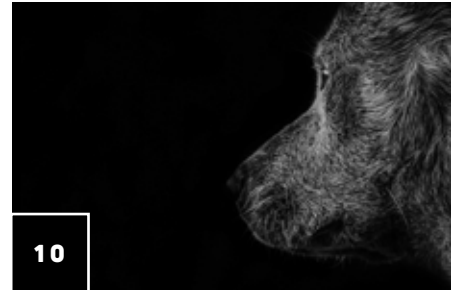
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- » As I Was Saying: When Lenten Fasting Is Indistinguishable from a Cleanse
- » News: Iowa Church Hosts Praise Band Fest
- » Church Worldwide: Faith Groups Seek Afterlife for Shuttered Churches in Canada
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Good Posture

Can we strive to be
backbone
Christians, supple
and strong,
serving Christ in
the world?



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.

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

ONE OF MY FAVORITE parenting books is Barbara Coloroso's *Kids Are Worth It!* She describes three basic kinds of families: brick wall, jellyfish, and backbone. I am struck at how her helpful metaphors can also describe three kinds of spiritual postures.

A brick wall is rigid and unyielding. It keeps people in or out. A brick wall posture, then, tends to be rigid and authoritarian. It emphasizes rules and getting things right. Christians who adopt a brick wall posture tend to see issues in black and white. They often have very firm convictions. In the extreme, this posture leans toward dominance and legalism.

A jellyfish has no firm parts at all. It is swept along by every wave and current of the sea. A jellyfish posture, therefore, is less concerned with rules and boundaries. It tends to be accepting, often following trends. Jellyfish Christians may be comfortable with ambiguity but may lack spiritual stability and grounding. They are in danger of permissiveness and relativism.

A backbone, on the other hand, is both firm yet flexible, giving both structure and movement to the body. A backbone posture recognizes the need for boundaries but avoids setting them in stone. Backbone Christians, in my view, combine the best of both brick wall and jellyfish postures.

To be clear, the brick wall and jellyfish postures are not synonymous with so-called conservatives and liberals. I have seen liberals who are intolerant and brick-walled about their beliefs. People can sometimes be a brick wall with certain beliefs and jellyfish in others. I have seen some conservatives, for instance, stand resolute on certain

issues and yet follow along on other societal trends. I am talking about one's default or dominant posture and disposition, not one's theological position.

We tend to confuse backbone strength with brick wall rigidity. Similarly, we confuse backbone flexibility with jellyfish weakness. And so we often fail to even recognize that there is a third way.

Every sign of accommodation is interpreted by brick wall Christians as losing our principles, while jellyfish Christians view every boundary suspiciously as oppression. Both sides, therefore, tend to misinterpret each other's concepts and language, often jumping to the worst conclusions. We fail to appreciate and learn from each other's good points.

A saying, often mistakenly attributed to Augustine, can be helpful here: In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity. The essentials are our spiritual backbone. These are what hold us together, giving us strength to stand. Freedom to differ on nonessentials is where we need to be flexible. And we must do all things in, with, and out of godly love.

Unfortunately, our list of essentials seems to be getting longer over time. By increasing the number of non-negotiable essentials, are we in danger of turning our backbone into a brick wall? On the other hand, I don't want us to morph into jellyfish either.

Can we retrain our imaginations to imagine this third-way posture? Can we strive to be backbone Christians, supple and strong, serving Christ in the world? **B**



REPLY ALL

Pew or Canoe

To an aged-60+, lifelong-churched guy, Mr. Burge has captured some important themes the church should hear ("Pew or Canoe," March 2019). One of them is men. Not that us guys are easy to engage, but the church has not seemed to focus on men's spiritual needs. I am thankful for my church's support. I have found that men's video/Bible study groups can offer deeper connections for many guys than a sermon for a varied audience. The discussion and sharing of men from ages 30 through 70+ can funnel thousands of sermons and current culture struggles into new listening for all of us.

» Scott Wagner // Kentwood, Mich.

Gary Burge asks for theology, sermons, and church teachings that address all of life ("Pew or Canoe"). He wants church to instill a vision of life that explodes with meaning and significance. His request is not unreasonable. Only theology covers everything and must not exclude anything. In a world wallowing in fake news and universities that cannot teach wisdom, where will we find a map for living a good life except with theology? Our theology needs to be on a grander scale, more inclusive; it has to be cosmic because Christ's salvation is cosmic. Burge is also disappointed with popular Christian writers. I have benefited greatly from Marilynne Robinson.

» Nick Loenen // Richmond, B.C.

Indigenous Ministries

Re: "Council Discusses Indigenous Ministries" (April 2019): The meaning of syncretism can be found in the dictionary. The word *Indigenous* can also be found there. Overlaying these definitions is Genesis 1:27-31. I have yet to meet a person anywhere whose blood color is different than mine. The basic human needs are water and food. It is then over a drink or meal that human interactions start.

For generations the church has convened in synods (and a multitude of other descriptions of meetings). But real hospitality happens when two or three gather (Matt. 18:20). This implies that every church (and each member) has a responsibility for hospitality. The on-the-ground work in Red Mesa, Regina, Edmonton, and Winnipeg is where this is happening. Meeting with the same people year over year, discussing the same thing, is probably not effective.

» Harry Boessenkool // *online comment*

Thanks for the Freebies!

Thank you so much for making Joanne De Jonge's kids' pages available for printing ("Just for Kids: A Baker's Dozen," free PDF download available at thebanner.org). I have been meaning to request permission to copy some of the children's pages from *The Banner* to share with the girls in our GEMS Club. The ones you made available are some of my favorites. I'm so very grateful.

» Catherine Louis // Maple Heights, Ohio

Language

In Heidi De Jonge's article "When Words Fail" (March 2019), she wrote, "I may be pushing the boundaries of what is permissible." I think she is. It seems to me that the Scriptural guidelines for the use of our tongue are plain and clear; they are much more reliable than Kate Bowler's wisdom. In texts like Ephesians 4:29; Matthew 15:10; Exodus 20:7; Matthew 5:21-22; James 3:9-11; Matthew 12:3, 37; and dozens more, God's guidelines for use of words seem obvious. I don't see how his "words" can possibly "fail."

» Harry J. Vriend, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Summer Jobs in Canada

I take great exception to acceptance of the Canadian government's rewriting of qualifying conditions for funding under the Summer Jobs Program ("Canada Reverses Abortion Rights Proviso to Summer Jobs Program," Feb. 2019). Section 15 retains the restriction for organizations that "actively work to undermine or restrict a woman's access to sexual and reproductive health services." Even though last year's language of "core mandate" of the organization is removed, the fact remains that by applying, we accept discrimination against our anti-abortion beliefs and leave organizations such as Pro-Life completely isolated. The form remains highly discriminatory to those who value life, and just because we have no abortion law in Canada, the religious freedom guaranteed in our Charter is withheld in terms of funding equality. This year's form is highly misleading and in essence unchanged from last year. We should stand with Pro-Life rather than allowing them to be isolated. Our unity must be worth a few dollars.

» Chuck Poeman // Abbotsford, B.C.

READ MORE ONLINE

A Well-Balanced Christian Life

How are we doing in knowing what we believe?

I FINALLY DISCOVERED a most effective way to teach the young people of our church. But first, some background:

Synod 2002 endorsed an identity statement that outlines three major Reformed emphases: the “doctrinalist” emphasis stresses understanding biblical doctrine as reflected in the Reformed confessions; the “pietist” emphasis centers on a personal relationship with Christ; and the “transformationalist” emphasis underscores Christ the King commissioning us to spread the gospel and to exercise leadership in all aspects of life.

The statement concludes: “It’s important to observe that a well-balanced Christian life and theology need all three of these integrated emphases” (“What It Means to Be Reformed,” 46).

When I was young, it seemed the church tilted toward “doctrinalist.” The Heidelberg Catechism was drilled into my head, and I got tired of it. My attitude began to improve when I was asked to speak at an Easter sunrise service. I didn’t have a clue as to what to say, so I asked my mom for ideas. My wise mother simply said, “You may want to look up the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 45.” I couldn’t imagine how that old, boring document could help me, but I was desperate. I ended up basing my little talk on the three benefits of Christ’s resurrection.


So I’ve learned to better appreciate the “doctrinalist” emphasis, but I still believe our denomination was lopsided toward that mindset. Praise God we have since then made some good strides in both the “pietist” and “transformationalist” emphases. But do we now tilt too much in that direction? How are we doing in knowing what we believe?

The Heidelberg Catechism is not preached as often anymore. Christian

Reformed preachers and teachers may think this is familiar stuff students already know. But they don’t. Just ask our college chaplains. Churches that do teach the catechism might struggle with the problem of inconsistent attendance—on one Sunday, students may learn about the doctrine of justification in Lord’s Day 23; the next Sunday, it might be a different set of students learning about sanctification in Lord’s Day 24.

What I found very helpful in teaching our young people was to replace the weekly catechism class with monthly Sunday retreats for high school juniors and seniors. In August, I met with students and their parents to lock down monthly dates, stressing that except for illness they were expected to be there. The retreats went from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and included a lunch prepared by church volunteers.

I divided the two hours of teaching time evenly among those three Reformed emphases. As “pietists” we prayed and worshiped together. Each participant came prepared to share a meditation on a Scripture passage. As “doctrinalists” we studied the confessions. The first year we covered key topics of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism; the next year we explored the Canons of Dort. As “transformationalists” we discussed social justice issues. We also practiced sharing the gospel message with others. Adults were invited to talk about how they were trying to live out a certain emphasis.

At each retreat students were asked to paraphrase the teaching of Lord’s Day 12 on what it means to be a Christian. That Lord’s Day includes all three emphases, so if the students learned nothing else, they knew the importance of not being a lopsided Christian! 



Doug Aldrink is a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church.



Me and the Black Dog

By Theresa Miedema

I have chronic major depression. Sometimes it feels like depression has me. Depression does that to you: it envelops you, suffocates you, drowns you.

I remind myself that I *have* depression, but I am not depressed. I'm not this illness, even when it has swallowed me whole. Depression is not who I am.

For me, depression does not go away. It ebbs and it flows. Over the years, I have worked with my doctors to develop a strategy for managing depression.

Understand, though, that you "manage" depression the way you manage a lion with a whip and chair. You can keep it under control, and you can keep the worst symptoms at bay. But you're still in a cage with a wild animal and you must never forget that.

Depression is a complex condition with physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions.

Physiologically, depression hurts. It physically hurts. When the depression flares up, I feel a deep, penetrating ache radiating throughout my body from my core. My entire being hurts. It feels like my soul is dying. Maybe it is: depression is a cancer of the soul.

While depression has emotional and psychological dimensions, it isn't about feeling sad. My body feels sad, but my brain feels muddled. When the depression was very bad, my brain felt full of static. I couldn't think. It was like watching TV without a cable connection or listening to the radio as you lose the signal.

When your brain feels like that, it's impossible to get things done. It's impossible to know what is wrong. It's impossible to figure out what to do next. Your brain is just scrambled signals. So for me, one of the first steps to recovery was unscrambling the signals. In my case, medication was and is central to calming the noise in my brain.

Medication does not make the pain go away. Its role is to add stability and to make it easier to process what I am experiencing so I can tap into other parts of my management strategy to address other symptoms.

You need a multifaceted strategy to manage depression because depression is a shape-shifting illness. It is a trickster. It takes different forms, throws up a variety of symptoms, and masquerades as different ailments.

Sometimes you can't sleep; other times, you sleep too much.

Sometimes you can't eat; other times, you can't stop eating.

You feel angry. You feel irritable. You feel despondent. And then you don't feel at all. The whole world smells and sounds and tastes grey. You don't see how blue the sky is or how fresh the air feels after the rain. You don't hear music anymore; you only hear noise.

Depression is a shape-shifter and it is a liar. The lies are probably the cruelest part of the illness.

It tells you that everything you're feeling is your own fault, or that what you're experiencing isn't real and the pain is only in your head. If you just tried harder, it says, the noise in your head would stop and your soul wouldn't ache.

Depression is a lying illness, and its most sinister and dangerous lie is that this darkness around you will not end, that the pain is permanent, that there is no relief.

It *lies*. It lies about the most important truth that all new things begin in darkness, that dawn comes out of the deepest night, and that if the light isn't there yet, then sometimes you have to reach into the darkness and pull it out.

Depression is a cancer of the soul. Not everyone survives cancer.

If you are going to survive, you need tools of hope to claw back at the darkness and to wring light out of it.

You start by building a good foundation for mental health to keep the darkness at bay. You add on habits and practices that you use when you feel the light abating.

I try to maintain a good baseline of health through a combination of medication, psychotherapy, sleep hygiene, sports, and community. I have an inventory of tools I use when I hit a flare-up—things like visiting bookstores, listening to music, watching cat videos, taking favorite walks, engaging in creative pursuits, and having conversations with trusted friends.

One of the ways you can help people with depression is by being present.

For all of eternity,
I have been,
I am, and I will be
God's beloved.

Just be there and don't offer advice. Recently, during a particularly difficult time for me, a dear friend simply said, "You can leave all these feelings with me. Just bring them here. It's okay." She did not try to fix me or counsel me. She just stayed with me. The darkness is not so scary when you know you are not alone.


If you are not sure if someone is okay, ask. Yes, you'll have some awkward conversations. But isn't the kingdom of heaven paved with awkward conversations as we walk alongside each other, carrying each other's burdens? So ask. You can ask, "Are you okay?" Or, "Would you like to have coffee together? Or would you care to join me on a walk?" Be a tool of hope; don't tritely suggest that "maybe more prayer would help."

People with depression do not need your advice. We need you to see us and to accept us, broken and wounded as we are. And we need your patience, because depression makes you selfish. Managing depression requires me to be very self-aware. I am always very cognizant of what I am feeling and what things are affecting me on any particular day. I need to be this self-aware to stay healthy. However, being

this self-aware tends to make me self-centered and even, if I am not careful, selfish. I cherish people's ability to be patient with me, to show me generosity of spirit, and to understand that I am more than my moods.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize what depression has given me. When I was in the deepest part of the worst depressive episode I have ever had, I felt the presence of God in a way that I had never experienced before. Sure, I knew God loved me. But in that dark, horrible time, I *felt* how much God loved me. I felt physically cradled by God.

When you have depression, you need a big God. I mean, you need a really, really big God. You need a God big enough to handle your anger and your doubts. You need a God whose compassion and mercy tolerate your rage and who comforts you in your desolation. You need a God whose patience is infinite and who will speak to you in a gentle whisper rather than angry judgment. You need a God who sees you, who knows you in all your passion, in your good moments and your bad moments—and who welcomes you as God's beloved.

I will likely have depression for the rest of my earthly life. But for all of eternity, I have been, am, and will be God's beloved. And so I go forward, knowing that even in the darkest places, my God will hear me. 



Theresa E. Miedema teaches business law and ethics at University of Ontario Institute of Technology. She grew up in the CRC and now worships at an Anglican church in Toronto, Ont.

BIG QUESTIONS

Ethics

If hierarchies exist in nature, why should we frown on hierarchies in human society?

"Nature" *alone* is not a good source for arguing either for or against human hierarchies. Christians believe that humanity's fall into sin distorted God's good creation, so we cannot simply assume that *is* necessarily translates to *ought*. Hatred and violence are universal and "natural," but we believe they are sinful distortions and not part of how God created us. Therefore, simply because hierarchies are prevalent in nature or even human history does not necessarily mean God intended them for his image-bearers.

We should also distinguish between what I call functional hierarchies and social hierarchies. Functional hierarchies are expertise-based to enable an organization's proper functioning. A coach, for example, has authority over the players on a team, as an employer does over employees. These hierarchies are limited and temporary. A coach has no authority over those same players outside the purview of the team, and coaches can be replaced.

Social hierarchies, however, are often based on a person's nature. In a patriarchy, for example, men are ranked higher than women; in a racist society, one race is ranked over another. These social hierarchies tend to be permanent and pervasive, crossing different social spheres including family, work, and more. God did create a hierarchy of humans over the rest of creation, according to Genesis (1:27-28). But it is not clear that God created a social

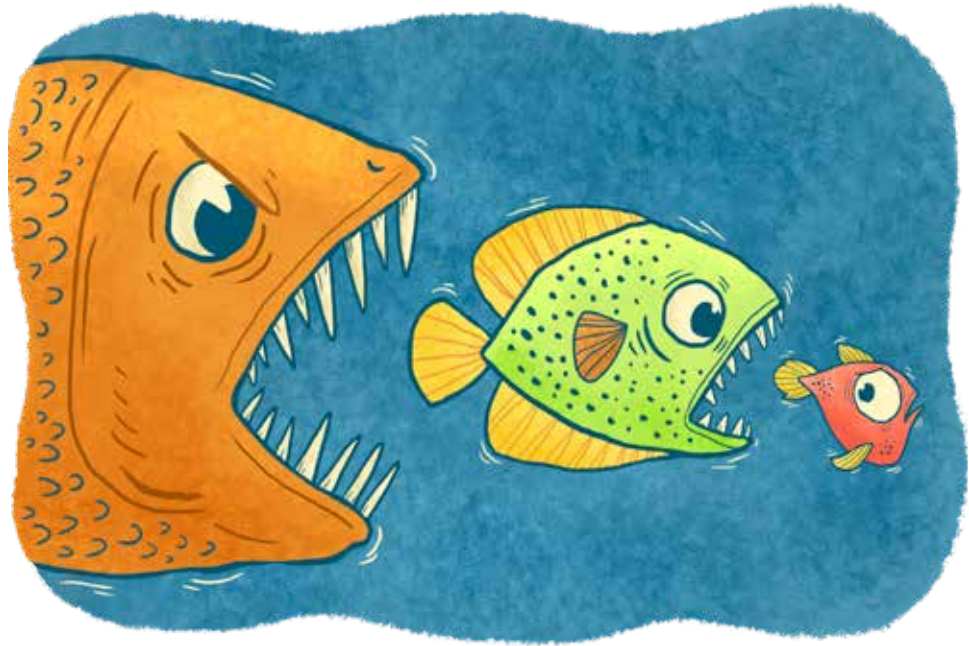


Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohorquez

hierarchy among his image-bearers. An argument can be made that some social hierarchies (such as parents over children) might be God-ordained, but that relationship changes when both children and parents age.

Determining whether some or all social hierarchies are part of God's blueprint for humanity or are a result of the fall requires more than simple deduction from nature. It requires a careful study of the whole of Scripture. Given the doctrine of total depravity, there is good reason to be suspicious of social hierarchies in general, as they often become avenues of social oppression. On the other hand, avoiding social hierarchies does not mean we should eliminate social differences or diversity, but merely the inequality between those differences.

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

Relationships

Why can't my stepdad and I get along any more since he and my mom got married? He and my mom had been dating since I was 12 (three years ago) and I

liked him a lot at first. But now we fight all the time.

It might help if you stop thinking of your mom's new husband as your dad—stepdad or otherwise. The reason you got along well with your mom's new husband *before* she remarried is because both you and he were getting to know each other without the weight of responsibility parents carry, both legally and relationally, for their children.

Many couples who remarry after a death or divorce assume that the new marriage automatically confers the rights and responsibilities of parenthood on the new marriage partner. With young children the title "stepparent" is often more naturally conferred based on the child's developmental stage. The younger the child, the more acceptable the stepparent role. However, children on the cusp of adolescence often feel conflicted about their parents' roles in their lives, and that is especially true for their relationship with stepparents.

Since the normal developmental stage of teens includes a desire for independence and autonomy, a teen's resistance to being parented combined with a new marriage partner's desire to be a good stepdad or stepmom is almost guaranteed to result in conflict.

It can be very helpful for everyone in a newly blended family if both the marriage partners and their respective children understand that the roles of spouse and parent should not be assumed to automatically go together.

At 15 you are old enough to be able to initiate a respectful and non-blaming conversation to begin to resolve the conflict you don't want. Begin by telling your mom what you find difficult and asking her for help, resolve to forgive the hurts you feel, and pray for a new beginning as you look for ways to increase family harmony "as far as it depends on you" (Rom. 12:18).

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

Missional Living

The community around my church has changed from mostly church members into an international community. What's the best way for my church to reach out with the gospel?

According to the Pew Research Center, immigrants to the United States numbered 44.5 million people in 2017. That equates to almost 14 percent of the U.S. population and is the highest number since 1910. Canada's three largest minority groups are South Asians, Chinese, and Blacks, most of whom live in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. The presence of immigrants throughout North America presents your church with wonderful opportunities to welcome, embrace, and present the gospel in a winsome way.

Missiologists Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile wrote, "It is good news to affirm that God chooses regular, imperfect, and even unlikely people in the contemporary world in which many people feel caught in depersonalized and dehumanizing political, economic, and social systems and structures. . . . In God's mission, anyone can play a critical role" (*Participating in God's Mission*, p. 270).

I suggest asking your congregation some hard questions about how closed or open it is to reaching out to new immigrants. Church demographer Thom Rainer provides warning signs for inward-focused churches. These include (1) conducting very few attempts to minister to those in the community; (2) meeting any change toward becoming evangelistic with anger and resistance; and (3) seeing the past as more important than the present (*ThomRanier.com*). Checking to see if your church exhibits these signs will suggest how ready your church might be to reach out or what barriers it must overcome.

Author Rajendra Pillai provides some helpful tips for meeting your neighbors: It takes time and patience over several months before sharing the gospel. Be willing to share your own story of pain and joy when appropriate. Do not stop praying for the person or family. Share life together through dinners, children's events, and community events (*Reaching the World in Our Own Backyard*, p. 19).

Reginald Smith is director of race relations and social justice for the Christian Reformed Church. He attends Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Faith Formation

Our church has a lot of programs for children and teens but nothing for those of us who are retirement age. I feel as if I don't count. Shouldn't the church have things for us too?

Feeling as if you don't count in the church means that things are not as they should be. Talk to an elder or a pastor and explore why you feel that way. There are a variety of reasons you might not see any programs for older members. In our church some programs stopped years ago when there was no one willing to lead, and they just never started up again.

Another thing to consider is that children and teens are not able to organize

programs to meet their own faith needs. Older adults have the ability and the time to organize activities and programs for themselves, so churches often don't make this a high priority.

But programs are not the only way to form faith. Through prayer, worship, community, service, and fellowship, a life can be intentionally filled with meaning and purpose. Older adults who find their identity in Christ should continue to be formed in faith through developing new habits and practices that deepen a relationship with him. Congregations should look for ways to encourage these spiritual patterns in people of all ages, including older members. These members are crucial to the life of the church, which should be sure to address their faith needs and to encourage them to participate in congregational life.

Older adults have also been given the gift of time—time to walk with Jesus and with his people. They can be important partners in helping to form faith in children and teens through the simple practice of being a friend and sharing conversations. Older adults have learned from years of experience how to deal with grief and struggle, with joy and despair. Their stories need to be shared so that young members of your church know that when they experience their own times of struggle or loss, others in their community have experienced similar struggles before them. Through building relationships and sharing our lives with each other, all of us learn better what it means to be the body of Christ.

Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries and director of children's ministries at 14th St. CRC in Holland, Mich.

Robert J. Keeley is a professor of education at Calvin College and director of distance education at Calvin Seminary.



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

Renovations Create Spaces for Healing

NEWS

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The Indigenous Family Centre in Winnipeg, Man., an urban Aboriginal ministry operated by the Christian Reformed Church, had some help repurposing some of its rooms this winter, creating space to promote healing and spiritual growth.

"We are prioritizing the safety and health of the collective community here," said Michele Visser, the center's director. Visser has had to make some difficult decisions as a result of the city's critical levels of methamphetamine use. "With everything we do and every service we offer, our first question is, Does this promote healing and spiritual growth? If not, we don't do it."

Visser invited artist and IFC board member Melissa Critch to organize the redecorating of several rooms, including an office, the family room, and the center's medicine room.

For Critch, it was important not just that every room be functional and comfortable, but also that each room include touchstones to remind people of their identity.

"Many of the people who live in our area aren't able to get out of the city to attend our cultural ceremonies, so I wanted to bring those positive aspects of ceremony to them here," Critch said.



Boys and leaders from Covenant CRC's Cadet club help construct new cupboards at the Indigenous Family Centre in Winnipeg, Man.

Renovating three rooms in the building required a lot of cleanup and preparation. The Cadet club of Covenant CRC, including about 20 boys and 10 adults, spent two hours one Saturday in January ripping out carpets, cleaning out rooms, and assembling furniture.

Evan Booy, Covenant's Cadet organizer, said, "The work that needed to be done was really ideal for the group we had. The boys got a chance to learn about IFC and the service they provide to the community and to help out in a tangible way."

— Krista dela Rosa

Noteworthy



Photo by Cim Flanders

Unity Christian 2019 boys' basketball state champion winning team.

Unity Christian High School in Hudsonville, Mich., won the **state title in Division 2 boys' basketball** in March, making history by becoming **the first Michigan high school to achieve state championships in football, boys' soccer, and boys' basketball in the same academic year.**

CRC's **Worship Ministries**, with Calvin Center for Social Research, carried out a comprehensive survey in 2018, releasing the results in March. It's the first **survey of current worship practices** since 1999. **Look for "CRC Worship Survey Results" at network.crcna.org.**

[READ MORE](#) [ONLINE](#)

CRC Continues Abuse Conversation



Bev Sterk addresses those gathered at Waterloo (Ont.) CRC for the 2019 Inter-classis Safe Church Conference.

After prompting lengthy discussions on addressing abuse at Synod 2018, the annual general gathering of the Christian Reformed Church, Bev Sterk, a member of Second CRC in Lynden, Wash., has had opportunities to share her story and encourage people working on the issue. She was invited to Waterloo, Ont., where she spoke at the March 2 Inter-classis Safe Church Conference. Classis Huron, a regional group of Christian Reformed congregations, has been holding the event for 20 years.

"The #MeToo and the #ChurchToo movements, I think, empowered women's voices and people's voices on the floor of synod to speak up," Sterk said. "At the local classis level we are continuing to work on these recommendations, and we're working somewhat in partnership and collaboration with the Abuse of Power Committee."

The committee, mandated by Synod 2018 to bring recommendations to this year's annual gathering, presented a draft to the CRC's Council of Delegates in February. (The Council carries out the work of the church between synods.) The finalized version is expected to be included with the supplemental material for Synod 2019, available mid- to late May.

Readers who want to know more about the background that led Sterk to write her 2018 overture to synod can look for *The Story behind the Abuse Overture*, which she wrote at dojustice.crcna.org.

—Alissa Vernon

Garden Boosts Local Food Program



New Era garden volunteer Sue Vriesman and others doing spring garden work. In 2018, the garden yielded just over 100 pounds of produce.

The community garden of New Era (Mich.) CRC has become a valuable resource to the village of about 400 residents during its five-year run.

A local garden center donates flats of plants; all tools, plants, and seeds are supplied.

"We are trying to serve the needs of our community and grow our church," said garden coordinator Sanda Whitaker.

"We have been blessed to receive private donations and grant funding to grow our community garden," Whitaker said. "If we are blessed with an abundance of veggies, they are donated to [charity] distribution points." Some Sunday mornings, extra produce is placed on the church steps for church members and garden members to help themselves.

In 2016 a farmer's market was added to the program. Twice a month on Tuesdays the market offers free live entertainment; vendors offer low-cost dinner options as well as garden produce. Senior citizens who participate in a government assistance program receive tokens redeemable for fresh produce. This program, supported by grants from the NW Michigan Chronic Disease Coalition in partnership with District Health Department #10 and Mercy Health Sister Simone Courtade Fund, supplied each eligible senior with \$4 worth of produce per visit in 2017, Whitaker said.

—Eliza Anderson

Banner Staff Changes



Kristy Quist (left) and Judy Hardy were recognized for their long service to *The Banner* with mock cover plaques at a staff planning retreat in February. Quist left the position of Mixed Media editor at the end of March. Hardy will retire as associate editor at the end of May.



Lorilee Craker, a member of Madison Square CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., was appointed as the new Mixed Media editor. She began work March 21. She has authored 15 books and brings more than 17 years experience as a freelance entertainment writer for *The Grand Rapids Press* to the role.

READ MORE ONLINE

40 Years of Welcome: Canadian Churches Extend a Hand to Refugees

The Canadian government's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program turns 40 this year. World Renew, the international development, disaster response, and peace-building agency of the Christian Reformed Church, has been involved since the beginning—the third church group to sign on following its inception in the late 1970s by Canadian Mennonites. Partnering with congregations across Canada, World Renew estimates that it has welcomed and resettled 7,500 refugees since 1979.

Applicants are deemed eligible by the government and placed on a list for sponsorship agreement holders, of which World Renew is one. Then they are matched to a sponsorship group, often a congregation. The congregation commits support for one year, including helping them find accommodation, furniture, food, clothing, employment, and enrollment in English lessons. The government provides six months of living expenses; the church covers the other six months. Relationships that develop between sponsoring churches and refugees are often deep and enduring.

Iron Springs (Alta.) CRC sponsored Tho Nguyen and her four children as refugees from Vietnam 36 years ago. Adri van den Dool



Tho Nguyen (center) with John and Adri van den Dool

and Nguyen called each other "sister." Van den Dool and her husband attended all the graduations and weddings of Nguyen's children. The families shared meals and went hiking together. "Although Tho passed away on October 2, 2018, we are still friends with the family," said van den Dool.

Ken Vanderploeg, pastor of First CRC in Taber, Alta., suggested the collective stories would be far too numerous to tell. "You'll

need the entire magazine [*The Banner*] or an article each month." He told of Zacharias, one of the "Lost Boys of Sudan" who were displaced or orphaned during the Second Sudanese Civil War and eventually made their way to refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia. Zacharias lived in a camp for 19 years before he was sponsored in 2016 by Taber CRC. "His story will fill a book," said Vanderploeg.

Martha, a single mother with five children, lived in the same camp as Zacharias and was sponsored by Taber CRC the same year. As a woman without a husband, and with young daughters, her family was particularly vulnerable. Also, in a camp where Christians were persecuted, she dressed as a Muslim woman. "Without knowing it," said Vanderploeg, "we had 'rescued' Christians from the refugee camp, which is what we had prayed for." Martha soon discovered she had relatives in Lethbridge and went to live in the same apartment complex, a few blocks from Immanuel Elementary Christian School, where her younger children attend.



The Ghirmai Emun Ghebremariam family

Ghirmai Emun Ghebremariam and his family from Sudan were sponsored by Bethel CRC in London, Ont., in December 2006. He described being separated from his wife and children before resettlement in Canada, adding, "It was an emotional moment to see them after six years. Coming to new country to start everything from the start was hard. . . . I would like to thank the deacons of Bethel Church. After one year we were blessed with one additional child named Senai. The life became much easier working different odd jobs until [I became] self-employed. Now I and my wife, we have been self-employed for 11 years. My daughter graduated from university, and Abel is still in his third year of college, and Senai is in Grade 6 this year. I would like to thank the government of Canada and the people of Canada for facilitating the process of immigration."



The Kahya family

The Kahya family, sponsored by Wallaceburg (Ont.) CRC, arrived in Canada in July 2016. "They are Syrians who lived in Libya and Turkey before coming to settle in Canada," explained Dick and Carolyn Bulsink. "They are a Muslim family and have taught us about their faith, and we pray that they have learned about our faith. . . . We fell in love with them right away, and as a committee, we enjoyed getting to know them and working with them."

First CRC in Sarnia, Ont., participates in sponsorship with three other local churches. From 1996 to 2016 they sponsored six families. "All in all, I feel our churches have been blessed through this ministry," said Henny Drope, a member who first served on the church's refugee committee when she became a deacon in 1994. "We have learned about struggles the families have gone through. We have learned to respect different cultures and religions."

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Roger Earl Van Harn
1932-2019

During his 42 years as a Christian Reformed pastor, Roger Van Harn estimated he preached 3,000 sermons. His ministry over those years was impacted by several major events in American history. Van Harn, 86, died on February 9.

Beginning in 1957, Van Harn served Cottage Grove CRC in South Holland, Ill. He was then called to a church-planting ministry at Grace CRC in Indian Harbour Beach, Fl., near Cape Canaveral. His family arrived the night before Alan Shepard's historic flight as the first American in space. Van Harn then served Olentangy CRC in Columbus, Ohio, a church, like many in the late sixties, that was caught up in the tensions of the civil rights movement. At a time of widespread student anti-war protests, he became campus minister at Ohio State University.

In 1976, Van Harn received a D.Min. from Trinity Lutheran Seminary and accepted a call to Grace CRC in Grand Rapids, where he stayed for 22 years. After retiring in 1998, he worked at Eerdmans Publishing as editor of a lectionary commentary series and other projects.

He is survived by Ellie, his wife of 62 years; five children; 13 grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren. He was predeceased in 2006 by their son Philip.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Dr. Andrew John Bandstra
1926-2019

Andrew Bandstra, professor emeritus of New Testament theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, a loving and dedicated family man and committed friend, died on Feb. 8 at age 92.

Born on a farm in Iowa, Bandstra attended Central College in Pella, Iowa; Calvin College and Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich.; and Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. He served in the armed forces in World War II.

After ordination in 1955, he pastored Lincoln Center CRC in Grundy Center, Iowa, before beginning his career as a professor, first at Calvin College and then at Calvin Theological Seminary. He is remembered as an excellent and engaging teacher and preacher.

At his memorial service, his daughters mentioned three things their father loved: "He loved having fun, he loved people, and he loved words." Known for his big smile, hearty laugh, and counselor's heart, Bandstra touched the lives of countless people.

He will be missed by his second wife, Ruth Ann; four daughters and their spouses; seven step-children and spouses; and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, whom he rocked, held, loved, and supported. He was predeceased by his first wife, Mae Ruth, in 2007, and his daughter Ruth Ann in 2018.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Classis Watch: Winter 2019

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, a regional group of churches. Many of the actions taken by classes are governed by the CRC Church Order, the rules that govern denominational life. Here are some of the actions by classes in the past few months. The Church Order, with its Articles referred to below, is available online at crcna.org/resources/synod-resources.

Those **welcomed into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** include seminary graduates Benj. Petroelje, Calvin Chen, Beverly Weeks, James Zwier, Norm Underland, Darren Kornelis, Kyle Dieleman, Chadd Huizenga, Christopher Lee, Derrick Lee, SangMyung Samuel Lee, and Ernesto Hernandez (Articles 6 and 10).

Those **welcomed into ministry in the CRC from other denominations** include Anthony Selvaggio, Michael Saville, Sam Pang, Marcia Fairrow, and Do Hyeong Kim (Article 8).

Revs. Shannon Jammal-Hollemans, Daniel Rhee, Erik Kamp, Derek Van Dalen, and Mark Scheffers were declared **eligible for call**.

Ministers released from a congregation: Rev. Mark Bennink from 12th Avenue CRC, Jenison, Mich.; Rev. Jim Kuiper from Bethany CRC, Bellflower, Calif.; Rev. Michael Miedema from chaplaincy at the Manitoba Developmental Centre (Portage la Prairie, Man.) (Article 17a).

Leaving Ministry in the CRC

Churches and classes make a declaration reflecting a resigned minister's status that is appropriate to the way and spirit in which the minister acted during the time leading up to and including resignation from office. Those designations are: honorably released, released, dismissed, or in the status of one deposed (Article 14).

Brent Kladder, Jay Song, and Hyo-Nam Kim were **honorably released**.

Laurie Zuverink, Il Young Kang, Kang Jun-suk, David Cho, Sung Woo Chang, Moses Jeong, Ji Hyun Jun, David Yang, Woon Se Yeo, Young Ook Kim, William Yang, and Sung Phil Yang, were **released**.

Bret McAtee was **dismissed**.

New Ministries and Ministry Changes

An emerging (unorganized) church does not have its own council and is under the care of a council of a neighboring CRC. An organized church has its own council (Article 38).

Churches declared organized: River City CRC, Cambridge, Ont.

Churches declared emerging: Crosspoint Community Church, Anchorage, Alaska.

Churches affiliating with the CRC: Cerritos (Calif.) Mission Church; Yeolin Community Church, Chattanooga, Tenn.

Renamed: Springing Fountain CRC, Buena Park, Calif., is now Dream Church; Calvary CRC, Livingston, N.J., is now Great Hope CRC.

Ministries closed: Calvary Community Church, Plainwell, Mich.; Spiritual Eyes CRC, Redlands, Calif.; Church of God's Love, Saratoga, Calif.; Bridge of Life, Sacramento, Calif.; Mount Airy Community Church, Philadelphia, Pa.

Disaffiliated: South Bay Early CRC, Long Beach, Calif.; Woodville Community Church, White Cloud, Mich.; and Newman (Mich.) Christian Community Church.

Synod 2019—Annual General Assembly of the CRC

Classes may, by way of an overture, ask a synod to address specific issues or may respond to reports coming before a synod. The Agenda for Synod 2019 can be found at crcna.org/resources/synod-resources. Page numbers below refer to where to find specific items in the agenda.

Overtures Related to the Report of the Synod Review Taskforce

The task force report can be found at crcna.org/resources/synod-resources in English and Korean and also starting on page 455 of the *Agenda*.

Classes Holland, Zeeland, and Atlantic Northeast are asking that Synod 2019 **reject recommendations requiring classes to pay registration fees for synod delegates**, stating that costs for synod are already covered by ministry shares.

Classes Zeeland, Central Plains, Iakota, Atlantic Northeast, and Georgetown want Synod 2019 to **reject a proposed requirement to include a female delegate or a delegate from an ethnic minority**, noting that it is the prerogative of churches and classes to select their delegates. Classis Heartland wants it to be **a recommendation rather than a requirement**.

Classes Zeeland and Atlantic Northeast ask that Synod 2019 **reject a recommendation calling for power and privilege training** for synod delegates.

(See also "Task Force Recommends Refinements for Annual Synods," Feb. 2019, pp. 16-17; "No Synod Delegate Fees, No Delegation Requirements, Some Classes Say," at thebanner.org)

Other Issues

Classis Iakota asks that Synod 2019 instruct Resonate Global Mission to **place missionaries in the care of a classis to reduce the burden of fundraising on missionaries** (p. 514).

Classis Lake Superior asks Synod 2019 to direct the executive director and the Council of Delegates to **identify pastors of the United Reformed Church who left the CRC due to deep convictions of their faith and change their release status to “honorably” released** where appropriate, to effect reconciliation (p. 515).

Classis Atlantic Northeast is asking synod to propose changes to Church Order Article 51, **removing the ordinary expectation that congregations worship twice** on a Sunday, bringing it in harmony with current widespread practice in the denomination, as well as to delete Church Order Article 54-b, **the expectation that once each Sunday a sermon be preached using the church’s creeds and confessions**, for the same reason. The classis also wants Synod 2019 to remind denominational boards and committees that **the current list of special observance Sundays be reviewed** lest recognition of institutions and causes detract from the worship of God (p. 509).

Classis Georgetown would like Synod 2019 to appoint a committee to **study the morality and advisability of ecclesiastical marriage without a civil marriage**, noting that this would help congregations and pastors better minister to couples seeking marriage in situations where civil marriage creates financial problems (p. 518).

Classis Pacific Northwest is asking Synod 2019 to approve **dividing the classis in two, creating a new Classis North Cascades** that would encompass churches in Whatcom County, Wash. (p. 480).

Classes California South and Hackensack want Synod 2019 to **declare teachings of Kinism a heresy**, in particular the teaching that **interracial marriage is sinful**, and the Kinist teaching that **God has ordained separation in a religio-ethnstate that necessitates racial separation in all areas of life**. The overture cites the fact that a pastor within the CRC propagated Kinism, despite efforts of the classis to respond, and the pastor ultimately left the CRC and took his congregation with him (p. 489).

Synod 2019 is meeting at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., from June 14-20. For continuous coverage, download the Banner app on your mobile device or follow The Banner Magazine on Facebook or @crcbanner on Twitter.

—Gayla R. Postma, Banner news editor

Redeemer Drops Tuition, Builds Community Connection



Photo by Beth Van Lingen (Redeemer)

In October 2018, Redeemer professor Kevin Flatt spoke on secularization at the Redeemer Pastor Professor Exchange, one of the school’s community-connecting initiatives.

This past academic year, Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont., which is associated with the Christian Reformed Church, began or announced several new initiatives. Pastors and professors met to exchange ideas at university-sponsored talks in October and February; five Christian high schools will partner with Redeemer to launch Act Five, an eight-month live-work program for high school graduates; and an \$11 million gift made it possible for the school to announce a tuition drop in hopes of attracting new students and growing enrollment.

David Zietsma, vice president of external relations and enrollment, confirmed that an anonymous donor has committed to giving Redeemer \$11 million (CDN) over the next five years. The funds will be designated to reduce tuition costs by 42 percent. Beginning in September 2019, Redeemer’s undergraduate tuition for Canadian students will be set at \$9,800 instead of the planned rate of \$16,992.

Redeemer’s goal is to double enrollment to 1,200 students.

— Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

Cooler/Smarter Workshops Offer Practical Advice, Raise Concern

Five Christian Reformed congregations in Grand Rapids, Mich., cohosted a series of workshops between January and May to help people learn how to reduce carbon emissions in their everyday lives.

The seven workshops were based on the book *Cooler Smarter: Practical Steps for Low-Carbon Living*, published in 2012 by the Union of Concerned Scientists. They included sessions on transportation, heating and cooling your home, and the impact of purchases.

"We recognize [that climate change] is a moral and spiritual issue," said David Koetje, a professor of biology at Calvin College, who was one of the workshop leaders. "This is a right-to-life issue when you're talking about climate change posing great risks to food production, to human health, to habitation."

Ginny Kuilema, who attends Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, was one of about 70 people who attended the Alger Park CRC workshop focused on diet, food production, and their impact on the changing climate. She'd also attended previous sessions, noting she'd already taken steps toward some lifestyle changes.

"I find myself questioning my purchases. I'm especially aware of how much plastic I use," Kuilema said. "I now use laundry soap in water soluble pods that come in a cardboard box. I'm reusing Ziploc bags and plan to purchase alternative bags."

The series was promoted through the Climate Witness Project, a campaign of the CRC's Office of Social Justice and World Renew. Madison Square, Creston, Oakdale Park, and Monroe Community Church were the other Christian Reformed congregations hosting workshops.

Early promotions of the diet-based workshop raised a complaint from outside of Grand Rapids. Bill Vis, a retired CRC pastor who now serves as interim pastor



Photo by Greg Chandler

Workshop 5, A Low Carbon Diet, in the fellowship hall at Alger Park CRC.

of Terra Ceia CRC in Pantego, N.C., and is part of an online community where some CRC members have objected to previous campaigns of the Office of Social Justice, spoke with a beef farmer who objected to a publicity piece that targeted a reduction in beef consumption.

"He, rightly I think, perceived this as a direct attack on his ability to earn a living and feed his family, as well as to tithe to his church and thereby support the denomination, including OSJ and World Renew," Vis said. That publicity piece was later removed.

Steve Mulder, a consultant for the Climate Witness Project, said the series isn't an example of "top-down" direction being promoted by the CRC. It arose out of serious concerns that some in the churches have for the future of our planet.

"We believe we're doing honor to God by honoring creation. We have a moral and religious duty to do this, for the sake of our kids, our grandkids, and the most vulnerable people in the world who are already impacted (by climate change)," Mulder said.

— Greg Chandler

Leadership Changes at Resonate

Resonate Global Mission, the mission agency of the Christian Reformed Church, which was created in 2017 with the joining of the denomination's Home Missions and World Missions, made a change in its leadership structure this spring. Consolidating the Canadian national director and U.S. national director positions, the agency appointed Kevin DeRaaf as new director of North American regional teams and Canadian administration. DeRaaf, previously Resonate's regional mission leader in Eastern Canada, began in the role April 15. The position is based in Burlington, Ont.

Describing the new position when the planned consolidation was announced, Resonate director Zachary King said, "This placement will provide pastoral leadership to our Burlington staff and participation in Canada-specific collaborations and initiatives, in addition to leadership of the regions."

King told *The Banner* that "stewardly use of resources and integration of ministry" were considerations in making the change.

The roles of Canadian national director and U.S. national director had been held by Steve Kabetu and Amy Schenkel, respectively, prior to the creation of the one North American position. Kabetu left the organization at the end of March. Schenkel continues as regional mission leader for the Great Lakes, a role she previously held jointly with the U.S. national director position.

— Alissa Vernon

Other Ministry Changes



Sam Huizenga, previously program manager for Global Coffee Break, became director of Raise Up Global Ministries in March, replacing Gary Bekker, who is retiring in September. Raise Up encompasses Coffee Break, Timothy Leadership Training, and Educational Care — three non-formal adult training programs that the Christian Reformed Church grouped together in 2017. Temporarily dubbed the Combined Training Unit, it was rebranded Raise Up Global Ministries in October 2018. Huizenga said she's excited to take on the challenge of leading this collaborative group of programs serving the global church.



NewGround
Churches loving communities

Diaconal Ministries Canada has renamed a ministry-funding program that has been helping churches establish community-connecting ministries for over 35 years. Christian Reformed churches in Canada looking to fund new ministry ideas can seek out **NewGround**. (The program was formerly called Operation Manna.) Tammy Heidbuurt continues to be the program coordinator.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Earl Donald Dykema

1928-2019

Earl Dykema's favorite Bible verse was Jeremiah 29:11: I know the plans I have for you, . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. After Dykema's mother died when he was 8, his father gave advice to guide him: "We don't know why God took mother to heaven, but remember this: God makes no mistakes; God loves us too much to hurt us."

"Earl believed that truth," said one of his children, "and that his only comfort in life and in death came from Christ Jesus, his Savior and Lord—that was Earl's identity." Dykema, 90, passed away on March 1.

Ordained in 1954, Dykema served the following congregations: Wright CRC, Kanawha, Iowa; Crownpoint (N.M.) CRC; Beacon Light Community CRC, Gary, Ind.; and Peace CRC, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He then worked for 16 years as a regional director for Christian Reformed Home Missions.

After retirement in 1993, Dykema remained an active member of Peace CRC and volunteered in the community.

Predeceased by Betty, his wife of 63 years, Dykema is survived by his three children and their partners, two grandchildren, and two great-granddaughters.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Gerald (Jerry) Frens

1943-2019

Jerry Frens, 75, loved being a chaplain. He was working part time as an on-call chaplain at Northwest Community Hospital when he died unexpectedly on February 15. He was struck by a vehicle's sideview mirror while cleaning leaves out of a storm drain near his home.

Ordained in 1968, Frens served First Christian Reformed Church in Chino, Calif., followed by Newton (N. J.) CRC and Crossroads CRC in Madison, Wis. In 1985, he began a career in chaplaincy at Northwest Community Continuing Care Center in Arlington Heights, Ill. He then worked in hospice care in Lombard, Ill., and later at Rainbow Hospice in Park Ridge, Ill., until 2013.

A longtime stated clerk for Classis Northern Illinois, Frens also served as a church visitor and counselor. As a member of Lombard CRC he participated in the choir and men's Bible studies; he was also a member of the local clergy breakfast group.

Frens enjoyed photography, traveling, camping, classical music, and watching football games—during which his usually taciturn and calm behavior changed dramatically.

Frens will be missed by his four children and five grandchildren. He was predeceased in 2017 by Marge, his wife of 51 years.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Doing Ministry Together



Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

Recently, Hope Community Christian Reformed Church in Surrey, British Columbia, was faced with a dilemma. The bustling suburb includes many families whose faith journeys vary widely. Some are new believers; others are new to Canada. Many are too busy for regular midweek church programs. Church leaders wanted to help parents become spiritual leaders in their homes but needed help to set up discipleship opportunities. They reached out to Faith Formation Ministries, who helped them plan and run a Saturday event focused on this topic.

Meanwhile, in another part of the continent, Covenant Life CRC in Grand Haven, Michigan, was struggling to respond to mental health challenges. Church leaders asked Disability Concerns for help and were connected with a variety of resources, including a mental health learning community made up of other CRC and Reformed Church in America congregations. As a result, they were able to start a mental health committee at their church, train elders, provide suicide intervention training for church members, and start groups to provide mental health support to many Coast Guard personnel in their community.

In Sioux Center, Iowa, Faith CRC was hoping to commemorate Sanctity of Human Life Sunday on February 3 as part of their Safe Families Program. Through the Office of Social Justice, they were able to order bulletin inserts as well as find song suggestions, prayers, responsive readings, and other worship elements to help them mark this day.

While all three of these churches might have been able to hire a consultant or meet these needs with their own members, they didn't have to. Instead, they were able to access free resources through the Christian Reformed Church right when they needed it, made possible through an innovative system known as ministry shares.

A History of Crowdfunding

Ministry shares is an arrangement by which all CRC congregations are asked to contribute a set amount of money per active member to help fund shared denominational ministries.

"Through ministry shares, important ministries are funded and are accessible to all CRC congregations without any one

Hope Community CRC in Surrey, B.C., received help from Faith Formation Ministries to help them meet the needs of young families.

church having to foot the entire bill," explained John Bolt, chief financial officer of the CRCNA. "A steady stream of funding is available for joint ministry efforts in an ongoing way without the high overhead costs associated with traditional fundraising campaigns."

This system, while similar to modern crowdfunding initiatives, isn't new. In fact, it goes back to the very early days of the Christian Reformed denomination. In 1862, when the CRCNA was only five years old, its leaders realized that they needed to find a way to cover the \$400 annual salary of Rev. Koenraad Van Den Bosch, one of its first pastors.

Their solution was to ask each of the congregations where Van Den Bosch preached to contribute toward the cost. It worked so well that they decided to use the same approach to help pay for pastor training. As a result, a fund to create Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary was born.

From there the system took off.

"Ministry shares has been known by a variety of names over the years, including assessments and quotas, but the theory behind it has remained the same: CRC congregations and members realized that they could do more and better ministry when they worked together than if they did it all on their own," explained Bolt.

Sharing Ministry Today

Today, ministry shares remain a stewardly and cost-effective foundation for our denomination.

"Nearly every ministry of the CRCNA receives at least part of its funding through ministry shares," said Steven Timmermans, executive director of the CRCNA.

He pointed out that mission agencies such as Resonate Global Mission and Back to God Ministries International receive approximately 35 percent of their support from ministry shares. Calvin Theological Seminary receives about 32 percent, and ministries such as Disability Concerns and Faith Formation Ministries rely on ministry shares for about 80 percent of their funding.

World Renew, founded in 1962 as an outreach of CRC deacons, does not receive ministry shares because its founders believed special offerings were a better fit for its type of programs. Congregations are asked to take at least four offerings per year to support World Renew in lieu of ministry shares.

For all other denominational ministries, ministry shares are a crucial part of their annual budgets.

“Ministry shares are an amazingly efficient and stewardly way for us to accomplish ministry together,” said Timmermans, noting how the system allows all members to contribute, no matter their income levels.

“Over the years, as synod decided to start new programs—whether it be Safe Church, Disability Concerns, or the online community of the Network—we’ve used ministry shares as a way of enabling all of our congregations to contribute toward the costs,” Timmermans said. “In this way, every initiative is truly part of our shared ministry.”

Adapting to Changing Realities

Over its nearly 160-year history, the ministry shares program has hit a few obstacles and has had to be adjusted. In the 1930s, for example, in the midst of the Great Depression, several congregations struggled to pay their full shares.

“Synod 1938 debated this topic and wondered whether a congregation should be punished for not meeting their ministry shares obligations,” said Bolt, explaining that some thought these congregations should be billed for their ministry shares shortages and expected to pay back this amount in future years. “They ultimately decided that that’s not what the ministry shares program should be. Congregations



Through Disability Concerns, members of Covenant Life CRC in Grand Haven, Mich., were connected with members of other West Michigan CRC and RCA congregations as a mental health learning community.

should be able to contribute—or not—as their unique situations allow,” he said.

Similarly, in 1939 synod decided to combine two ministry share systems into one. Before that, churches were asked to contribute “assessments” to fund institutions such as Calvin College, Calvin Seminary, synodical expenses, and the ministers’ pension fund. They also contributed “quotas” to pay for special-interest programs such as Home Missions and World Missions. Synod found this dual system to be confusing, so they combined the two into one, later renamed “ministry shares.”

As the CRCNA grew, its members added new colleges and universities in addition to Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, so synod adjusted the ministry shares system again to encourage more support for these schools.

Ministry shares allocations for Calvin College vary by classis and are based on the number of CRC students from that classis who attend the school. Where this enrollment is lower, churches are also encouraged to direct support to Dordt College, Redeemer University College, The King’s University, or Trinity Christian College.

Ministry Shares Today

One of the biggest issues facing ministry shares today is underpayment. “If every CRC member and every congregation gave their covenanted amount to ministry shares, it would provide about \$40 million for ministry locally and around the world,” explained Bolt.

Some churches, however, have shifted toward prioritizing local causes or church efforts instead of denominational ministry shares. Others have difficulty raising enough money to pay their covenanted amount.

“Some churches simply do not have the financial means to contribute their fair share,” Bolt said. “While synod has said that when one church can’t pay, it is up to other congregations

Reimagining Ministry Shares: Proposal

Delegates to Synod 2019 will discuss a proposal to reimagine ministry shares in a way that can better fund ministry priorities. This proposal shifts the emphasis of ministry shares toward congregational pledges by suggesting the following process:

- » As part of the budgeting process, each church will carefully consider how much it can pledge toward ministry shares. Guidance for making this decision will be developed by denominational staff, endorsed by the Council of Delegates (COD), and sent to the churches and classis treasurers.
- » Each classis will discuss the pledges from congregations in their region and decide if any adjustments need to be made.
- » Preliminary CRCNA ministry budgets will be built around these pledged amounts from classes.
- » The budgets will be finalized at the May Council meeting each year.

The proposal states that there should be no penalties for not paying ministry shares and that each classis should determine whether or not emerging church plants should contribute. It also suggests a streamlined formula for funding educational institutions.

For more information, see this year’s *Agenda for Synod*.

in their classis to help meet this obligation, in recent years that hasn't been happening. Contributions to ministry shares have been declining, and classes have not always filled the gap."


Currently churches contribute on average only about 60 percent of their covenanted amount to ministry shares each year. As a result, ministries have had to be reduced, and programs have been cut back.

Ministry Shares Reimagined

Synod 2016 recognized the financial gap in the ministry shares system and asked that the program be reconsidered. It instructed staff to prioritize and evaluate existing programs and to develop a proposal for reimagining ministry shares. This proposal will be brought to Synod 2019 for discussion and decision.

"It is always good to revisit programs and tweak them for current realities," said Bolt, who helped put together the 2019 proposal. "I'm hopeful that what we've put together will better match the planning cycles and realities of our congregations and will result in an even better system going forward."

In the meantime, the current ministry shares system will continue to pool resources to make vital programs available to Hope Community, Red Valley CRC, Faith CRC, and others.

"Some of the ministries to which Christ calls us can be difficult to do on our own. Ministry shares allow us to pool our resources in order to do more together," said Timmermans. "It is a big reason why the CRC is able to support a range of ministry programs that is unparalleled for a denomination of our size. We hope it will continue well into the future." 

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg serves as director of communications and marketing for the Christian Reformed Church.

The Question of God and Race

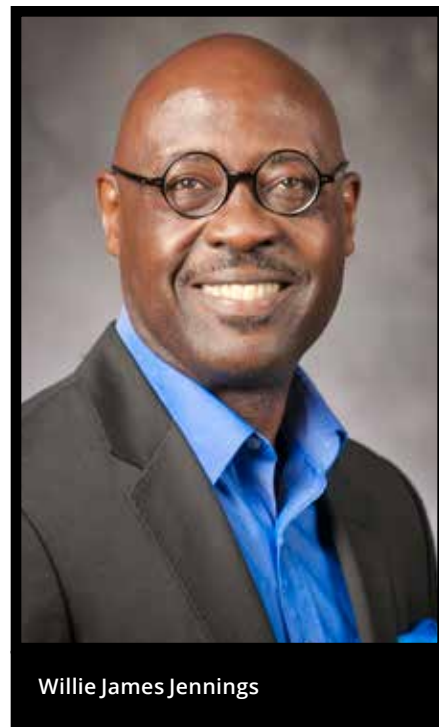
THIS YEAR'S STOB LECTURE Series featured Willie James Jennings, associate professor of Systematic Theology and Africana Studies at Yale University. The Stob Lectures, a joint effort of Calvin Seminary and Calvin College, invite conversation on important issues in theology, apologetics, and ethics.

Jennings is an important contemporary voice in the world of theology, due in part to his award-winning 2010 book *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. After speaking at Calvin College as part of the 2019 January Series, Jennings spent the afternoon at Calvin Seminary as part of the Stob Lecture Colloquium, where he was interviewed by Calvin Seminary professor Danjuma Gibson.

Their conversation moved from Jennings' childhood in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to the theology of Martin Luther King Jr. Much of the talk centered on theological education and how many scholars today are wrestling with one big question for themselves. Jennings said he explores "the question of God and race."

Digging deep into this question led Jennings to study how an "intensely Christian" city like Grand Rapids is also intensely segregated by race. Through his teaching and his writing, Jennings finds he is "at war with the racial configurations of this world," looking to God for answers to troubling realities.

Through his teaching at Duke Divinity School and at Yale, and through his consulting work with the Association of Theological Schools, Jennings has been able to speak into these configurations and move Christians at



Willie James Jennings

theological schools throughout North America toward diversity and unity.

As Jennings wrestles with the question of God and race, he also works with scholars to find their own questions to pursue. This leads him to work with students who are looking into various questions of "life and death"—practical questions about theology and justice.

Despite the challenges found in schools of theological education, Jennings' enthusiasm is propelled by the fact that God continues to call people to ministry.

"This is the miracle," Jennings said. "That's unbelievably exciting, to work with people who have heard God."

To watch the full video of the 2019 Stob Lecture Colloquium, visit calvinseminary.edu/news.

—Matthew Cooke,
Calvin Theological Seminary

The View from Here

A Church of Connection and Collaboration

ONE OF THE FIVE desired futures expressed in our denominational ministry plan, *Our Journey 2020*, focuses on collaboration: “Our churches and ministries will work hand in hand with each other, and with partners in our own communities and around the world, to faithfully fulfill Jesus’ command to make disciples of all people.”

There have been times in the Christian Reformed Church in North America’s history when collaboration was not evident in our ministries. Think back to 1984, for example, when “after several fruitless attempts by previous synods to find solutions to persistent problems between CRWM and CRWRC, the synod of 1982 appointed a five-member ad hoc committee” (*1984 Acts of Synod*, p. 658).

The findings of that committee pointed to “ineffective and often frustrating on-field relations, differing management models, tensions between the personnel of both agencies, disagreements between the two agencies, and significant differences of opinion” (p. 659).

Another example was expressed in 2011 when synod appointed a task force to provide advice to the Board of Trustees and/or synod regarding short-, medium-, and long-term measures that would improve the culture, structure, and leadership within the CRC. The task force provided a series of yearly reports thereafter in which the repeated call

Scripture is clear about how life in the body of Christ ought to work

was for the CRC to become a more “collaborative denomination.”

Collaboration doesn’t seem to be deep in our DNA. But ought it not to be? First Corinthians 12:12-14 says, “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.”

The passage goes on: “But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (1 Cor. 12:24-25).

Whether at home or abroad, at the denominational level or within your local congregation, Scripture is clear about how life in the body of Christ ought to work—out of concern for each other, no division, the many differing gifts contributing to the work of the kingdom.

The good news is that we as a denomination are becoming more and more

like the body of Christ. True, we’re not there yet (and won’t be this side of heaven), but we have daily evidence of the many parts working together as one body. One of the best examples is something denominational staff have been calling the Connections project.

Begun initially as a three-year pilot project in 12 classes (regional groups of churches), its goal is to bring denominational resources to the churches in ways that are responsive and easily accessed. You can read a great example of the Connections project at work on page 29.

The ideas learned during the Connections project will soon be rolled out across the entire denomination. Stay tuned in the coming months as Syd Hielema takes the reins of this effort to fundamentally shift the posture of our body-life together. More and more, you and I will be experiencing life together hand in hand.



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

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

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The Warmth of a Home and Community



WITH NICARAGUA'S RAINY SEASON fast approaching, Luis and Alba Lopez knew their family was in a dire situation: Their roof wouldn't be able to withstand the rainstorms.

A family of four, the Lopezes lived in a small, cramped house. While Luis worked hard making and repairing shoes, he couldn't afford materials for a new roof.

When Resonate Global Mission missionary Jairo Solano visited the local church the members expressed worry for Luis, Alba, and their two sons. Hearing their concerns, Solano organized the church members to help the Lopez family.

Solano crunched the numbers and sent out a newsletter asking for prayers and donations to provide the Lopezes with a proper roof. They

would need about \$350; the community donated \$750.

It was more than enough for a roof. It was enough to build an entire house.

"Since the Lopez family and their church were hoping to do the labor themselves, we were able to help them build an entirely new home with this money," Solano said.

Working together, 15 church members built the Lopezes a new house. The most difficult part was getting the building materials to the location. Solano's truck could only bring them so far before they had to carry the materials themselves. "Thankfully, there were a lot of people willing to help with the job," he said.

The community then took its help one step further: Women from the church banded together, pulling ingredients

The Lopez family's house was in no condition to withstand Nicaragua's impending rainy season. Members of their church worked with Resonate missionary Jairo Solano to build them a new home.

from their homes to cook meals for the volunteers.

Within two days, the Lopez family had a house with a sturdy roof and more space. The Lopez family was overwhelmed with gratitude. "They also offered to help if we had other needs or projects to be done in the community," said Solano.

—Lauren Postma,
Resonate Global Mission

Media Offer New Opportunities for People with Disabilities in China



PEOPLE LIVING with a disability in China often live a life of seclusion or end up having their disability exploited, neither of which feels empowering.

“In China, there are not as many services available for people with disabilities as there are in North America,” said Pastor Jerry An, who serves as Back to God Ministries International’s (BTGMI) Chinese ministry leader. “Most people end up housebound, with no way to get to church and very little interaction with others.”

People like Huan (name changed) and the progress of media technology are helping others break out of that dichotomy.

As someone who is blind, Huan especially appreciates the voice command feature of her smartphone. It allows her to search, ask questions, and share what she’s learning about God with others.

Huan subscribes to many of the programs that BTGMI’s Chinese ministry team produces. Last year she reached out to An to learn more about sharing the gospel through media. Huan told An that she coordinates ministry for a network of Chinese pastors who are also blind. In fact, she’s made it her mission to minister to other people in China who are blind—currently over 17 million people.

“She couldn’t do this type of ministry before,” An said. “But with new media, she has access to all sorts of our resources. The easiest way to reach out and pastor the blind population is through new media.”

Huan asked An to lead a workshop for the pastors in her network about the opportunities media bring to the ministry picture.

Huan has learned new ways to share the gospel with others who are blind in China.

“Being blind and living in China is very difficult,” said An. “Media ministry opens up an easy way to connect to a whole new community.”

In turn, An learned how this network of pastors was already using media to create virtual church services. “They offer a beautiful worship service,” said An. “Using a live streaming app, one person can play the keyboard in their living room while others sing along from their own homes. And it all sounds amazing!”

It’s not a stretch to say that for many in this virtual congregation, this was probably the first worship service they have ever been able to participate in. Thanks to the Christian Reformed Church’s support for BTGMI, leaders like Huan have resources to help keep them on the forefront of media ministry.

—Brian Clark,
Back to God Ministries International

The Difference a Call Can Make

BETTY-ANN COLEMAN had a simple question. An administrator at Westside Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Kingston, Ontario, she was unsure about a certain aspect of The Bridge App, a smartphone app created in partnership with the CRCNA. Coleman sent an email with her question to the CRCNA denominational office.

It would have taken just a few minutes to email the reply, but that's not what happened. Dorothy Vandersteen, who supports The Bridge App, noticed Coleman's work hours listed in the bottom of her email message. Like many church administrative assistants, Coleman works limited hours during the week. It so happened that she'd been working right as Vandersteen was responding to the message.

Vandersteen made a split-second decision to call instead of email. She thought this would be a little more personal and would allow her to take time to listen.

Vandersteen is one of several people involved in the denomination's new Connections project. Begun as a three-year pilot project in 12 classes in the Midwest, California, and southern Ontario, the goal of Connections is to bring denominational resources to Christian Reformed churches in ways that are responsive and easily accessed. Taking time to listen is a key part of Vandersteen's job.

In this case it paid off. A two-minute answer to Coleman's question turned into a longer conversation about how the denomination can better recognize and serve administrative assistants working in Christian Reformed churches.

Coleman found out that Vandersteen and some Connections coworkers in



Participants learned about The Bridge App during an administrative assistants' day for classes Niagara and Hamilton.

Ontario were planning events specifically geared toward church administrative assistants. Vandersteen learned that Classis Quinte already does something like that during one of its meetings each year.

As the two women talked, they began to strategize ways to collaborate. Vandersteen had the ability to bring resources to the table, and Coleman had the experience of meeting annually with other church administrators. She knew what would be helpful information and what wouldn't. The biggest payoff, however, was the relationship that was begun.

The real story isn't about creating a better event. It's not even about how overlooked church administrators are. The real story is about how a simple change of mindset could allow denominational ministry staff and a local church to collaborate instead of simply coexisting.

This is what the Connections project is all about. In collaboration with all of the ministries of the CRCNA and an increasing number of classes and local churches, the Connections project

works to foster greater relationships between local churches and the ministries available to serve them.

It includes regional staff such as Vandersteen, who deliberately build connections with specific classes of churches. It also includes a one-stop phone number (1-800-272-5125) to call for answers to all types of ministry questions, a single web page (crcna.org/resources) that allows users to search for thousands of resources, and an online chat feature on every page of crcna.org.

Thanks to support from Lilly Endowment Inc., the Connections project will soon be expanding to all classes of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, with all CRCNA ministries shifting their posture toward serving local congregations.

—Scott DeVries,
Connections Project



One Gift. One Thousand Churches.

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Blooming Beauties



FLOWERS are one of the most beautiful parts of God's creation. They come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. They also remind us how much God cares for us. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "See how the wild flowers grow. They don't work or make clothing. But here is what I tell you. Not even Solomon in all his royal robes was dressed like one of these flowers. If that is how God dresses the wild grass, won't he dress you even better?" (Matt. 6:28-30, NIV). The next time you see a dandelion or a rose, remember how much God loves you!

Fun Flower Facts

- » There are about 400,000 different kinds of flowers in the world.
- » The world's smallest flower is the watermeal, a type of duckweed. The flowers are so small it would take more than 5,000 of them to fill a thimble!
- » The world's biggest flower is *Rafflesia arnoldii*, the corpse lily. It grows in Southeast Asia and its flowers can be over 39 inches (100 cm) wide.
- » Broccoli, cauliflower, and artichokes are actually flowers!



Flower or Animal?

Some flowers look a lot like other things. The bird-of-paradise flower looks like the bird it's named after. The monkey face orchid (above) looks like—you guessed it—a monkey's face! Read more about flowers that look like animals at tinyurl.com/FlowerLookalikes.

Tulip Mania

Before the 1500s there were no tulips in Europe. But after people brought them to the Netherlands from Turkey in the 1600s, tulips became so popular that their prices soared. At one point just one bulb of a tulip called *Semper Augustus* cost 10,000 guilders—enough to buy one of the biggest, fanciest homes in Amsterdam! Can you imagine that? Today, tulips are so common that one bulb costs less than a dollar.

Draw Your Own Flowers

Want to learn how to draw a rose? Check out the easy step-by-step instructions at tinyurl.com/BannerRose and give it a try! Or look for the book *Draw 50 Flowers, Trees, and Other Plants* by Lee J. Ames at your public library.



Sandy Swartzentruber works for Faith Formation Ministries and attends Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. She loves flowers but can't grow them.



The Ordinary Work of Justice

Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning

Not long ago, when I worked as a reintegration chaplain with men leaving prison, I would often talk about my work in local churches and schools. I could count on a few people to come up afterward to say, "I'm so glad you're doing that work. It's so important for some of us to do."

Those comments always grated on me.

I know people mean well. Most wanted to compliment me on what they see as valuable work. But three words always stuck out to me: *some of us*. Implicit is the idea that some of us are called to the work of justice and solidarity, but the rest of us are not.

I see this dynamic at work on our campus as well. Justice seeking is for students in the social justice club or the creation care group. It's one pursuit among others that we can take or leave as we please.

That attitude is hard to square with the biblical witness.

The prophet Micah summarized life with God as "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8). All three—justice, mercy, and humble pilgrimage with God—make up the life of faith. Isaiah characterized faithful action as "to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke" (58:6). The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Christians in Rome, described God's kingdom as justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). And Jesus himself told the Galilean crowds that those who hunger and thirst for justice will be filled.

Clearly the pursuit of justice is not an optional hobby for God's people but a basic commitment. So why do we fall into the trap of thinking that justice is only for some of us? Is it because we're not convinced that justice is all

that important? Maybe. But my sense is that most of us know that justice is important, even basic, to our faith. I wonder if it's not so much that we think justice is unimportant but that it's intimidating.

"Doing justice" is often associated with dramatic, public acts of truth-telling and confrontation: Desmond Tutu calling out discriminatory policies in apartheid-era South Africa; Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat to highlight unjust racial policy; Dr. King's historic 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery; climate activist Greta Thunberg speaking at the United Nations.

Actions like those are an important part of what it means to do justice. But if justice seeking is as basic a part of our faith as the biblical authors lead us to believe, then there must be a more ordinary, everyday form of justice seeking for those of us not named Desmond, Rosa, or Greta. And maybe

it is the ordinary, everyday practice of justice that empowers us for life's more dramatic moments.

When the psalmists and prophets speak about justice, they often use two Hebrew words: *tsedekah* and *mishpat*. In English Bibles, those words are usually translated "righteousness" and "justice." So in Psalm 33:5 we read, "The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of God's unfailing love." Or, from the prophet Amos, "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (5:24).

Tsedek means *rightness*, that which is as it ought to be. And *mishpat* is what needs to be done in a given situation if things are to be restored to *tsedek* (rightness) so that everyone can flourish. They are deeply relational words, rooted in the loving God's covenant relationship with God's people. The Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright says justice is "essentially relational and covenantal."

For the biblical prophets and psalmists, to do justice is a deeply relational act. Making space for everyone to flourish is not just about providing the material goods necessary for people to flourish. Neither is it about creating a perfect system of government or engineering the ideal city. It is about restoring broken relationships so that things are made right. Biblical justice is a justice that restores. That could be why the apostle Paul, who was steeped in the words of the prophets and the psalms, called Jesus Christ "the justice of God." Jesus is the One who restores what is broken so that all may flourish.

As justice seekers in the biblical tradition, we are prompted to ask: *What relationships are broken, and what can we do to repair them?* When a few people in a community hold most of the wealth and a great many others live in poverty, then the economic relationships that tie us together are broken. What can we do to repair them? When parents do not feel safe letting their children play in the street because of violence in their

Doing justice . . .
may be as simple as
having an awkward
conversation with
your uncle or going
to a different section
of the library to find
some new authors for
your child.

community, then our social ties—neighbor to neighbor, citizen to citizen, community to government—are broken. What can we do to repair them? When women cannot pursue their God-given callings at work or in political life simply because of their gender, that is a sign that relationships are broken and need fixing.

In summary, for God's people justice is making sure everyone has what they need to flourish; this is accomplished by repairing those broken relationships that are hindering God's shalom.

Shedding Light on What Is Broken

If biblical justice is a movement that restores broken relationships, then our pursuit of justice is as much about everyday acts of courage and conviction as it is about those dramatic—and intimidating—moments of history. Justice is all about relationships, and what else is everyday life made of but our relationships as children, friends, parents, students, coworkers, and fellow citizens?

Restoring that which is broken begins with actually recognizing that things are broken. To heal a broken arm, we need to determine what bone is

broken. To heal the broken relationships that stop us from flourishing, we need to shed light on what is broken.

How do we do that?

We don't need to start by organizing a global protest march or running for elected office (though that may be necessary too). We can start by "making it awkward." I know a local tradesman who would never call himself an activist. I doubt he's ever spoken up at a city council meeting or written a letter to the editor. But if he hears a coworker speak crudely about women, he confronts them directly and publicly. If he hears a friend speak ignorantly about Canada's Indigenous communities, he is willing to stop that friend and challenge her assumptions.

He is willing to "make it awkward" in everyday conversations, to expose in small ways how relationships between men and women and between settler and Indigenous communities are broken. It's a small thing, but it's a courageous step toward a more just world.

Another way to shed light on injustice is the simple act of saying no. When Christians in the Clapham parish of south London found out about the pervasive injustices of the human slave trade in the 19th century, they got angry. They responded, in part, by publishing lists of companies who were profiting from the trading of human beings and by encouraging fellow churchgoers to boycott those companies. South Africans acted similarly in the 1980s and early 1990s by encouraging citizens around the world to divest from companies profiting from racially unjust public policy in their homeland. Students regularly tell me about their refusal to support companies who exemplify the broken economic and social relationships of our fallen world: oil companies who profit from the destruction of the created world; mining companies who subject their workers to dehumanizing conditions; T-shirt companies whose advertising turns young girls into sex objects.

Sometimes we can expose injustice simply by putting one foot in front of the other. The *Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad* (or Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity) began in central Mexico when the poet Javier Sicilia's son was killed by a drug cartel. He was one of thousands of Mexicans killed or gone missing during the "war on drugs." Sicilia and his friends began organizing small marches in public squares. Those small marches became large marches—some with over 200,000 participants—to make public what was otherwise pushed aside. Sicilia's movement has been instrumental in creating a grassroots movement for change in a situation otherwise marked by fear and despair. And it all started with the ordinary act of walking in public with friends.

Making things awkward, saying no with our wallets and our voices, putting one foot in front of the other—such actions don't require the voice of Oscar Romero or the dedication of Dorothy Day. These are ordinary acts of justice, exposing broken relationships so we can work for something better.

Making Things (a Little More) Whole

Shedding light on our world's brokenness is one part of doing justice. The other is joining the Holy Spirit's work of restoring what is broken, following in the footsteps of the Carpenter and Healer who spent a good deal of his time making broken things whole.

Again, restoring what is broken can look pretty ordinary.

One tragic aspect of our broken world is that some voices get heard more easily than others. Where I live in western Canada, the voices of Indigenous men and women, the voices of newcomers, and the voices of women have all been pushed to the margins at one point or another in our history. How can we even start to make things right?

Teachers have been showing me one very simple way forward in their

classrooms. Every day, creative teachers raise voices that have previously been silenced. By reading picture books by Indigenous authors, telling the stories of female nation-builders that our history textbooks have ignored, or assigning novels by authors from underrepresented communities, teachers make broken relationships a little more right by exposing their students to voices of fellow image-bearers they may not otherwise hear.


Sometimes making a broken relationship right is a matter of church real estate. Near my home in Edmonton, Alberta, a Presbyterian church recently decided that it simply did not make sense for its shrinking congregation to use the large church property only for Sunday services and the occasional outreach dinner. At the same time, a small group of women in the congregation had befriended newcomers to Canada through refugee sponsorship. The church put two and two together and decided to transform its church property into a beautiful housing complex for newcomers.

This church had a Christ-inspired vision of a more welcoming world where all people have what they need to flourish—in this case, a safe, affordable home. And so they did the tedious work of securing work permits, applying for zoning changes, and going door to door to convince their neighbors that this new housing complex would be a good thing for the neighborhood. The work was long and often boring. It did not garner a lot of praise or media attention, and the names of the churchgoers will not make it into many history books. But their ordinary actions helped to right a host of wrongs—war, displacement, and exclusion. It is precisely the sort of ordinary, everyday justice seeking that Psalm 33 tells us God loves.

Theologian Gustavo Gutierrez has said that his journey toward justice is animated by one question: How do we tell the poor (or the forgotten, excluded, and pushed aside) that God loves them

in a world that feels like a negation of love? His response—and ours—is to "let justice flow" in ordinary, everyday ways. When we do, we are telling people who are poor and those who are downtrodden or excluded that God does love them—not through empty words, but by helping to build a world that no longer feels like a negation of love. That is why Cornel West says that "justice is what love looks like in public."

The call to do justice can feel intimidating, but it doesn't have to. Doing justice may mean doing something extraordinary, like confronting a corrupt politician, decrying an unjust law, or protesting a tone-deaf government. But it may also be as simple as having an awkward conversation with your uncle or going to a different section of the library to find some new authors for your child.

It will certainly mean praying fervently that the God of justice and righteousness be present among us in new and startling ways as we make justice a part of our daily walk of faith. And as we pray, we can let activist Daniel Berrigan's words keep us accountable: "And then there is the question of prayer, which consists for the most part in insisting that God do for us what we are unwilling to do for one another. Resolve: Let's do for one another what we would have God do for all. This is known as God-like activity." 



Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning is program director of The Micah Centre at The King's University and is an ordained pastor in the CRCNA. He is a member of Fellowship CRC in Edmonton, Alta.

1. What first comes to your mind when you hear the phrase "doing justice"? Why?
2. If "justice is making sure everyone has what they need to flourish" by "repairing those broken . . ."

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

More Than Just Stuff

I've been noticing in Scripture how stuff is the means through which God accomplishes redemption.



Phillip Leo is church communications director at Barnabas Foundation. He is a member at Calvin CRC, Oak Lawn, Ill.

STUFF IS JUST STUFF. If you've lived a few years and have yielded to the claims of the gospel, you've probably already come to this conclusion. Although it sounds simple enough, the underpinnings of this statement are profound and inform our discipleship at a very practical level. We don't live for stuff. We don't find deep and lasting meaning through stuff. We need, use, and even enjoy stuff. But at the end of each day, stuff remains, well, just stuff.

Of course, stuff is also a big target for preachers. Many hermeneutical miles have been driven in the pulpit railing against too much stuff or the misuse of stuff or the wrong kind of stuff. When I was a young preacher, I spent many miles on this highway. It was just too hard to resist something that preached so easily and related so well to the congregation. The result, however, was that stuff became my preaching punching bag. I could pull it out whenever my sermon sagged and I needed a quick flurry of jabs and uppercuts. I beat up stuff for my listeners.

These days, though, I've been noticing in Scripture how stuff is the means through which God accomplishes redemption. Take, for example, the story of Ruth. Naomi's nearest kinsman begs off on the cost and risk of receiving Ruth the Moabite into his family. He falls over himself declaring that he's out, and that kinsman Boaz is more than welcome to step up—and, more importantly, pony up.

The awkward truth in this story is that it is really about stuff! The reluctant nearest relative can't see his life and well-being beyond his stuff, so he keeps it firmly in his grasp. Boaz, however, wonders what might be around the corner for his family. He

yields his stuff in service to what God might have in store.

When stuff is just stuff, anything is possible. Nobody imagined what would happen as a result of Ruth gleaning in Boaz's field. Nobody imagined what would come from the home that Ruth and Boaz would make together. Nobody imagined that Ruth would bear Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David, whose royal dynasty would produce the Messiah. Most importantly, nobody imagined that this Messiah, who was from eternity, would become the very stuff of this world in order to redeem it.

Stuff is just stuff. But here's the thing: It's God's stuff, and it matters to God—a lot. So I wonder what might change if I begin to see the stuff of my life as more than just stuff? What if it's the stuff that helps bring about God's mercy and justice? What might become of the leftovers that I "accidentally on purpose" leave behind for others? What greater design of God might be discovered by risking some of my stuff? What if my stuff was more than just stuff?

I imagine endless possibilities. No matter how small, stuff of any kind becomes a powerful instrument of shalom whenever it's yielded in service to God, through Christ our Lord. **B**

1. As you reflect on all the stuff in your home, would you characterize it as "too much"? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree that stuff matters to God? Why or why not? . . .
3. What might "risking some of my stuff" for God's greater design . . .

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Saving Face

I wonder if our society's appetite for media that portray disrespectful behavior as humorous leaves us tolerant of disrespect.



Nicki Kuiper is a middle-school math teacher at Orange City Christian School in Orange City, Iowa, and curriculum coordinator for eight Christian schools in northwest Iowa. She and her family attend Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Orange City.

SHE SAT ACROSS FROM ME, a look of disbelief on her face. As she spoke, her eyes grew larger, her voice stronger. "These things would never, ever happen in my country," she said. "But if they did, there would be a big problem for that person and for that person's family."

Angela, a high school student from Vietnam studying in the United States, was sharing an incident from one of her classes that day. A student had been arguing with the teacher, refusing to follow instructions and even calling the teacher by his first name. She went on to recount similar examples of what she called "disrespect" between students and teachers.

When asked to describe what might happen to a student who disrespected teachers in Vietnam, Angela's eyes grew large again as she listed a series of consequences. The student would be required to write a letter of apology to the teacher and to write a series of lines promising never to disrespect a teacher again. The student's parents would be called into the school office for chastisement and a demand to better train their child.

Having lived and taught in an Asian country for more than four years, I knew this last consequence was the worst of all. In Vietnam, as in many Asian countries, society gives high significance to what is called "saving face." According to Alida Brill, "Saving face signifies a desire—or defines a strategy—to avoid humiliation or embarrassment, to maintain dignity or preserve reputation" (*Psychology Today*, Nov. 2009).

Because saving face is so important to Vietnamese parents, everything possible is done to ensure that children

respect teachers at all times. For that reason, you'd never hear a student arguing with a teacher or refusing to follow instructions. And you'd never meet a student who referred to a teacher by his or her first name—ever.

Angela's observations about what went on in the classroom caused me to consider my own responses to disrespectful behavior in my classroom and to recall missed opportunities to help students practice respectful behavior in schools and classrooms throughout my teaching career. It seemed to me that adults in our society—myself included—needed to teach and hold our children to higher expectations of respectful behavior.

There are many reasons why a sense of respect for teachers has fallen through the cracks in our culture. Some teachers have abused their power over children or have demanded respect in ways that are detrimental to students' emotional health and well-being. Additionally, the movement toward raising a child's self-esteem has society reiterating the mantra that children must only be affirmed and never, ever shamed. While affirming children is a good thing, and abuse of power is never acceptable, I wonder if we have gone too far. I wonder if our society's appetite for media that portray disrespectful behavior as humorous leaves us tolerant of disrespect.

When I was in school, the phrase *Have you no shame?* and others like it (*Shame on you!*) was a common response to wrong behavior. It was a call to consider my actions, to feel, yes, *shame* for what I had done, and to allow that shame to shape my future actions. Today, using either of these phrases in a public setting these days would likely draw accusing glares toward the



parent or adult who speaks them—and rightfully so in the case of parents who use them to belittle children and decimate their sense of self-worth.

Because we avoid using the word *shame* in our culture, I wonder which word might take its place. I wonder if there exists a form of spoken communication between adults and children that requires us to examine our disrespectful behavior the way “Shame on you!” did for me and “saving face” does for Asian students.

But more important than remembering how the concept of shame colored my upbringing, I need to reflect on how “shame” is used in God’s Word. Scripture often talks of Christ’s shame and how it covers our own shame. More than once the psalmist asks God to take away his shame or to keep enemies from causing him shame. But other Scripture passages seem to acknowledge shame as an appropriate response to wrong behavior:

“Let the wicked be put to shame” (Ps. 31:17).

“God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor. 1:27).

“When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom” (Prov. 11:2, KJV).


“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret” (Eph. 5:11-12).

“Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways” (2 Cor. 4:1-2).

“Whoever robs their father and drives out their mother is a child who brings shame and disgrace” (Prov. 19:26).

The biblical use of the word *shame* often points to actions that dishonor ourselves, flagging behavior that must be changed. These verses compel me to feel shame of my own: shame for students who have been allowed to disrespect their teachers; shame for parents and teachers who have dropped the ball in training children to respect others; shame that an exchange student from Vietnam

has a negative view of the American classroom.

It took the eyes of a 16-year-old from across the ocean to arouse in me a fresh urgency about how we might help our children to develop a respectful attitude. I want to learn better ways to train children to examine shameful behavior in the light of behavior that honors parents and others God put in authority over them. Perhaps it’s time to engage in more discussion about what respect should look like at school and at home. As parents and teachers, we must use words and actions that call children to respectful behavior that honors Christ rather than shames him. 

Not His Own: Jeremy Benjamin

Preparation needs
to go well beyond
your bookings.



Kristy Quist is the director of communications for Canopy Resources and a member of Neland Ave. CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Jeremy Benjamin is a singer-songwriter on a 14-month “I Am Not My Own” tour of Canada. At each stop he leads worship by sharing the Heidelberg Catechism in musical form, telling his story, and raising funds for Christian ministry. The tour, in partnership with the CRCNA and World Renew, among others, has been extended due to high demand. It will wrap up in August with the binational CRC gathering Inspire 2019. This is an excerpt of a *Banner* interview with Benjamin; you can find the full interview at *TheBanner.org*.

Q. Concert donations are going toward World Renew’s efforts in Nigeria and toward ministries that individual communities choose. What have you learned about those other ministries along the way?

A. I think perhaps the biggest thing I’ve learned along the way is that God is working significantly through the CRC in Canada in each of its communities. One of the most important goals of the tour was to connect our worship song (“I Am Not My Own”) with on-the-ground, kingdom mission. And so when we look back on this project and have a recorded piece, we can be reminded of what it means to be “not our own” and what this looks like. These local ministries are beautiful demonstrations of how God’s people in the CRC are living as though they are not their own.

Q. Tell me about your relationship to the Heidelberg Catechism.

A. The words from Q&A 1 became very real to me in my early twenties. . . . It really did offer me a much-needed comfort from a very low period I was going through at the time, and in fact I can directly relate those words

nudging me toward rededicating my life to Jesus.

Throughout the years, it was God who worked through other people to nudge me toward writing songs for the church based on the text, not my idea at all. So the first time I really dug in with passion to the full document was in 2012, when I wrote the first album of songs, entitled *Heidelberg*. I loved the poetic language and the articulation of what Scripture was saying and what a healthy theological response was.

For many across the hundreds of churches I’ve now had the privilege of working with in the last seven years, the Heidelberg Catechism is still central to the teaching that happens on Sundays. It is beloved and beautiful. I have so many people share stories of personal journeys where the Catechism has helped them through difficult times.

For other congregations, there is a significant generational gap in even knowing what the document is. An older generation will approach me and thank me for breathing new musical life into the text so that it is shared with a younger generation.

For some, there is a negative connotation that reminds them of a time where the catechism and church was “drilled” into them in a way that felt more rigid than loving. I think connecting the songs and my personal story that unfolds with it softens this a little.

And for so many—especially because the concert evenings are purposely ecumenical events—it is the first time they are even hearing of such a thing. **B**



We Hope for Better Things

by Erin Bartels

reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Over the course of 150 years, three strong women from the same Michigan family confront different kinds of racism in this potent debut novel. Elizabeth loses her journalism job at a Detroit newspaper and finds herself submerged in her family's past via their forgotten old farmhouse. As Elizabeth gets to know her secretive great-aunt Nora, a picture emerges of a history that lays the foundation for the heartache and courage of future generations. With empathy and meticulous attention to historical detail, Erin Bartels takes the reader time-traveling from present-day racial tensions to the explosive 1960s Detroit race riots to Michigan's Underground Railroad. (Revell)



Simon Peter: Flawed but Faithful Disciple

by Adam Hamilton

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

This informative, insightful book is by parts a devotional, a sermon, and a scholarly work. Hamilton shares the details of Peter's life and invites readers "to understand how Peter's story speaks to us today, how these stories serve as God's Word to us, helping us both to know Christ more fully and to become the disciples Christ calls us to be." Accessible and inspiring, Hamilton's book, in which he shares his own failures and vulnerabilities, encourages Christians to live out of the truth that "Jesus makes amazing use of flawed disciples." (Abingdon Press)



Tides of a Teardrop

by Mandolin Orange

reviewed by Otto Selles

In this gorgeous album, singer-songwriter and mandolinist Andrew Marlin travels through variations of longing and loss, particularly when considering the death of his mother. Emily Frantz provides perfect harmonies and takes the lead at times, offering variety to the subdued instrumentation. While the songs examine great sadness, the overall musical tone is an elegant calm, like a stormy lake that suddenly quiets at sunset. Whether you call their music folk, Americana, roots music, or real country, Mandolin Orange will speak to you "softly, tenderly, using delicate voices," to borrow the lyrics of "Time We Made Time." (Yep Roc Records)



Capharnaüm

reviewed by Kristy Quist

Resourceful 12-year-old Zain hustles any way he can to survive. When his parents sell his young sister into marriage, he runs, only to find more problems. Furious, he sues his parents for having given birth to him, saying he is "living in hell." Truly, the streets of Beirut seem hellish for the myriad neglected children, refugees, and people in poverty. With a cast of non-actors from backgrounds similar to their roles, Lebanese director Nadine Labaki has created a gut-wrenching film that asks a sobering question: what does the future hold for the world's hurting children? Now streaming. (Sony Classics)

The Lowdown

New Direction: Bethany McKinney Fox's book *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church* will be released May 28. (IVP Academic)

Real or Fantasy? *Tolkien*, a biopic about the early years of the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, will debut in theaters May 10. (Fox Searchlight)

Squirrely: Mike Nawrocki, co-creator of *VeggieTales*, has a new book series of chapter books called *The Dead Sea Squirrels* that, similar to the Veggies, teaches life lessons with silly fun. (Tyndale Kids)

Mane Event: More genre-bending bluegrass with a beat will come from Judah and the Lion on their new album, *Pep Talks*, due out May 3. (Cletus the Van Records)

Is Faith in God a Crutch for Weak People?

It takes incredible strength to do these things—to stand in the face of death and claim victory.

IS FAITH IN GOD a crutch for weak people?

The short answer: Of course it is.

For anyone experiencing a moment of weakness, struggle, or sorrow, knowing that there is a God who knows them, cares for them, and is looking out for them is an incredible “crutch,” an incredible support to lean on.

And who among us *doesn't* feel weak from time to time and in need of something to lean on? So, sure, faith in God is a wonderful support to lean on when we are weak. Except when it's not.

And here's where this question posed by non- or not-yet-believers—“Is faith in God a crutch for weak people?”—doesn't acknowledge the challenges of faith, or of following Jesus, or of believing in a good God when bad things happen. Because, as believers know, it's not like faith is always easy, or always something to lean on, or always a source of great answers.

I work on a college campus. Every death in our community is a tragedy. If it's a student, the tragedy is obvious, but even when it's an adult who serves on our faculty or staff, it's a tragic loss because that person was in the prime of life, working, serving, loving—and is now gone. When faced with losses like these, faith in God may be a support to lean on, but just as often our belief in a good and loving God is challenged to the point of breaking. When we look at a 20-year-old lying in a casket, we wonder: How can a good God allow this? How can I/we believe in a God who let this happen?

Those are moments when our faith in God feels less like a crutch we can lean on and more like a burden we bear. We ask the ancient questions about

evil and suffering and faith and hope. We stand by a grave in disbelief. Our hearts literally ache with loss.

At those times, our faith isn't a crutch. A crutch just won't do it. In those seasons, our faith is about the cross. It's about knowing that our God loved us so much that he faced death itself—and won. It's about singing “no guilt in life, no fear in death—this is the power of Christ in me” as tears stream down our faces. It's about standing at the grave and saying together, “I believe in the resurrection of the body.” It's about reciting, one more time, that we “belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to [our] faithful Savior, Jesus Christ” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1).

It takes incredible strength to do these things—to stand in the face of death and claim victory. To bury a child and continue to trust God. To weave grief into the rest of your life even as you celebrate baptisms, weddings, and holidays. These are not the actions of the weak. These are the actions of the strong. They may not feel strong. We may not feel strong. We may feel more like we are barely holding on. But in those moments, our faith is not in our strength, but in our God who has said that in our weakness, God is strong. We don't lean on a crutch. We don't lean on our faith. We lean on our God. “Till he returns or calls me home—here in the power of Christ I'll stand.” **B**



Mary Hulst is chaplain for Calvin College and teaches at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich.

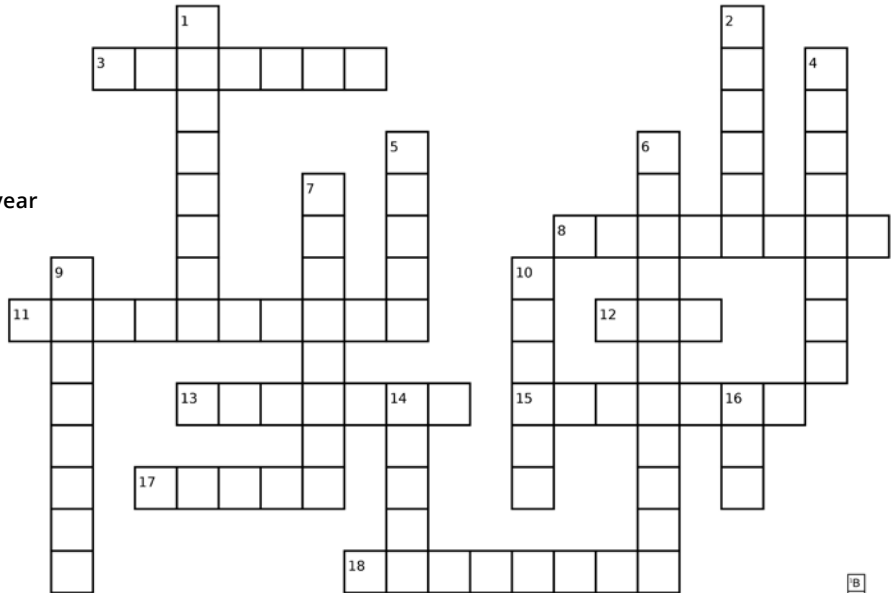
Find clues to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*. See the answers next month!

Down:

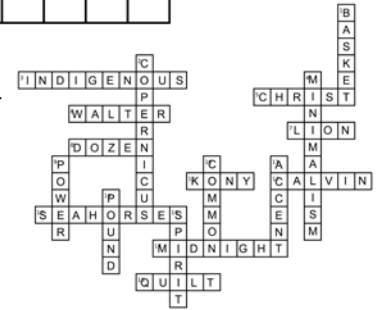
1. Neither brick wall nor jellyfish
2. Lebanese film director Nadine _____
3. Regional grouping that meets 2 to 3 times per year
4. New director of Raise Up Global Ministries
5. _____ Peter
6. A new denominational project to serve churches
7. _____ shares, a form of CRC crowdfunding
9. Activist Daniel _____
10. Is this what faith is for weak people?
14. A common response to wrong behavior
16. "I am not my _____"

Across:

3. regional grouping meets 2 to 3 times per year
8. Canadian city with Indigenous Family Centre
11. A cancer of the soul
12. _____ Research Center
13. Emphasis on personal relationship with Christ
15. Redeemer University College is reducing this
17. _____ Years of Welcome
18. Author of 2010 award-winning book



Answers to the April 2019 puzzle.



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Denominational Announcements

GENERAL

CALL TO SYNOD 2019 The council of Faith Community CRC, Wyoming, Michigan, calls all delegates to Synod 2019, elected by their respective classes, to meet in the Covenant Fine Arts Center on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on Friday, June 14, at 8:30 a.m. All area CRC members are invited to join the delegates in worship at the synodical Service of Prayer and Praise on Sunday evening, June 16, 2019, at 5:00 p.m. in the College Chapel, Calvin College, 1835 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Rev. Roger B. Groenboom, pastor at Faith Community CRC, will deliver the message. All CRC churches across the continent are requested to remember the deliberations of synod in their intercessory prayers on Sunday, June 9, and Sunday, June 16. Council of Faith Community CRC, Wyoming, Michigan

Church Positions Available

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

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.fcvcrc.org/> and email search@fcvcrc.org for more information.

SEEKING PASTOR Trinity CRC, Fremont, MI. Our former pastor has retired and we have begun the search for a pastor. If interested, please contact Todd DeKryger at tdekryger@ncats.net or (231) 286-8778.

PASTORAL OPPORTUNITY open at Faith Community Fellowship CRC of Mount Vernon, Washington in the beautiful Pacific Northwest! We are searching and praying for our next Senior Pastor. We invite you to access our Church Profile for details of who we are and what our mission is. Contact Gordon at 360-630-0257 or e-mail to gord.terpstra@gmail.com. We await your contact!

WORSHIP DIRECTOR: Bethel Community Christian Reformed Church, Newmarket is

searching for a permanent part-time Worship Director to coordinate and lead the worship at its two Sunday services. One is more traditional, focusing on hymns and contemporary worship music geared to an older established demographic while the other is focused on contemporary and emerging worship music geared to an unchurched younger demographic. Contact Derek Tensen 905-642-3811 datensen@hotmail.com

THRIVE MINISTRIES is seeking an Associate Pastor who is a spirit equipped servant leader, committed to the Reformed Faith, who will serve primarily as Pastor of our First CRC campus in Fulton, IL. For more information, please email Bruce Bielema at bjbielema@gmail.com or call 563-321-1147

LEAD PASTOR - The Aylmer Christian Reformed Church of Aylmer, Ontario is seeking a full-time Lead Pastor following the retirement of our Pastor in February 2019. We are looking for a self-motivated, compassionate Pastor that is devoted to providing Reformed preaching, nurture our spiritual growth and equip us for community outreach. If this is you, we'd love to speak with you. Please contact Lisa at 519-520-1220 or email bruceandlisavk@hotmail.com. Job description and church profile are available upon request.

LEAD PASTOR First CRC of Crown Point, Indiana is seeking a pastor with a loving conviction for Jesus Christ, a passion to advance the kingdom of God through preaching the gospel, and a heart for pastoral care of our 800 members. The pastor will be responsible for carrying on the vision and setting direction for the church and staff. First CRC is excited about who God has already chosen and if you feel that God may be calling you to Crown Point, learn more about our church at: www.cpcrc.org. To submit a resume or for further information, please contact: first@cpcrc.org.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR, THE HAGUE NETHERLANDS American Protestant Church of The Hague seeks a dynamic, Christ-centered, Associate Pastor to become part of a richly diverse international, inter-denominational English-speaking congregation. For a detailed opportunity description and application requirements, visit www.apch.nl/associate-pastor-search

PASTOR Bethel CRC in Zeeland, MI is seeking a pastor who will share in our vision and encourage us in our mission to be a "community rooted in the love and acceptance of Jesus Christ, ignited by the Holy Spirit to be growing in and sharing our faith in Zeeland and

beyond." Additional information can be found on www.bethelchurchzeeland.org. Please send all inquiries, questions, and resumes to search@bethelzeeland.org.

Volunteers

SHORT TERM MISSION 2019-2020 opportunities. Honduras: youth camp & construction. Dominican Republic: eye clinic, program for children/elderly, construction. Flexible dates. For more information, please contact mark at mvanzeelt2004@yahoo.com or 630-792-1754

Birthdays

100TH BIRTHDAY

ROBERT D. KEEGSTRA of Jenison, Michigan. Happy 100th birthday! "Bob" celebrated his 100th birthday with an open house for family & friends on April 20th. He was married for over 70 years & has 3 sisters, 3 children, 6 grandchildren, 7 great grandchildren & 13 great great grandchildren. We're all so grateful to have you in our lives.

90TH BIRTHDAY

MRS. BETTY BOUMA JONKER will celebrate her 90th birthday on May 13, 2019. She is the widow of Mr. Leo James Jonker and the daughter of Peter B and Helen Niewenhuis Bouma. Greetings can be sent to 5840 Cahill Ave., #114, Inver Grove Heights, MN 55076.

BARBARA BUURSMAN (WIEGERS) celebrates her 90th birthday on May 12, 2019. Her husband, John, and children Dick & Sue Landman, Greg & Kathy Door, Randy & Debra Buursma along with her 8 grandchildren & spouses & 7 great grandchildren thank God for her loving, steadfast care & life lessons she taught. God has blessed us with a devoted wife, mother, grandmother & Beppa!

TINA MEYER (nee De Zoete) will celebrate 90 years of life on May 6. Her husband, Rev. Peter Meyer, children: Annette (Roy), John, Norman, Ray and Yolanda (Rob), grandchildren and great grandchildren praise God for her devotion to Him, her gentle spirit and loving kindness for all her family, friends and neighbours far and wide. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, His love endures forever! Psalm 106: 1 Address: 205 Mountain Circle S. E. Airdrie, AB T4A 1X6

SHIRLEY TRIEZENBERG (PASTOOR), widow of Herman Triezenberg, will celebrate her 90th birthday on June 4, 2019. She is loved and cherished by her children Cindy and Rick Bandstra, Pat and Jim Talen, Nancy and Gary Fox, Julie and Steve Jones, Jennifer and Brad Vander-

Brug, Sheila Stoffle, 14 grandchildren, 4 great-grandchildren. Wishes may be sent to her at 30 College SE, #68, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Anniversaries

70TH ANNIVERSARY

SALIE, Harris and Harriet were married on April 22, 1949 in Bellflower CA attending and raising their children at the 1st Christian Reformed Church of Bellflower were they have been members for over 70 years. They were blessed with 6 children. We would like to thank our parents for the wonderful Christian examples they have been to us, and the many sacrifices they made for us. Don & (Myra) Diane Vos, Bob & (Nancy) Rod & (Pam) Glen & (MaryJo) Marv & (Mary) Blessed with 30 Grandchildren, 34 Great Grandchildren, 1 Great Great Grandson

60TH ANNIVERSARY

KUYERS, John and Marjorie will celebrate their 60th anniversary on May 1, 2019. Children Bill & Kristi Kuiper and Jon & Julie Kuyers along with their grandchildren and great grandchildren are so thankful for their example of a Christ centered marriage. God's richest blessings!

Obituaries

APOTHEKER Annette, age 88 of Kalamazoo, MI passed away December 28, 2018. Survived by sister Janet Apotheke, niece Lisa (Jones) Perl, nephew John (Kristen) Porter, 2 grandnieces & 2 grandnephews.

HIBMA, Florence, 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

HOFMAN Bertha Kooy of Grand Rapids, MI was born in Nobleford, AB into the first CRC established in Canada. She served several congregations with her husband Rev. John M. Hofman, who preceded her in death in 2014. God blessed Bertha with 95 years of life before her passing on November 4, 2018. She is survived by her children Marv & Mary, Ruth & Steve (Venhuizen), Greg & Judy, Tom & Wendy; sister Johanna Konynenbelt; sisters-in-law Gert Kooy, Alice Kooy, Dolly (James) Strikwerda, JoAnne Hofman; brother-in-law Henry Postman; 10 grandchildren; 13 great grandchildren

MOLL, Roger, 88, of Celeryville, OH passed away Mar. 25, 2019. He is survived by his wife, Arlene (VanZoest) Moll; daughters Mary (Dave) Kline and Martha (Mike) Zietse; 4 granddaughters and 6 great-grandchildren all of Grand Rapids, MI.

MOLL, Senetta, 97, of Celeryville, OH passed away Mar. 28, 2019. She is survived by broth-

ers Herman Moll, David (Janice) Moll, Lynn (Gloria) Moll, Keith (Linda) Moll; brother-in-law Sidney Cooper; sisters-in-law Phyllis, Joyce, Arlene Moll. Preceded in death by brothers: Franklin, Kenneth, Donald, Roger Moll and sisters: Janice Cooper, Lois Moll.



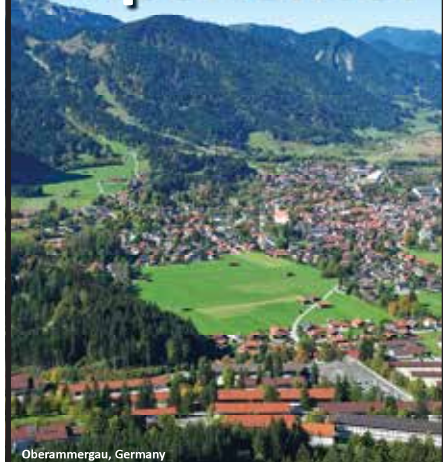
PETROELJE, Josephine "Jo", age 95, of Grand Rapids, MI went to her eternal home with Jesus on Tuesday, March 19. Surviving her is one sister, Evelyn Karsten (Henry). She was preceded in death by her 2 brothers, Rev. Harold (Johanna) & Purcel (Marge) & her sister Anne DeMann (Clarence). She is also survived by many nieces and nephews and loving close friends. She worked 49 years at Pine Rest Christian Hospital. In her retirement, she continued volunteering in a variety of ministries.

RITZEMA, Bernice Jean (Vander Weide), 92, of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away April 5, 2019. Preceded in death by her husband, Richard Mark Ritzema, she is survived by her children, Jane Kropewnicki, Malois Ritzema (Mike Brady-deceased), Mary (Bruce) Hanson, Lorraine (Stan) Beloncis, Debra Ritzema (Tim Pendergast); grandchildren, Nadia (Chapin) Rydingsward, Alice (Nathaniel) Peterson, Zoe Beloncis, and Isabel Brady; and great grandchildren, Mae Li and Linnea Rydingsward, Maxwell and Walter Peterson.



SLAGTER, Eleanor of Grand Rapids, MI. Jesus took Mother (94) by the hand and gently ushered her into Eternity, April 3rd. Family was bedside to hold her hand, stroked her hair, sang hymns and prayed over such a wonderful wife of nearly 72 years, Sweet Mother, Sister, Aunt, Grandmother, Great Grandmother and beloved friend. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants." Psalm 116:15 Eleanor was God's example of forever giving the Olive Branch of God's grace and forgiveness to reconcile relationships in Christ. "It's not about us. It's what Christ did for us that we can't help but share His goodness, grace and Love with others, so that others may find Peace in their daily walk." Mom was Plymouth Heights CRC secretary for years until she retired in 1987. She loved that job. John and El moved to the family cottage at Cobmoosa Shores, Shelby, MI. They moved to Maple Creek Retirement Community in 2011. They relocated to Seal Beach Nursing Home in CA in December of 2016 to be close to their daughter and family. The last 2 1/2 years in California have been wonderful. Warm, sunny days, blue skies, family, a caring, 24/7 Nursing staff, convertible outings, home visits to celebrate special occasions and Holidays, and family photos. Son, Rick was able to visit several times to help, enjoy time together and to be one on

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one with our sweet mother. ...God's gift of Love. The folks were the only couple at the Nursing Home. They were able to share a room til Dad, John Slagter, passed July 26, 2018. A DOUBLE Memorial Service was held. Donations to Mark Wiersma and his wife Anne. Missionaries in Nigeria. www.resonatglobalmission.org. Search "Wiersma"



SLOMP John, beloved husband of Agnes, went home to his Heavenly Father on March 8, 2019, at the age of 90. John immigrated to Canada from The Netherlands with his family in 1948. He and Agnes farmed near Brooks, Alberta and were active members of the Brooks Christian Reformed church. John was predeceased by his brother Tieme, sisters Grace (Deunk), Jennie (Borkent) and Hennie (Dronkelaar) and his parents Jan and Lammie Slomp. He is survived by his wife Agnes, brother Henry (Willhelmien), children John (Alice), Alice Nicholson, Karl (Linda), Linda (Glen) Ohlmann, Betty (James) Parent, Randy, Brian (Sherry), and Leroy (Michelle), 19 grandchildren and 19 great grandchildren.

VERBRUGGE, Dr. Calvin, age 81 of Racine, WI, passed away peacefully at home on March 10, 2019. He is survived by his wife of 57 years, Pauline (nee Koene); children Helen (Garry) Arkema and Susan (Chris) Guck; 6 grandchildren and one great grandchild. He was preceded in death by his brother, Verlyn. He is survived by his brother Glenn (Berniece), sisters Maryls (Henry) Admiraal and Ruth (David) Shackelton, and sister-in-law Lori Verbrugge.

VERWOLF, John W, age 85, of Grand Rapids, MI went home to be with his Lord on Sunday, March 24, 2019. Missing him is his loving wife of 64 years, Adeline K. (Goris), children Donna (Gary) Turner, Debra (Mike) Voorhorst, David (Sandi) Verwolf, Douglas (Kathie) Verwolf, 12 grandchildren, and 21 great grandchildren. John was a loving father and husband with a strong faith. To know him was to love him.

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Through a Child's Eyes

Seeing through
the eyes of a child
might be more like
looking through
God's eyes than I
ever thought.



Russell Boersma is pastor at the Christian Reformed Church in Parkersburg, Iowa.

OH, TO BE YOUNG AGAIN.

That's something many of us older folks have thought about or even dreamed of—the excitement of seeing the world through eyes as yet untarnished by the disappointments that tend to make us cynical as age takes its toll.

What if we were able to find that delight in life again? How could we return to finding joy in the simple things that astonish little children?

Perhaps it starts with our perspective on what God has made. Earlier this month, we received a picture of our grandchildren showing off some special headgear their mother had made from flowers that grew in their yard. These, our granddaughter Charlotte said, were sunflowers! I recognized them as dandelions and would have called them weeds. Dandelions are not something I find delight in—but to Charlotte, they were beautiful.


What makes adults delight in some flowers and not others? It is all about our perspective. If we want to experience a child's delight in life, could it be that we need to cultivate minds that are open to receiving beauty in all its forms? How delightful life would be if we could look through childlike eyes not yet been tarnished by the ongoing effects of humanity's fall into sin! Ever since the fall, our hearts have been hardened in a way that prevents us from truly seeing God's great creation.

I think this is what Jesus was referring to when he defended the children who were coming to him. In both Matthew 19 and Mark 10, Jesus found the children to be much closer to heaven than the wise or learned adults. If we fail to see the world through the eyes of a



little child, what are we missing? Are we closing our eyes to the beauty God sees when he looks at the creation he has made?

If we are open to seeing the world through the eyes of a child, then we will not be darkened by the hate or prejudice so prevalent in the world today. We will be able to see the love God showers on all people. How many times have we failed to note the God-given redeeming qualities of our neighbor? Perhaps it's time for us to see "sunflowers" instead of weeds when looking at others so we can love them as God loves us.

Imagine what joy can be ours if we reset our perspective so we can see the beauty all around us! Looking through eyes of love and not suspicion would be a good place to start. This can be quite a challenge. Our points of view have taken a long time to develop. I know I have room for improvement—I still try to keep dandelion "sunflowers" out of my yard. But if I really try, I might begin to see things in a new light. Seeing through the eyes of a child might be more like looking through God's eyes than I ever thought. 

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