

BANNER

JULY/AUGUST 2019

THEBANNER.ORG

SYNOD 2019



A Bible for Those Who Can't Read



The Solar Talking Bible

- Easy to use
- Powerful speaker
- Solar powered

**DONATIONS FROM CANADA
ARE NOW TAX-DEDUCTIBLE
THROUGH OUR WEBSITE!**



Enhancing Trust



"Accredited for
special offerings"

Ethiopia: Opse Bdane first believed in Christ after hearing the Gospel on television. Soon after, she moved to a small village and joined the local church. She received a Talking Bible and began to listen. She shared it with her husband and children and they also became believers.

Since she cannot read, she listens to the Talking Bible as often as she can. She says she has come to love Jesus by listening to God's Word. She also wants to draw others to Christ. Her bright smile lights up the room as she says, "I am hoping and believing many will come to Christ through listening to God's Word." Her love and enthusiasm are contagious!

Will you help us place Talking Bibles into the hands and hearts of non-readers who need to hear God's Word? Your gift will allow new believers like Opse share God's love and teachings with those around them. What an incredible blessing! Give today at www.talkingbibles.org or text "Bibles" to 41444.

www.talkingbibles.org

Talking Bibles International • 419 East Grand Avenue, Escondido, CA 92025 • Telephone: 855-55-BIBLE (855-552-4253) or 760-745-8105



Timeless Gospel Message . . . Today's Media

In 1939, the Christian Reformed Church began sharing the Gospel through radio—using our world's most widely-used technology to tell God's story.

Now 80 years later, although the media has changed, the message hasn't.

BackToGod.net/80th



CHURCH PLANTING. CHURCH GROWING.

Resonate's church plants are on the front lines of bringing and being the gospel of Jesus Christ in their communities. As a supportive partner, we equip and encourage leaders, and we come alongside new churches with resources that will bring health and sustainability.

Are you interested in learning more about becoming a church planter or supporting a church plant? We can help. Speak with Resonate's regional team in your area to talk about initial steps and potential opportunities.

resonateglobalmission.org/starting

[RESONATEGLOBALMISSION.ORG](https://resonateglobalmission.org)

 A Ministry of the Christian Reformed Church

Resonate[™]
GLOBAL MISSION 

BREAKING BARRIERS

everybody belongs ■ everybody serves



 Martha Schreiber (left) and Mathea

A Gift from God

by **Martha Schreiber**

Fellowship CRC, Etobicoke ON

My youngest daughter was due on my 45th birthday. My husband picked out her name—Mathea, meaning “gift of God.” Although she was given a diagnosis of Down syndrome within minutes of her birth, it seemed an appropriate name. Perhaps my husband gave the wisest words in the hours after her birth: “Enjoy her as a baby because she is a beautiful baby.” And despite tears shed at her diagnosis, we did enjoy her as a baby. She displayed everything to love about babies: she was tiny, cute, content, loved to be held and cuddled. Yesterday, as I am writing this, she turned 12.

For me, my youngest daughter embodies the Disability Concerns motto: “Everybody belongs, everybody serves.” Mathea has a wonderful sense of belonging. She doesn’t question it; she just accepts that she belongs in her family, in her church, and thankfully, in her school. In our family, she considers herself an equal to her two older

sisters and knows her place within the extended family. On Sundays she loves to go to “our church,” as she says.

As for serving, I can see that, at the age of 12, Mathea has the gift of prayer and the gift of worship. Mathea loves to lead in mealtime prayers. Her older sisters may roll their eyes at her long prayers, and I am reminded of my late grandfather’s long mealtime prayers. Mathea will pray for everything that’s important to her, even remembering people in our church we have been praying for.

Mathea loves our church and the worship service. She loves to sing and has never complained about boring sermons. All three of our daughters are gifted in music. Although not as musically gifted as her sisters, Mathea loves to stand beside the worship leaders and either conduct the congregation in singing, play air cello or flute, or sing (or hum) her heart out. When the offering is received, she has to put an offering into the plate. Once when her father forgot to pass her the offering, I had to take her to the back of the church to catch up with the deacons, so she could add her offering.

Recently she came home from a GEMS sleepover with a spontaneous testimony, “I’m happy to believe in God.” Many people have commented to us what a blessing she is—a true gift from God.

More online

Thanks for reading this excerpt from the summer 2019 *Breaking Barriers*. This newsletter and the Disability Concerns blog (network.crcna.org/disability), co-published by CRC and Reformed Church in America Disability Concerns ministries, received a first-place award for the newsletter and second-place award for the blog this year from the Associated Church Press.

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

BANNER

WHAT'S ONLINE

Looking for more? Here are just a few of the stories you'll find online at *TheBanner.org*. (Try typing the headlines into the search box.)

- » *Breakthrough* is a movie about miracles that doesn't just preach to the choir.
- » Natasha Owens offers plenty of hope in an upbeat style with her third full-length album, *Warrior*.
- » *Hello Lighthouse* is a treat of a children's book sure to be loved by all ages.
- » News: Ontario Church Celebrates 20 Years of Clothing Ministry
- » News: Conference on Youth and Mental Health Encourages "Walking Alongside"
- » As I Was Saying: Remembering Rachel Held Evans
- » As I Was Saying: It's Time for Christians to Confront White Supremacy in Our Churches



SYNOD 2019

Couldn't be there this year? Our special theme issue is the next-best thing. On pages 16-39 you'll find your synod roundup: highlights, in-depth stories, analysis, people, and more!

FEATURES



From the Margins to the Margins: African Americans in the Reformed Tradition

Eric Washington // For centuries, African Americans have served the church by speaking truth to power.



The Christian Religion and Civil Religion

James D. Bratt // Our first loyalty is to seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness.



Cover: Times are certainly changing, even for the Christian Reformed Church, as these two synod photos attest: The top one is at Synod 1938, in the library of Calvin College at its previous Fulton Street campus. The bottom is at Synod 2019 in the Covenant Fine Arts Center at the college's current East Beltline campus.

NEWS

16 Overview of Synod 2019: Times Have Changed

22 Synod 2019 Opens Ministry Share System

26 Let's Talk About Sex, Synod

COLUMNS

9 Editorial: Stronger Discipleship

Shiao Chong // To fight kinism, we need to focus on better discipleship

12 The Other 6: Of Cars and Geese

Joel Kiekintveld // To know one's tradition is to know one's history.

15 Cross Examination: How Do I Respond to People Who Think God Is Irrelevant?

Todd Statham // Our experience of life is inconceivable without God.

43 Candidates 2019: Anonymous?

David Koll // Meet this year's candidates for Minister of the Word. For the first time, some are anonymous.

47 Discover: Swimming in Swamps

Christin Baker // A swamp might not be the best place to take a dip!

48 Mixed Media: The Transportive Power of Audiobooks

Lorilee Craker // Could audiobooks be the ultimate family bonding agent?

63 Still: By His Wounds

Luke Carrig // The pain of Jesus can cut to the heart of those hurting the most.

Correction

The news story "New Leader for Faith Formation Ministries" (June 2018) misnamed a funding institution. Lilly Endowment Inc. provided the grant for the project to which Syd Hielema is moving.

OUR SHARED MINISTRY

Editor Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



A New Normal of Bivocational Ministry

Cassie Westrate // Pastors who work a second job share the struggles and blessings.

54 The View from Here: Becoming a Denomination of Support for Bivocational Pastors

Steven Timmermans // Their job is not as simple as dividing their work in two.

BANNER

The Banner is the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church

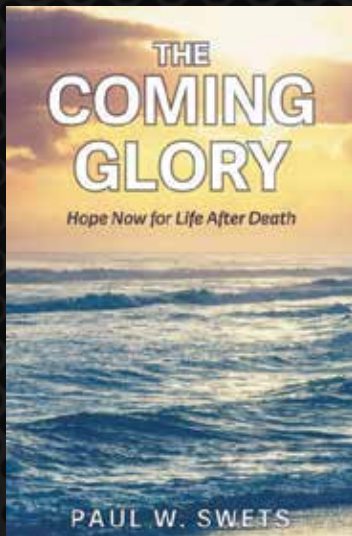
Editor Shiao Chong
Associate Editor Sarah Delia Heth
News Editors Alissa Vernon, Gayla R. Postma
Mixed Media Editor Lorilee Craker
Art Director Dean R. Heetderks
Designer Pete Euwema

Contact Us 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407 info@TheBanner.org
Address Changes and Subscriptions 800-777-7270 or visit TheBanner.org
Classified Advertising 616-224-0725 classifieds@TheBanner.org
Display Advertising 616-224-5882 ads@TheBanner.org
Editorial 616-224-0824 editorial@TheBanner.org
News news@TheBanner.org

Published monthly (except August). Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Mich. Postmaster, send address changes to: *The Banner*, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407. Canadian publications mail agreement #40063614. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: *The Banner*, 3475 Mainway, PO Box 5070, STN LCD 1, Burlington ON L7R 3Y8. Copyright 2019, Christian Reformed Church in North America. Printed in U.S.A. *The Banner* (ISSN0005-5557). Vol. 154, No. 7, 2019.

Member of Associated Church Press and Evangelical Press Association.

Hope Now for Life after Death



"From years of pastoral work, Swets offers a compelling taste of Christian hope accessible to a very broad audience."

Dr. J. Todd Billings,
Author, *Rejoicing in Lament: Wrestling with Incurable Cancer and Life in Christ*

"Having lost my spouse, I turned to sources of comfort... I found answers in The Coming Glory."

Dr. Roger Rice
Emeritus Professor of Sociology, Calvin College

"Tremendously inspiring!"

Rev. Dr. John Tien
Retired Pastor

CROSSLINK
PUBLISHING

Order at TheComingGlory.com

Hey Worship Leaders!

Did you know there is a place to connect with other CRC worship planners? A place to share resources, ask questions, and find encouragement? Look no further than **The Network** (crcna.org/network).

You'll find a vibrant community with an entire section dedicated to all things Worship!

Get involved today! After all, ministry is more fun together.

Visit crcna.org/network

network

Think you can change
the world with words?

We do.

CHANGE can be big, like bestseller big. Or it can be small, like 140 characters small. It's about what you choose to do on the one hand, and who you are on the other. We are more than our jobs, and God has a calling for each of us, wherever we go.

That changes everything.

Starting with you.

redeemer.ca



REDEEMER
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

A degree you can believe in.

Stronger Discipleship

Rather than simply deterring people from kinism with external punishment, we need Christians who are spiritually inoculated against such heresies.



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

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

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

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

SYNOD 2019 DECLARED the teachings of kinism as heresy. Kinism teaches that God requires racial separation in all areas of societal life and hence forbids interracial marriage, and even transracial adoption. It is essentially Apartheid 2.0. A former CRC pastor espoused it and took his congregation with him in leaving the denomination. Delegates at synod cautioned that this is not an isolated incident but even a common sentiment among some CRC churches.

This issue with kinism is personal for me, as I am Chinese ethnically, and my lovely wife, Martha, is Dutch ethnically. According to kinism, our marriage is contrary to God's will. What, therefore, does that make our three daughters? You will forgive me if kinism makes me bristle.

Ironically, it was through God's providence that I met my wife in the first place. Born in Malaysia, I only ended up as a foreign student in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, because every other university—in Malaysia and abroad—rejected my application for admission. God closed every door except one. And it was in Edmonton that I met Martha through the CRC campus chaplaincy. And if it wasn't for Martha, I probably would not have stayed in Canada. And I wouldn't be writing this today as the editor of *The Banner*.

I could also point to the fact that God chose to include Rahab and Ruth, both non-Jews, as part of Christ's lineage, as the gospel of Matthew take pains to point out (Matt. 1:5). Jesus was not a "pure-blood" Jew.

I am, therefore, relieved synod declared kinism a heresy. But the questions remain, how could such a theology gain a foothold in the CRC in the first

place? How could a pastor who holds to the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort still fall prey to such heresy? This is why I also appreciate synod's call for better education and instruction of church leaders and lay members on kinism's errors. We need to prevent this from happening again.

Some at synod think stronger discipline on office bearers is the key. I worry that emphasizing discipline, though necessary, inadvertently shifts the focus to compliance or performance rather than inner transformation.

Even the Abuse of Power Task Force, whose recommendations synod adopted, recognizes that creating a mutually respectful culture is as important in the long term in preventing abuse as stronger accountability mechanisms. Rather than simply deterring people from kinism with external punishment, we need Christians who are spiritually inoculated against such heresies. Expertise in our three confessions failed to inoculate a CRC pastor against kinism, just as they failed to inoculate Afrikaner Reformed Christians from apartheid. I think we need to utilize the Belhar Confession, now a contemporary testimony in the CRC, more in our worship and discipleship. The Belhar, born out of a struggle against apartheid, with its themes of unity, justice, and reconciliation, should be a greater part of our corporate discipleship. Stronger discipleship, rather than simply stronger discipline, is a greater key to prevention. **B**

If you missed our annual appeal letter in your mailbox, please use the enclosed envelope. Or give online at TheBanner.org/Donate. Thank you!

SUPPORT THE BANNER

From the Margins to the Margins

African Americans in the Reformed Tradition

Eric M. Washington

Born in or around 1753, a little girl in the region of Senegambia in West Africa was captured and enslaved. She survived the torturous journey to America on a slave ship and was sold to a British American living in Boston named John Wheatley. Wheatley and his wife, Susanna, named this little girl Phillis, the name of the ship that had carried her to North America. The Wheatleys were members of a Congregational church. Their daughter Mary taught Phillis about the Christian faith as well as lessons in Latin, Greek, and English literature. Phillis Wheatley had an emerging talent for writing poetry and was the first Afro-British woman to have her writing published, beginning in 1767, the year of her baptism at Old South Church. She wrote scores of poems on numerous subjects, including race and slavery. In one poem from her 1773 collection *On Being Brought from Africa to America*, Wheatley wrote about God's providence and God's electing mercy and grace, particularly toward an African person:

'Twas Mercy brought me from my
Pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to
understand
That there's a God, that there's a
Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither
sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with
scornful eye,
"Their color is a diabolic die."



Remember, *Christians, Negros,*
black as *Cain,*
May be refin'd, and join th'
angelic train.

Well aware that racism undergirded the entire American slave system, Wheatley's poems combated the explicit racism directed against all Africans during the 18th century. For Wheatley, Africans, or "Negros," as she termed them, were recipients of saving grace as much as their British-American counterparts were. As a Reformed Puritan, Wheatley used her intelligence and talent to draw attention to the injustice of race-based slavery and to African equality in the sight of a merciful God.

European colonialists—Puritans in New England and Dutch Reformed people in New York and New Jersey—brought Reformed traditions to North America during the 17th century. As Congregational and Reformed churches dotted the landscape in colonial America, English slave traders dropped off their cargoes of enslaved

Africans. Over time, enslaved Africans became baptized members of these churches and became part of the covenant community. As early as the 1660s, Dutch Reformed congregations in America included enslaved Africans. Their Puritan neighbors in New England were sure to include their enslaved persons in family devotions and, in their churches, in catechesis and baptism. From this context of slavery, African-American

voices emerged within the Reformed tradition.

The most prominent African-American Presbyterian during the 19th century was arguably Henry Highland Garnet, born into slavery in New Market, Md, on Dec. 23, 1815.

In 1824, Garnet's family escaped from slavery, eventually settling in New York City. Educated in African schools in New York City, Garnet entered the Presbyterian Oneida Theological Institute to study theology and classics in 1836. After graduating in 1840, Garnet moved to Troy, N.Y., where he became an elder of the newly founded African American Presbyterian Church. He then studied under African-American ministers who were members of the Presbytery of Troy and became a licensed preacher in 1842. The following year, Garnet received his ordination and a call to the pastorate of Liberty Street Presbyterian Church in Troy. In his famous 1843 "Address to Slaves," a speech he gave in Buffalo, N.Y., directed to an imaginary audience of enslaved persons, Garnet

From this
context of
slavery emerged
African-American
voices within
the Reformed
tradition.

encouraged enslaved people to overthrow slavery with the words “Let your motto be Resistance!”

Few people realize that one of the most prominent late-19th-century civil rights advocates and organizers of African-American women served in a Presbyterian church in Chicago. Ida B. Wells-Barnett was a member of Sixth Presbyterian Church (now Sixth-Grace Presbyterian Church) and taught Sunday school. Wells-Barnett was born an enslaved girl in 1862 in Holly Springs, Miss. After emancipation, she would eventually earn her degree from Fisk University in Nashville. Wells-Barnett is noted for her groundbreaking journalism exposing incidents of lynching in the South. In her 1892 book *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, Wells-Barnett argued that white men lynched African Americans for fear of African-American economic progress, not in defense of white women’s honor and purity as they claimed. Sometime in the 1890s, Wells-Barnett joined Sixth Presbyterian, an all-African-American church founded in 1888 in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago. There her Sunday school class with young men eventually blossomed into the Negro Fellowship League. She also founded the Frederick Douglass Center, a literary society. With Wells-Barnett’s service, Sixth Presbyterian became a community hub lifting up members of the African-American community.

In 1951 Eugene Callender, who possessed the spirit of Henry Garnet’s Reformed theology, became the first African-American pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. Born in Cambridge, Mass., in 1926, Callender was the first African-American student to attend Westminster

Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in 1947. In Philadelphia, Callender experienced discrimination at a downtown restaurant that refused to serve him. He told fellow student Lewis Smedes of the incident. What followed was the mobilization of the entire student body and faculty in protest of that restaurant.

Upon graduating in 1950, Callender connected with Peter Eldersveld, longtime host of the CRC’s evangelistic radio program *The Back to God Hour*, when Eldersveld spoke at Westminster’s commencement. Eldersveld hired Callender to contact African Americans in New York City who were avid listeners of the program. Before long, Callender’s mission resulted in a church plant in Harlem in 1951, which became the Mid-Harlem Community Parish. In 1959, Callender accepted the call to Church of the Master (Presbyterian Church (USA)). During his longtime ministry there, Callender established “street academies” that educated African-American and Latinx high school dropouts. In addition, Callender was active in the civil rights movement, serving as executive president of the New York Urban League for a time. His Reformed witness was directed toward the whole person, with special attention to the African Americans and Latinx people on the margins of New York City.

Today, in a popular Christian podcast called *Truth’s Table*, three Reformed Christian women of African descent approach issues such as colorism, “gender apartheid,” and “misogynoir”—defined in a recent episode as “anti-black misogyny aimed at black women exclusively.” During the course of the podcast, the three women—Christina Edmondson, Michelle Higgins, and Ekemini Uwan—draw attention to how this affects African-American women mentally, emotionally, and personally. The women of *Truth’s Table* unapologetically target African-American women as their primary audience. They are among many African-American Reformed Christians who through their perspective and their application of Reformed theology engage a whole host of topics relevant to African Americans. For African-American Reformed Christians, this has also been a service to the whole church.

The tradition within Reformed and Presbyterian churches has always been to engage with dominant theologies and historical narratives, speaking truth to power. From Phillis Wheatley to Eugene Callender to the women of *Truth’s Table*, African-American Reformed Christians have done so, ministering from the margins to the margins. B



Eric Michael Washington is associate professor of history and director of the African and African Diaspora Studies program at Calvin College. His research interests are African-American missions in Africa and the intersection of postcolonial African literature and history.

Of Cars and Geese

This is a new tradition for me, tossed into the backpack with the old tradition of my youth to form a new set of tools for my journey.



Joel Kiekintveld lives in Anchorage, Alaska. He is the teaching pastor of Crosspoint Community Church, the hub director of the Anchorage Urban Training Collaborative, and a doctoral student at the University of Pretoria.

In September 2018, 10 church planters and missional leaders from around North America gathered at the Abbey of Genesee near Rochester, N.Y., for a spiritual retreat that included 36 hours of silence. This article is based on journal entries written during those hours.

I'VE HAD THE WINDOW IN MY ROOM open for most of the last day. I opened it to let in the fresh air, but it has also brought in sounds from outside. One sound in particular has me thinking of the past while another has me thinking of the future.

The first sound, a car on a country road, is initially like nothing more than a gentle breeze blowing through the leaves. Yet it eventually builds to a cascade of sound as the car passes close by before fading off again until it is almost imperceptible, finally vanishing. This sound is the sound of my youth, and this location—a farmhouse in a cluster of trees surrounded by corn, wheat, and soybean fields—is much like my boyhood home in Graafschap, Mich.

The second sound is always in the distance, though sometimes deafeningly close like the passing cars. Geese are flying south, honking as they go. While the monks sing in a measured, harmonious, almost still way as they break from their work five times a day for services, the geese, in contrast, sing their song in an unruly, random, chaotic monotone, keeping their chorus even as they are in constant motion.

These two sounds bring to mind something I once heard Douglas John Hall say: "Know your tradition, and know what time it is."

I grew up in the country playing in the fields, lifting my eyes up to the hill

where our church stood with a white steeple and a rooster fixed on top. My life was those fields, that land, those hymns, those people. I learned my basic faith like the cars passing by on country roads: a little at a distance, then building to a roar. This way of learning continued throughout my overly self-righteous high school years and my zealous college period.

Then I moved from the country to the wilderness city of Anchorage, Ala., a place that, like the whirl of colors in the Superman ice cream I licked as a child, swirls the city and the country into one thing. It was there my work as a pastor began, and I morphed from a creative youth pastor to a young man carried by a dream of a drop-in center to the man I am now, being pulled more and more into the city, theology, and academics. Looking back, those years on the floor of that drop-in center and with the youth gathered there were the ones that shaped me most—and those same years behind the office doors were the ones that broke me.

My tradition—my faith—first learned on country roads and eventually in Bible college . . . it stopped working. Or maybe I stopped working. Maybe that faith was never meant to work in the reality of serving youth with deep needs or in an urban wilderness. My hunch is that this is a natural progression—something like software needing to be updated.

Last night, I shared my thoughts on and experiences with the liturgy with the others on this spiritual retreat. I contrasted the monks' liturgy with the more familiar liturgies of my tradition. The monks' liturgy, which has lasted 1,600 years, is the daily cadence of their lives. In fact, the psalm-singing



is so ingrained that most monks seem to have all the psalms memorized. Yet in my experience with liturgy, there is usually a “new” order of worship for each week’s service, which seems to all but vanish by Monday morning only to be dreamed and planned back into existence for the next week’s use (and refuse). Did the faith I was taught need to be updated after a time? Maybe my experience was not a failure of faith but what the Franciscans would call the “primacy of Christ”: whatever Christ went through, his followers must also go through. Or perhaps, as René Girard teaches, it is the “scandal [that] must come” (an inner or outer rivalry between two things rooted in the fact that we mimic the desires of those around us). These new voices from these other traditions have augmented and reshaped my adult faith.

Those teachings (along with youth telling me things like “God is like a song on the radio” or asking “You’re my clergy, right?”) formed in me a deep faith. This is a theology not learned on the hill in the white-steeped church, but caught on the streets of the trailer park and inside the teen center while living in the shadow of the Chugach Mountains, a theology carried to me—taught to me—by those who walk on other city streets. This is a new tradition for me, tossed into the backpack with the old tradition of my youth to

form a new set of tools for my journey. The old tradition is now like a car passing by, fading into a distant, still, small voice; the new tradition is a roaring whirl of tires on gravel and a rush of wind.

To know one’s tradition is to know one’s history.

I hear the geese again, heading this way. The geese know what time it is. After northern summers they know fall has arrived and now head south. They are autumn’s sons of Issachar—they know the times and what they are to do. They know it is fall, time to move on and time to honk as they fly marathon distances to the south.


Their honking seems to ask me if I know what time it is. Recently, I have been tempted to say that it is time to quit—to no longer earn my keep as a pastor, a service provider, and a leader. I wonder if the many titles I hold dear (or that have been affixed to me by others), all of which give me some fleeting sense of identity, need to be removed. I have been tempted, like a friend of mine, to “get quiet.” But like these southbound geese, now overheard overhead, I do know it is time for a change of season.

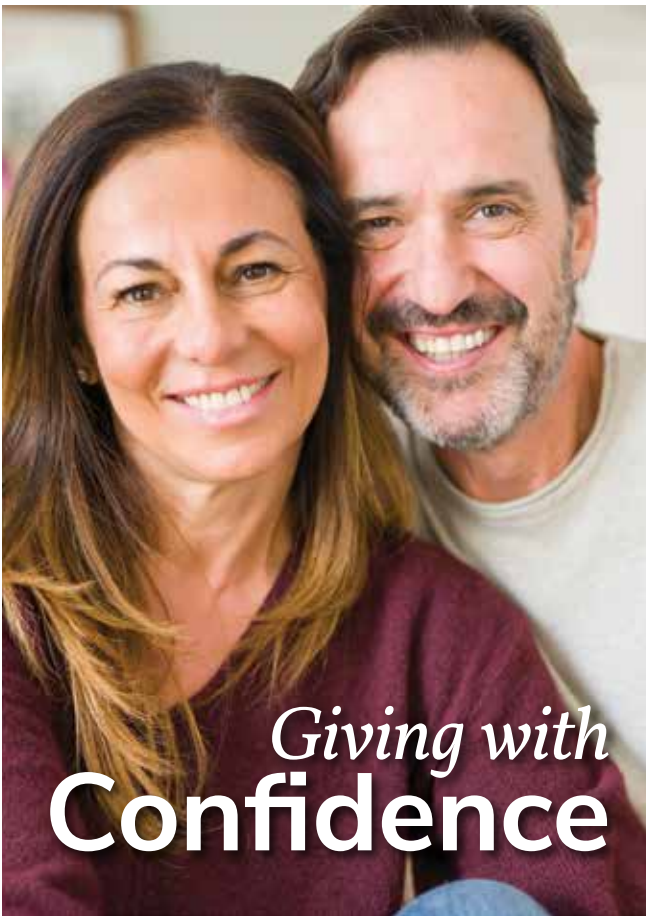
As I write, a song plays in my head. Unlike the saint’s song I woke to today, “Make Me a Channel of Your Peace,” this song is from someone few would think of as a saint:

It’s time to move on,
it’s time to get going
What lies ahead
I have no way of knowing
But under my feet, baby,
the grass is growing
It’s time to move on,
it’s time to get going.

—Tom Petty, *Time To Move On*

On the way back from the vespers service tonight I saw a flock of geese like Ruth of old, following the gleaners, pecking at dropped corn kernels in a field freshly harvested. Seeing those geese reminded me of the Celtic Christians who use a wild goose as an image for the Holy Spirit.

It seems I wasn’t visited just by geese today. There was another Visitor who came almost imperceptibly, prompting me from the past and prodding me into the future. 



Giving with Confidence

Confidently support your local church and other ministries in ways that increase your Kingdom impact.

- » Give a gift in your will
- » Reduce your taxes by giving non-cash assets (stock, real estate, etc.)
- » Give a gift that pays you income for life
- » Designate funding for special projects or future ministry opportunities



LEARN HOW

Call 888.448.3040 or email info@BarnabasFoundation.com.

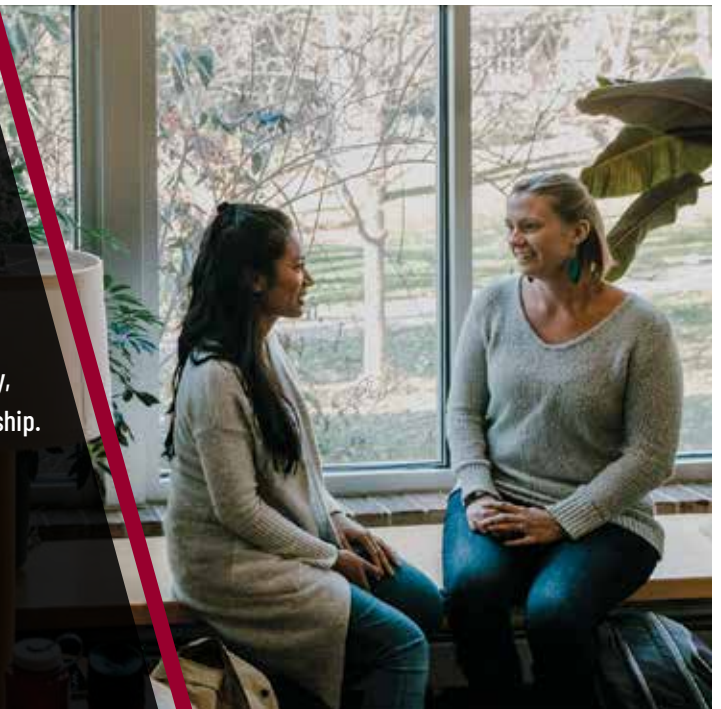
Your ministry is in motion.

This degree can keep up

If you're sensing God's call to grow and form you in ministry, consider a specialized and practical MA in Ministry Leadership.

CONCENTRATIONS

- Education, Youth, and Family
- Missional Leadership
- Pastoral Care
- Pastoral Leadership
- Worship



Now available fully online
calvinseminary.edu/ma



CALVIN
 THEOLOGICAL
 SEMINARY

Grand Rapids, Michigan

How Do I Respond to People Who Think God Is Irrelevant?

By sharing our personal experience of God's relevance, we can challenge others' attitudes and stimulate their imaginations.



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

A FEW YEARS AGO I was teaching part time in the theology department of a small German university. Germany is a deeply secular nation in many ways; the students I taught—all of whom were baptized Lutheran or Reformed members of the *Landeskirche* (state church)—were often patronizing toward Christianity. Most were studying theology as a purely academic interest and were sure that neither God nor the church were of much relevance today. As a practical assignment, I had students visit one of the hundred immigrant congregations that have popped up in the bustling city of Hamburg over the past decade. These congregations are often African, thoroughly charismatic, and definitely not part of the *Landeskirche*. I was fascinated by the students' impressions. It wasn't just the energetic drumming and the evangelistic zeal of the sermons that struck them; it was that the worshipers were so obviously convinced of God's reality and God's relevance to their lives. One student in particular, I recall, was visibly shaken. She had never before encountered people for whom daily life was unthinkable apart from God.

How do we respond to people who think God is irrelevant to life?

In the United States and Canada, church attendance is declining and Christian cultural influence waning. But this isn't the case globally, where religion is alive and well and Christianity in particular is vibrant and vital. People from every culture and nation on earth are experiencing God as real and relevant, the power that helps us face life's challenges and the truth that calls us to live with integrity and love. I respond to the person who thinks God is irrelevant by insisting on God's genuine relevance to everyone else in the world apart from that person. Obviously, this isn't meant to mock them; it's a tongue-in-cheek

challenge to their assumption that feeling God's absence is "normal." It's not! Perhaps it gets the person thinking along the lines of the student in my class: "If so many others find God relevant, why don't I?"

True, to admit that God is relevant for others doesn't necessarily show God is relevant to *my* life. How could we respond at this point?

As Christians, our experience of life is inconceivable without God. What older Reformed theology called a life *coram deo* (before God's face) is winsomely described in the contemporary testimony *Our World Belongs to God*: "God is with us in our world, holding all things in tender embrace and bending them to his purpose. The confidence that the Lord is faithful gives meaning to our days and hope to our years. The future is secure, for our world belongs to God" (12).

We know further that even people who don't acknowledge God still live and move and have their being in God (Acts 17:28). So the problem is not that God isn't relevant to these people; it's that God doesn't *feel* relevant.

Perhaps the best way to respond to people who feel this way is not with an apology or argument but with a testimony of how we've personally experienced God as relevant. When have you sensed God's goodness in your life or felt God's guiding hand at a critical moment? Where have you been stirred by God's love or troubled by God's justice? By sharing our personal experience of God's relevance, we can challenge others' attitudes and stimulate their imaginations to see and feel what life is like when it's experienced *coram deo* as it is for millions and millions of people in our world. Perhaps then they will even consider some reasons we might offer for why belief in God matters. **B**

Times Have Changed

SYNOD 2019 NEWS

Brought to you by

Reporters: Roxanne Van Farowe,
Clay Libolt, and
Alissa Vernon

Editors: Gayla Postma,
Sarah Heth, Shiao Chong

Photographer:
Karen Huttenga

Designers: Pete Euwema,
Dean Heetderks

Follow *The Banner* on social media:

- » Facebook.com/crcbanner
- » Twitter @crcbanner, #crcbanner

Got a news tip?

Visit TheBanner.org/News and use the "Got a News Tip" link. Or contact the news editor at news@TheBanner.org.

“

The IT staff were introduced, and those with technical difficulties were asked to raise their hand. First hand up was CRC executive director Steve Timmermans.

”

Times have changed in the Christian Reformed Church, and that was very much on display at Synod 2019, the annual leadership meeting of the CRC.

From training up future leaders, to abuse awareness, to second Sunday services, the denomination has changed dramatically in the past couple of generations.

And it is prepared for more change, turning the current ministry share system on its head.

Synod 2019 wasn't willing, however, to mess with some traditions, such as the operations of synod itself.

And over all of this hangs the angst, the fear of what may be ahead when the full report on human sexuality comes to Synod 2021.

A New Way for Ministry Support

The biggest break from the past made by Synod 2019 was the upending of the ministry shares system. For generations, members of CRC congregations have contributed to the support of shared denominational ministries based on what was requested after the administration created the mission budget. (p. 22)

Starting in 2021, congregations will instead be asked to pledge, with their classis (region), the amount they will send to support the shared ministries, and the budget will be based on that.

No More Denial

Twenty-five years ago, the CRC first established its Safe Church Ministry (then called the Office of Abuse Prevention). At the time, many believed abuse didn't happen in *our* churches. That denial has all but disappeared. Synod 2019 took bold steps to recognize and prevent the abuse of power that still happens too often. (p. 18)

Acknowledgement of that abuse became visible during a service of lament. Those present were welcomed to bear witness to stories of abuse they themselves carry or



Greg Janke, regarding ecclesiastical marriage vs. state marriage: "There are situations in which a state marriage might not be possible, such as if couples do not have birth certificates from their home countries."

stories they know of by placing stones in a pile. About two-thirds of those there came forward and placed a stone. (p. 18)

Not all change was dramatic. After a lot of discussion, delegates agreed to change the Church Order (the rules that govern the denomination), dropping the requirement to hold a second service each Sunday. In the words of one delegate, "that train has left the station."

Changing Face of Leadership

Synod 2019 adopted changes to the Church Order regarding commissioned pastors. It also adopted changes regarding pastors entering from outside the CRC, and seminarians trained outside Calvin Theological Seminary. (p. 28)

As Clay Libolt explains, these changes and others are happening so slowly and incrementally, they might not even be noticed for a while, but the face of leadership in the CRC is definitely changing. And more change is ahead as the CRC studies

a growing trend of pastors in bivocational ministry. (p. 29)

Speaking of incremental change, deacons are finding their stride at synod. This was only the fourth year of having deacon delegates and some deacons told *The Banner's* Alissa Vernon they were enjoying it and learning a lot about the bigger denominational picture. It can be difficult for classes to find deacons willing and available to be delegated. Nine delegations this year (out of 48) were missing a deacon. But Nathan Vos, a deacon from northern Alberta, said, "If you're asked and have those gifts, you should take that seriously." (p. 30)

There were fewer church planters than deacons delegated to Synod 2019. But not too many church planters come to synod because, as one of them told *The Banner's* Roxanne Van Farowe, "church planting is rogue by (its) nature." (p. 27)

Don't Change Too Much!

Delegates to Synod 2019 decided not to mess with much about how synod itself functions, accepting some but not nearly all the changes recommended by the committee that studied it. (pp. 24-25) Delegates agreed that having on-site mentors and guides, better orientation for everyone, and a parliamentarian would be good, especially to avoid the tangle of synodical procedures that can sometimes bog down and even derail discussions. They reluctantly agreed to limit the length of speeches to three minutes, even though the length of speeches is the top complaint of delegates following each synod.

But they refused to cede any control over who they could send to synod. Delegates were quite firm on not requiring delegations to have a female or a person of an ethnic minority included, though it is encouraged. And they didn't want to elect officers at the end of the synod who would preside over the following year's

synod, which would require the classis of those officers to delegate them.

Trying to Get It Right

Synods past and present prefer to get things done decently and in good order. When in doubt, ask for a study!

This year, synod asked the Council of Delegates to look at historical decisions of synod for the rationale behind "decisions dealing with political and/or justice matters" and how they were ruled to be properly before synod as "ecclesiastical matters." (p. 27)

Delegates wasted no time in declaring kinism a heresy, "a grievous deviation from sound doctrine." (p. 21) But they wanted a firmer definition of heresy, so the Council will assign someone to study the meaning and application of the word "heresy" in church pronouncements.

And Synod 2019 wants to get it right when two people want to be married in the eyes of the church but can't necessarily get married in the eyes of the state. So that is also being studied. (p. 31)

Trouble Ahead?

Even as delegates in 2019 strove to work together, to pray together, and to honor each other's differences, there was an undercurrent of anxiety as Synod 2021 approaches. That is the synod that will receive the final report of Committee to Articulate a Foundation-Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

Synod 2019 received the interim report, which previews direction in which the committee is headed. (p. 26) Already, groups advocating for the full participation of LGBTQ members of the church are publishing blogs and articles putting forth their views. And when Council of Delegates chair Paul De Vries gave a group of LGBTQ advocates a chance to give feedback, commenters on *The Banner* website and elsewhere decried the move as synod activism. (p. 26) The

committee is seeking feedback from anyone interested in giving it. (humansexualitycommittee@crcna.org)

Many denominations have discussed homosexuality and many have divided over the issue. But now it is getting closer to home. The Reformed Church in America is the CRC's closest ecumenical relative. That denomination is exploring whether to stay together, reorganize, or divide. Its ecumenical officer told *The Banner* that delegates at the recent RCA



Photos by Tracey De Weerd

An undercurrent of anxiety is present as the CRC nears Synod 2021 and the discussion of human sexuality.

synod were leaning toward that third option. (p. 33)

In reflecting on Synod 2019, synod president William Koopmans noted the struggle in the RCA. "I fear that conversation lies in our future as well," he said.

As the CRC goes through changes over time, and as it faces uncertainty in the future, it is still held by God. As Koopmans told delegates in the closing worship service: "God is holding you with a grip that will never let go. Pour your heart out to him, live in that grip."

— Gayla R. Postma

Synod 2019 Laments Abuse of Power



Participants in a liturgy of lament were welcomed to place stones in a pile, bearing witness to the stories of abuse they carry or know of.

After Synod 2019 mandated an implementation committee and a guardian team—each with several significant steps to seek out, end, and prevent instances of abuse of power—synod paused and grieved together in worship.

Hearing and reading from a litany written by Sharon Fennema, delegates and gathered visitors lamented together the breaching of relationships and the abuse of sacred trust and the failure to hear, believe, and take action in response to reports of abuse.

“In the Old Testament stones were used by Jacob, Joshua, and Samuel to serve as witnesses and a physical testimony to both what has happened in the past but also to reaffirm their reliance and faith in the sovereign Lord,” said Rev. Carel Geleynse. Those present were welcomed to bear witness to stories of abuse they themselves carry or stories they know of by placing stones in a pile. Almost two-thirds of those present came forward and placed a stone.

— Alissa Vernon

Synod Takes Steps to See, End, and Prevent Abuse of Power

Synod 2019 moved ahead on stronger requirements to address abuse of power that happens all too often in the church. It accepted the report from the committee addressing the abuse of power, asking the Council of Delegates to form a committee to implement many of the recommendations. (The Council of Delegates acts in between synod’s annual meeting.)

The implementation will include creating training on recognizing abuse of power for pastors, creating a code of conduct for employees, and taking steps to prevent abuse in CRCNA offices.



Cary Gephart, Classis Illiana: “We are praying for the day that abuse of power ends in the CRC.”

Furthermore, synod directed the executive director to develop a policy for the minimal use of nondisclosure agreements encouraged classes to provide funds for counseling services to survivors of abuse, and mandated record keeping of reported cases.

Significant Changes

Joel Vande Werken, Classis Atlantic Northeast, said these actions were



Mike Vander Laan, Classis B.C. South-East: “This is urgent. We are dealing with abuse all the time.”

significant and wondered if synod should withhold action on the creation of the additional guardian team.

Mike Vander Laan, Classis B.C. South-East, said, “This is urgent. We are dealing with abuse all the time.” He referenced the Safe Church Ministry report in the *Agenda*, noting that it fielded 700 phone calls from congregations last year.

The draft code of conduct will come to Synod 2020 for consideration.

Training Officebearers

Synod also encouraged all classes to develop a strategy to train officebearers and key church leaders on recognizing abuse of power, and it accepted guidelines for that, asking the executive director “in cooperation with Safe Church Ministry ... and others” to develop a resource toolkit for such training.

Stanley Groothof, Classis Iakota, supported the development of training for officebearers, emphasizing that definitions will need to be clear. “The more clearly we can define and identify (what

constitutes an abuse of power) and be trained in this, the better church leaders will be able to avoid it from happening," he said.

Strengthening Safe Church Ministry

In order to strengthen Safe Church Ministry, synod asked the executive director to oversee a review of the ministry's "policies for follow-up in reported cases that involve church leaders," reporting to the COD to ensure the CRCNA is "exercising due diligence."

Synod also asked that the COD "examine in detail the potential for conflicts of interest in current safe church procedures and to evaluate the need for and benefits of using outside experts to deal with situations that have a high potential for conflicts of interest."

Implementation Committee and Guardian Team

The committee implementing the recommendations will include "members from the offices of Candidacy, Pastor Church Resources, Safe Church Ministry, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin College (because of available expertise)."

Members of the guardian team would be "outside the 'chain of command' within the established organizational and management structure" and would be "accountable through reporting to the Council of Delegates." The guardian team's mandate would include early intervention in response to complaints, conflict resolution, and restorative justice tools.

Resources for Culturally Diverse Churches

Synod asked the executive director "to give high priority" to providing information and policies for abuse prevention and response in various languages and cultural styles appropriate to the minority-population churches in the CRC. José Rayas, Classis Arizona, asked how these things would be made accessible to all the different ministries, especially as new ministries in different cultural contexts arise, and who would bear the cost.

Colin Watson, the CRC's director of ministries and administration, spoke about the networks of minority churches self-formed within the denomination. These would play a role. "We are working within our ministries to ensure we are reaching out and getting input on how effective this strategy is," Watson said.

What's It Going to Cost?

Budget implications for the recommendations were included in the Addressing the Abuse of Power report, totaling about \$60,000. Steve Timmermans, the CRC's executive director said, "We did not budget in anticipation of this. So if we add something, it does beg the question, 'What aren't we going to do?'" That question was left unanswered.

— *Alissa Vernon*

Other Synod Decisions

- » Synod **did not change the status of pastors who left the CRC for United Reformed Churches** to "honorably discharged" because that could only be done through a church order appeal.
- » Synod **did not add the New City Catechism** to the CRC's contemporary testimonies. The catechism was referred to Faith Formations Ministries for review instead.
- » Synod **did not commend the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality** to the classes and churches for reflection and study, saying it was premature prior to the completion of the work of the current synodical Committee to Articulate a Foundation-Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.
- » Synod turned down a request from Classis Hackensack to have an **immigration lawyer kept on retainer** for churches dealing with immigration issues, saying identifying appropriate help in each local context will be better overall.
- » Synod approved a **ministry share of \$346.48** for calendar year 2020.
- » Synod 2020 will take place at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich. **Synod 2021 will take place at Dordt University** in Sioux Center, Iowa.
- » Synod **approved the transfer of two Korean churches** out of Classis Greater Los Angeles into Korean classes (Classis Ko-Am and Classis Hanmi).
- » Synod **established a standing committee for the purpose of reviewing Bible translations** for potential use in the CRC.
- » Synod 2019 created a new classis, **Classis Northern Cascades**, that will include 11 congregations drawn from the northern part of Classis Pacific Northwest.

Studies Requested by Synod 2019

- » A task force to study pastor bivocationality, slated to report to Synod 2021
- » A study of the meaning and application of the word "heresy" in church pronouncements, reporting to Synod 2020
- » A study on "the advisability, legality, and morality of ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriage," reporting to either Synod 2021 or Synod 2022
- » A study of the rationale behind "decisions dealing with political and/or justice matters" and how they were ruled to be properly before synod as "ecclesiastical matters"

— *Banner Staff*

Abuse That Left a Trail of Pain, Anger, Mistrust

No names were named. No communities were identified. But Synod 2019 delegates heard a story of abuse that left a trail of pain, anger, and mistrust in at least three congregations in three different cities. Seated in front of 180 synod delegates, Rev. Carel Geleynse told his story of picking up the pieces left by an abuser. One week after Geleynse became pastor of a Christian Reformed church, it was revealed that the church's previous pastor had sexually abused a minor. The abuse had occurred years before in a different church, but its shadow loomed large over what was now Geleynse's church.

"The initial response was disbelief, denial, and silence," said Geleynse. "In the formal life of the church, things tended to go on as usual... But behind the scenes, comments started to bubble up. Others began to tell stories. Many didn't tell anything until five to seven years later."

Asked about his reactions, Geleynse said, "I had a range of feelings: shock, anger."

In the face of betrayal, "trust takes a big hit," he said. "There was a hesitancy to trust me or any leader. Did my words match my actions? People were not sure, so they watched and watched and watched."

"There was guilt," Geleynse continued. "People said, 'I did nothing about it.' There were questions: Is God safe if his servants aren't trustworthy? The church ought to be a place of refuge."

Geleynse said it was hard work to regain trust. The church council watched and



Rev. Carel Geleynse, left, talks about the trail of pain, anger, and mistrust that follows abuse.

discussed a film about abuse in the church. "The council learned what sacred listening was about. We learned about not letting things go, naming the issue for what it was."

Some church members had pushed for quick forgiveness. "Quick forgiveness can be incredibly cheap," Geleynse said. "Abuse cuts so deep, and its effects are so far-reaching that one cannot simply say forgive and forget. And there are consequences, too."

Also, "without the (CRC's) Safe Church office, we would have floundered," he said.

The church council visited with pastoral and administrative staff members who had come and gone during the previous pastor's tenure.

All the visits culminated in a weekend of restoration, seven years after the original announcement. "We had a joint sacred listening time with a sister congregation that had also experienced abuse." Now, years later, the process of healing continues, according to Geleynse.

Following this compelling interview, delegates held table conversations about their own experiences with abuse of power in the church.

Stories like the one synod heard often can trigger feelings in those who have experienced abuse, according to Bonnie Nicholas, director of the CRC's Safe Church Ministry. For that reason, volunteers were on hand to talk and pray with anyone who needed support. Several people met with the volunteers, who all had experience of working with abuse survivors.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod Declares Kinism a Heresy



Andrew Hanson, Classis California South: "Kinism is the Americanization of apartheid."

Synod 2019 declared kinism a heresy. The decision came as a result of requests from two regional groupings of churches across the continent from each other, one from California and the other from New Jersey.

Kinism teaches that the races should be kept separate in racially pure "religio-ethnic states," supporting white supremacy. A former CRC pastor, now dismissed from the denomination, espouses kinism and did so for many years while he and his church were part of the CRC.

Reggie Smith, director of the denominational Race Relations office, introduced the discussion with a story. Word had come to him that the pastor of a CRC church was teaching kinism. Smith, who is African American, decided to visit the church. He went alone, but, he said, "if I had taken my wife Sharon, who is white, we would have been heretical in the eyes of this pastor." Kinism forbids interracial marriage.

The delegates were unified in their condemnation of kinism. Joel Renkema, Classis Central California, said, "Kinism says that people of color are less than human."

Jacob Boer, Classis Alberta North, said what makes Kinism a heresy is that it distorts the central Christian teaching that all humans are created in the image of God.

Some wondered how kinism could have been tolerated for so long in the CRC. Tyler Wagenmaker asked, "How does a pastor like this not get disciplined?" He presented a motion passed by synod that "councils and classes be admonished to promote confessional fidelity."

The language of the synod declaration on kinism calls it a "twisting" of Reformed teaching.

In condemning kinism, synod wanted a firmer definition of heresy. When is a teaching something one can disagree

with but not condemn the people who hold it? And when does it pass over into the category of heresy? Synod worked with a definition of heresy that defines it as "a grievous deviation from sound doctrine." Synod also requested the COD to study the meaning and application of the word "heresy" in church pronouncements. The COD will report back to Synod 2020.

Coming back to the podium, Smith led a prayer of lament and hope. Synod concluded the discussion of kinism singing a new song based on 1 John 4:20. The song goes, "How can I say that I love the Lord whom I've never, ever seen before, and forget to say that I love the one I walk beside each and every day?"

—Clay Libolt

Prayers for Reconciliation in the Middle East



John Tenyenhuis, Classis Toronto: We must not look away from "a tsunami of human horror."

Asked by East Hills, a congregation in Vernon, B.C., to deepen awareness in the denomination of the plight of the Palestinians and plead their cause to the governments of Canada and the U.S., Synod 2019 took note that the justice ministries of the CRC are already working in various ways to bring reconciliation in the Middle East.

Delegates, particularly those who have traveled to the Middle East, urged the delegates not to look away from Palestine, which John Tenyenhuis, Classis Toronto, called "a tsunami of human horror."

Theo Beels, Classis Grand Rapids North, said when he got to the Middle East, the plight of the Palestinians shocked him. "It was worse than I thought."

Tenyenhuis called the synodical statement "approximate," but, he said, "To say nothing isn't right. It seems to me that we should say something."

—Clay Libolt

Synod 2019 Upends Ministry Share System

Synod 2019 approved a far-reaching restructuring of its financial system, revising the relationship between the congregations and denominational ministries.

For more than 150 years, the denominational budget-setting process began with costs. The costs were met by asking congregations to provide money based on their number of members.

The new system adopted by synod begins not with costs but with pledges made by the congregations. The denominational budget will be based on the amount the congregations pledge to denominational ministries.

Churches Contributing Less

Over the years, some congregations have continued to dig deep but others haven't or can't. In answer to proposals to move away from the ministry share system, synods and denominational officials would point out the efficiency of this way to raise ministry money. The costs of raising ministry shares is negligible—about 20 cents for every \$100. To raise the same amount using professional fundraisers costs about \$25—one dollar to raise three.

“

Drew Sweetman:
“Finance has a reputation for being dull and dry, and there is nothing in this presentation that will threaten that reputation.”

”



Jonathan Owens, Classis Yellowstone: This will make planning easier.

Even so, of late, the ministry share system has been showing signs of strain. The percentage of ministry shares collected by the denomination has fallen to about 60%. This means that every year as synod sets the amount of the next year's ministry share—\$346 per adult member currently—it does so realizing that in fact the churches collectively will pay 60% of this number. But this collective figure includes some churches that will pay the full \$346 (some even more) and some churches far less or none at all.

In 2016, Classis lakota (a regional body of churches) brought a proposal to synod to radically restructure the ministry share system. The lakota proposal would have eliminated ministry shares for the mission agencies. They would be supported entirely by money raised by other means. Ministry shares would



John Bolt, director of finance: “[We’re] prepared to respond to whatever happens whether [the money that comes in] is less or more.”

be used only to support mission-critical denominational offices and ministries. The money raised by the ministry shares would be cut in half.

Synod did not adopt the lakota proposal, but, prompted by it in part, asked that the administration and the Council of Delegates “reimagine ministry shares.” The proposal that Synod 2019 adopted is the result of that request.

The New Direction

The new direction adopted by Synod 2019 puts the right to decide the amount to be contributed to denominational ministries in the hands of the congregations.

The new system begins with the congregations. They will each consider how much to contribute to denominational ministries. The denomination will supply the congregations with information to help them establish this amount, but the pledge will be established by the church council.

The councils will bring these pledges to the classes (regional gatherings of churches). The proposal hopes the classes will encourage churches with financial means to step up to a greater share of denominational ministry costs and help out congregations with less money.

The classes will send the amount of the pledges to the denomination, which will in turn create ministry budgets. The budgets will be approved by synod annually.

Synod built in a year for this system to get up and running. For the next year, councils and classes will be encouraged to discuss the new system. Final approval for proceeding with the new system will come from Synod 2020.

Vern Swieringa, Classis Zeeland, said, "The process will foster a much deeper covenantal relationship with each other."

But there was nervousness about it as well. Tom Wolthuis, Classis Central Plains, said the plan was very similar to one they had adopted in their classis. Overall, the plan worked, but his campus ministry took a 15% reduction in the money they were receiving from the classis churches. Chelsey Harmon, Classis B.C. North-West, asked, "Is there a plan if this doesn't go well?"

John Bolt, the longtime denominational director of finance, said the denomination "is prepared to respond to whatever happens whether [the money that comes in] is less or more." Asked whether he was concerned that contributions would fall under the new pledge system, he said he was not. He said "he believes that people will respond positively."

—Clay Libolt

Not Our Grandparents' Ministry Shares

The changes to the ministry share system have been occurring incrementally in the denomination. The CRC today is not the CRC out of which the ministry share system came. To grasp the significance of the change, it is necessary to step back and look briefly at the history of the ministry share system.

The deep roots of the ministry share system lie in a small immigrant denomination, the CRC of the 19th century, that needed to fund a training school for its clergy, expenses for its meetings, and pensions for its retired ministers. These costs were paid by asking churches to contribute based on how many families they had. Churches with many families would pay more; churches with fewer families, less.

In 1939, in the wake of the Great Depression, synod decided that no congregation could be compelled to pay their ministry shares. The obligation to pay was moral, not legal. The congregations had covenanted together to pay the costs, but for many reasons might not be able to pay the full costs.

Over the years, congregations found more reasons not to pay the full amount. Synod allowed smaller congregations to pay on a sliding scale. Other congregations disagreed with this or that denominational initiative. Still others favored local ministries over denominational ministries.

Appeals came to synod to redress the system. Synod dealt with the ministry share system more than a dozen times over a period of 75 years.

Today, the amount of money collected is generally only 60% of what was requested, and budgets are created on that assumption.

Synod's reimagining of the ministry shares means congregations will pledge what they can pay, rather than be asked to remit a set amount, and budgets will be created on the amounts pledged.

—Clay Libolt

Synod Tries to Get More User-friendly



Thea Leunk, vice president of Synod 2019: "It's a scary thing to be elected an officer to synod."

Synod 2019 fine-tuned the rules for the format and function of future synods. Delegates accepted limiting speech length, but they resisted any attempt to mandate whom classes may send as delegates.

At future synods, delegate speeches will be limited to three minutes. The CRC will offer more extensive training for delegates and will design synods to include more discussion around themes.

But Synod declined to adopt several key changes that its own Synod Review Task Force had recommended. Delegates cited concerns that those changes would have given the denomination too much control over local groups of churches.

The task force wanted to *require* classes to send at least one woman or ethnic minority delegate to synod. Synod chose instead to *recommend* the inclusion of a female or ethnic minority delegate from each classis.

Synod also turned down a proposal to require classes to pay a delegate

The No. 1 complaint about synod is long speeches.

registration fee that would help cover synod travel costs.

"My classis would have to limit its local ministries in order to fund this," said Chad Vandervalk, Classis B.C. South-East.

The task force recommended each synod select the officers (president, vice president, etc.) to serve at the next year's synod. That way, the officers could receive more training and also attend Council of Delegates meetings during the year.

"It's a scary thing to be elected an officer to synod," said task force chair and Synod



Meg Jenista Kuykendall, Classis Hackensack, regarding not requiring delegation of ethnic minority delegates: "Passing this motion tonight will make us think we've done something when we haven't."

2019 vice president Thea Leunk. "With this recommendation, we will see different faces at this table, and that's a good thing for this denomination."

Once again, many delegates considered the proposal an overreach. "Let's keep our parliamentary approach and see



Lora Copley, Classis Red Mesa: Requiring a classis to delegate women "would damage the very thing that we have called for, that we would serve one another and honor and respect our differences."

how we do, because I don't think we're doing so badly right now," said Gerry Koning, Classis Georgetown.

In the end, Synod 2019 at least addressed what task force chair Thea Leunk said was the "No. 1 complaint about synod"—it agreed to limit speeches to three minutes.

Some argued that the chair has the job of cutting off long-winded speakers, but Koopmans countered, "The chair doesn't want to be the hard-nosed person that is always cutting people off. This is a way of enabling the body to hear more from more people."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Future Synods: What's Actually Changing?

Synod 2019 took up much of what the Synod Review Task Force recommended, altered some of the recommendations, and rejected a few of them.

Here's some of what will be new to future synods, as adopted by Synod 2019:

- » **a volunteer on-site mentor/guide** to synodical procedures for young adult representatives and ethnic minority persons
- » **orientation for all** (not just first-time) delegates and advisers prior to the convening session of synod
- » **no more than two major study reports** will be on the agenda in a given year
- » **executive session decisions** should include a recommendation regarding what is to be included in the public record
- » **new rules about what kind of amendments are allowed:** when and which kinds of motions are up for debate before a vote, how the chair is challenged, and so on (good thing there will be orientation for *all* to review these kinds of procedures!)
- » **a basic review of the Rules for Synodical Procedure** will be included in the training of officers
- » **intentional opportunities for purposeful dialogue** (seven different considerations for this)
- » **improved connection** between synod and classes and churches (five different methods listed)
- » **a parliamentarian** appointed each year by the program committee to help synod follow the rules synod has set out
- » **more extensive training** for all delegates *prior* to synod with online and printed materials that cover rules and best practices (plus on-site engagement with training materials led by trained educators before synod begins)
- » **guidelines to avoid inappropriate use of social media contact with nondelegates** during advisory committee meetings and plenary sessions as part of delegate training
- » **"themed agendas" and/or "themed synods"** could be recommended periodically by the Council of Delegates
- » **training and orientation for delegates to better understand the power with which they are privileged**, especially with regard to gender, ethnicity, position, and age (this will be biblically and theologically grounded such as what is articulated in "God's Diverse and Unified Family")
- » **speeches must be no longer than three minutes per person** during plenary deliberation (except when needed for someone for whom English is a second language or who may require interpretation services)

Here's what's "encouraged":

- » **classes (regional assemblies) develop/maintain policies through which the classis would provide remuneration to delegates** who are financially disadvantaged through service to synod.
- » **classes send one or more delegates to synod for two consecutive years**, if possible, to build continuity from synod to synod
- » **each classis to include at least one woman or one ethnic minority person** in its delegation of one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer to synod

Here's what's not changing:

- » **no earlier distribution date of synodical study committee reports** (Classis Hamilton asked for these to be sent Sept. 15 instead of Nov. 1)
- » **Synod will continue to have four elected officers** (the task force had suggested doing away with the second clerk position)
- » **Synod will continue to elect its officers at the beginning of each new synod**

“

Chelsey L. Harmon:
"I hear this sometimes works at synod:
I'm single."

President William Koopmans: "May I remind you not to abuse the responsibility of reporter in addressing synod with matters not pertaining to synod."

Harmon responded: "I only needed to say it once, Mr. Chair."

Koopmans: "And I only needed to warn you once."

”

Let's Talk About Sex

A committee tasked to write a “theology of human sexuality” asked Synod 2019 delegates for feedback on its interim report.

The 34-page document gives a biblical overview of sexuality, emphasizing that sexuality is a good thing and that churches should be discussing it openly. It also laments the brokenness that surrounds sexuality in our culture and in our churches.

“Our primary purpose is to hear from you,” said Jeff Weima, co-chair of the study committee, as he presented the report. “We will pay careful attention to what you say.” The 10-member committee is tasked to complete its report by Synod 2021.



Photo by Tracey De Weerd

Representatives of the study committee on human sexuality include Matthew Tuininga, Mary-Lee Bouma, and Jeff Weima.

who acts as *promotor fidei* (or devil’s advocate). She has been “active, vocal, and extremely helpful,” he said.

Delegates spent an hour discussing the sexuality report in small groups. Each group recorded answers to five questions, which included “What concerns do you have about the interim report?” and “What advice would you give to the committee as we work to complete the full report?”

“It was good to have an opportunity to discuss this issue,” said Katie Haan, young adult representative. “Although we had different viewpoints (among the young adult representatives), we are still united in Christ and in a desire to show God’s love to people.”

“(Issues concerning sexuality) are so prevalent nowadays, we have to deal with (them),” said Duane Walhof, Classis Heartland. His discussion group “very much liked the tone of the report and the depth of the Scriptural basis it included” but asked the committee to “be careful that we don’t focus solely on mercy.”

Bryan Hoffman, Classis Northcentral Iowa, said his group was “concerned about the boots on the ground. We want the theology, but how do we apply it? What does it look like in our lives?”

To give feedback on the report, email the committee at humansexualitycommittee@crcna.org.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Council Chair Gives Spectators a Voice



Photo by Tracey De Weerd

Paul De Vries (in green shirt) went into the audience to get the views of a group of LGBTQ+ advocates regarding the report on human sexuality.

When past synods deliberated on controversial topics, protestors usually observed in silence.

But this year, when delegates to Synod 2019 gathered in small groups to discuss an interim report on human sexuality, those protestors were unexpectedly given a voice.

It was an impromptu invitation. Paul De Vries, chair of the CRC’s Council of Delegates, noticed a group of about 25 protestors in the audience, dressed in various versions of the rainbow used to symbolize LGBTQ+ pride. While delegates divided into their groups to give feedback on the sexuality report, De Vries spontaneously walked to the audience group and invited them to answer the same questions the delegates were answering. He promised to pass their answers on to the authors of the report.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Church Planters Challenge the Church to Grow

Church planters who came to synod said they sometimes feel like “fish out of water.”

Ben Bowater, a church planter in Kalamazoo, Mich., and a first-time delegate, often wished synod procedure were more mission-focused. The denomination is in decline because we are unwilling to change our ways, unwilling to go out and tell the good news, he told *The Banner*. “We’ve got to think in terms of priority.”

Dirk vanEyck, another first-time delegate, agreed, but added, “We (church planters) can create a conversation.” A church planter in Kentwood, Mich., vanEyck said he learned how easy it is to get something on the agenda for synod. “Church planters do not have an inherent right to complain about synod after seeing how easy it is to get something before synod.”

“Church planters can tend to think, ‘All that church order stuff, whatever,’” said Mark Van Anandel, who planted Hesed Community Church in Detroit. “But I would like to see more church planters here.”



Church planters at Synod 2019 included, from left, José Rayas, Ben Bowater, Dirk vanEyck, Mark Van Anandel.

Another church planter was serving as a synod delegate for the 12th time. José Rayas, who plants churches in El Paso, Texas, was also elected first clerk to Synod 2019.

“Over the last 15 or so years, our denomination’s call to plant churches has matured,” said Rayas. “If we’re truly going to be a church-planting denomination, we need to raise the proper leaders.”

Rayas serves at synod in order to connect his Hispanic church-planting friends to the denomination. “I want to make sure synod’s work goes out into the churches. If someone doesn’t do that, it dies out.”

At Synod 2012, Rayas helped form a group of Hispanic church planters called Consejo Latino. “We dream of holding a CRC church planting seminar in several different languages, to share the pains and the joys, the patience and the persevering.”

—Roxanne Van Farowe

No Change on Climate Change



Jake Porter, Classis Holland: “The world is groaning ... We need to know what we can do within this body and what we can’t do ... so that we might all witness to the new creation.”

Synod 2019 was asked to reconsider and withdraw two “assertions” on climate change made by a previous synod. Synod 2019 chose not to withdraw them, saying one was simply an observation, not an assertion.

Synod also noted that “the Synod 2012 report ... has fostered good work through the CRC that we would not want to slow down.”

Tyler Wagenmaker, Classis Zeeland, said he had been present at the 2012 synod and recognizes this as a complex issue before a “diverse body of believers with a number of different viewpoints.” He said he didn’t want to try to change anyone’s mind on the causes of climate change, but his

concerns lie in how the report has since been applied.

“There is a lot of angst about the application of this report, primarily by the Office of Social Justice. ... What kind of policies would we advocate for? That’s where the angst comes in, and I think that’s what this overture (request) was seeking to address in many ways.”

The request came from council of Calvary CRC in Ottawa, Ont. Classis Grand Rapids East sent a competing overture to synod keep the 2012 statements.

This kind of back-and-forth made synod move to clarify matters going forward. It has asked the Council of Delegates to look at historical decisions of synod, looking for the rationale behind “decisions dealing with political and/or justice matters” and how they were ruled to be properly before synod as “ecclesiastical matters.”

Jake Porter, Classis Holland, said having clarity on this is imperative. “The world is groaning. ... We need to know what we can do within this body and what we can’t do ... so that we might all witness to the new creation.”

Anthony DeKorte, Classis Arizona, said it comes down to wisdom, and a historical review is not needed. “There is nothing the COD will discover that will stop people from bringing things (they care about) to synod ... because there is no square inch that doesn’t belong to Christ’s kingdom.”

But synod decided it wants to try for more clarity on defining “ecclesiastical.”

—Alissa Vernon

The Evolving Office of Commissioned Pastor

One of the trends changing the face of leadership in the Christian Reformed Church is the evolving office of commissioned pastor. Synod 2019 approved a set of changes in the Church Order and in a separate handbook regulating this relatively new office. The changes catch the rules up to evolving practices in the office.

For much of its history, the CRC recognized only three offices: ministers of the Word (pastors), elders, and deacons. But already early in the 20th century, there were church leaders who did not fit the categories. Among these were pastors of chapels: mission churches that had not yet been formally organized under denominational rules. They were sometimes said to hold an “extraordinary office” like the evangelists in the New Testament book of Acts. They came to be known as “layworkers in evangelism.”

In 1978, synod created a new office of evangelist to include these pastors. They were permitted to preach and administer the sacraments, but only in their own ministry setting. Out of this, the office of commissioned pastor was born.



Caleb Dickson is a commissioned pastor.

In 1994, evangelists were permitted to serve in organized congregations along with a minister of the Word, but it was Synod 2001 that changed the office to what it has become today. The synod characterized the office as one of “pastoral extension,” meaning it could apply to a variety of pastoral roles, including staff roles like worship pastor, education pastor, and chaplain.

Clearly, by this time the old title for the office had become obsolete. Synod changed the title, first to “ministry associate,” and then in 2012 to “commissioned pastor.” The name for the office is an “umbrella title” for the office. Persons serving in this office usually have another title in the ministry to which they are called, such as “pastor of congregational life” or the like.

Over the past 15 years, the office has burgeoned. New rules have come into place, governing how commissioned pastors transfer to new ministry settings, what happens when they reach the end of their assignment or when they retire, even how they fit into church discipline.

Throughout this history, the denomination has maintained the local character of the office. Commissioned pastors are ordained for a specific role in a specific place. A move or change of job requires a new recognition of their status as commissioned pastors.

Recently, the denominational candidacy office also has begun to recognize the office of commissioned pastor as a bridge into the office of minister of the Word.

Perhaps it is best to think of the office of commissioned pastor as a bottom-up office. Instead of requiring certain training as a precondition for pastoral office, the office permits persons with a variety of training and background to serve in local churches in a variety of ministries, giving to them the full authority of the pastoral office. The office of commissioned pastor arises directly out of the needs of the church.

Left out of this brief history is the role that the office has played in places where it is impractical to send candidates to seminary for training. This new office provides a flexible way to raise up pastoral leadership in a variety of settings. It makes the denomination more nimble.

—Clay Libolt

Wasting No Time

Candidates for ministry in the CRC may not receive a call to a church until synod approves their candidacy. Faith CRC in Burlington, Ont., wasted no time. Council chair Henry Hess (right) presented a letter of call to Cara DeHaan within minutes of her approval.



Photos provided by Darren Roorda

A Slow Train to the Future of CRC Leadership

Sometimes it's the slow train that eludes detection. One such slow train is the long, slow, profound change in how the Christian Reformed Church recruits, trains, and credentials ministry leaders. Nothing is more likely to change the CRC in the future than the current changes in how the CRC raises up pastoral leaders.

Synod 2019, the general assembly of the CRC, strengthened two trends that have and will have profound effect in the denomination, and it called attention to a third. The first of these trends is the development of a new ministry office, commissioned pastor (p. 28); the second is opening the door to ministers ordained in other churches; and the third is an increase in candidates for the ministry trained in seminaries other than Calvin Theological Seminary, the denominational seminary. These trends are part of a larger story. Or rather, stories.

Although the stories of these trends are separate, they are connected like the cars of the train.

The CRC of the past looked almost exclusively to CTS for pastoral leadership. The pastors so trained were given ample doses of Reformed theology along with Greek and Hebrew.

The churches to which these pastors were called emphasized preaching, teaching (especially catechism), and pastoral care. Few churches had large staffs, elaborate programs, or much else that demanded administrative oversight. The training fit the job.

Churches have changed, as have the places from which they draw their leadership. Synod 2019 made changes generally making it easier for congregations to call pastors who have been trained and ordained in other denominations. For the past two years, more candidates for the office of minister of the Word have come from other seminaries than from CTS. Changes pertaining to the office of commissioned pastor opens avenues to leadership for pastoral leaders who are

not seminary-trained. Together, these leaders are changing the church.

Where Is All This Going?

With people entering pastoral leadership through the office of commissioned pastor, coming from other denominations, and trained in seminaries other than CTS, how will the CRC change?

It will, perhaps has already, break up the "old boys' club." When everyone was trained in the same way and at the same place, they knew each other. There was an easy familiarity. That will go away.

Related to this, the denomination will have to work harder to establish its theological and ministry identity. The opinions, and even assumptions, of pastors trained in different ways and different places are likely to be more divergent than they have in the past. The denomination will have to work harder

at the classis and synod level to reach agreement in matters of doctrine and approaches to ministry. The work might be harder, but the payoff could be greater.

Agreement will have to be reached on a simple and straightforward set of standards that can be applied to pastors in many different settings and coming from many different backgrounds.

These changes will work themselves out in the life of the denomination over not just years, but decades. They are the sort of changes that accumulate. One scarcely notices the change at first. The Church Order and other regulations pertaining to church leadership that were approved by Synod 2019 passed with no discussion. But the changes made are likely to change the face of church leadership more than anything else done at Synod 2019.

—Clay Libolt

Synod Receives 42 Ministry Candidates

Synod 2019 joyfully welcomed 42 new candidates for the office of minister of the Word in the Christian Reformed Church.

Jul Medenblik, president of Calvin Theological Seminary noted that the number of new candidates nearly matches the number of retiring pastors in 2019. Those retiring pastors have served for a total of 1,227 years, or 447,855 days.

"Let's call this your first day," he said. "You do not get to 1,227 years without faithful days," said Medenblik. "We want to encourage you to a long obedience day by day, year by year in the same direction."

See pp. 44-45 for this year's candidates.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Synod 2019 approved 42 candidates for minister of the Word.

First Women Advisers Return to Synod as Delegates



Photo by Tracey De Weerd

Sharon Jim (left) and Sherry TenClay

Sherry TenClay and Sharon Jim met each other at Synod 2001, when they served on the first-ever group of women advisers. This year, the two women served together as delegates for Classis Red Mesa.

23

Total percentage of female delegates.



Incremental Change with Deacons at Synod

Synod 2019 is just the fourth synod of the Christian Reformed Church to include deacons as delegates. While not every classis sent a deacon delegate this year, deacons who came found the participation valuable and eye-opening.

“You learn a lot about all that the denomination does at a bigger level,” said Nathan Vos, 34, a deacon delegate from Classis Alberta North.

Emphasizing the parity of church offices was one of the reasons Synod 2015 adopted the change of adding deacons. It was part of a wider revitalization of the offices of elder and deacon. The outcome has been a “relentless incrementalism” of change, said Andy Ryskamp, who served as a staff adviser on the Office of Deacon Task Force from 2010 to 2013 (while he was U.S. director of what is now World Renew).

For the most part, Ryskamp said, “there seems to be an eagerness on the part of deacons to be thinking through their leadership role. They recognize there is a leadership expectation (and they’re asking), ‘How do we do this effectively?’”

In Canada, support for deacons is provided by Diaconal Ministries Canada, led by Ron Vanden Brink. Adapting to the shift has been perhaps easier in Canada because the office has been supported for such a long time by the national network. “Our Diaconal Ministries goes back into the early ‘60s and the late ‘50s, and there isn’t anything comparable in the States,” Vanden Brink said.

In its report to synod, the Council of Delegates said “... it has become apparent that there is a need in the United States to have, as in Canada, a staff person or persons who provide such services on an ongoing basis.”

In 2019, nine classes were without a deacon delegate at synod. This is the largest number of classes missing a deacon delegate since the practice began in 2016. In several other classes, the interim



Nathan Vos, a deacon from Alberta North: “If you’re asked and you have those gifts, you should take that seriously.”

committee was tasked with finding a deacon delegate after the usual practice failed to find one.

That was the case for Brent Van Schepen from Classis Minnkota. He’s serving his first term as deacon at Bethel CRC in Edgerton, Minn., and hadn’t even attended a classis meeting when his pastor encouraged him to volunteer for synod since a deacon delegate hadn’t been found.

For Classis Northern Michigan, a grouping of 14 congregations, finding a deacon available for synod has been hard. Ken Koning, chair of that classis’ interim committee, speculates it’s a case of the typically younger deacons just being less available to take a week off work.

Vanden Brink and Ryskamp suggested that deacons might play a bigger role over time as the agenda for synod becomes more reflective of the presence and the work of all the office bearers. “A lasting question is how should the agendas of these events change,” Vanden Brink said. “Once we had deacons (at synod), why didn’t we stop and say ‘hold it, what should be different now?’”

—Alissa Vernon

Church Marriage and/or State Marriage: CRC Will Study

The Christian Reformed Church in North America will study “the advisability, legality, and morality of ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriage.” Synod 2019 approved appointing a task force to do this, to report to either Synod 2021 or Synod 2022.

Synod agreed the task force will include at least one person with legal expertise in the United States and one with such expertise in Canada; a person or persons with pastoral experience in this area; a person or persons with cross-cultural experience; and a person or persons with experience in pensions and end-of-life care issues in Canada and in the United States.

Synod considered the study necessary because churches are being confronted with questions and situations, and pastors and elders need guidance on how to respond.



Andy Hanson, Classis California South: “If I say I’m married according to the church, does that necessarily mean I have to be married according to the state?”

Phil Westra, Classis Atlantic Northeast, said the questions to be considered by the task force amount to asking if it’s morally advisable for people to deceive our governments about their marital status. Westra cited a 2012 report from the U.S. Social Security Administration regarding couples misrepresenting their marital status. “The report called that fraud,” Westra said.

Greg Janke, Classis Chicago South, said it isn’t quite as simple as that. There are situations in which a state marriage might not be possible, such as if couples do not have birth certificates from their home countries, he said. “There are many sorts of different situations where ecclesiastical marriages may be needed.”

Gerald Koning, Classis Georgetown, described a specific example of this in church-planting efforts among East African refugees. A cultural marriage took place back home, but because the individuals do not have birth certificates, they are unable to have a legal marriage in the United States. Their Sudanese families recognize them as married, but the state does not. What does the church do?

Andy Hanson, Classis California South, said the clarity is necessary because of the seeming growing divide between what the state recognizes as marriage and how the church sees marriage.

“Currently, the government recognizes marriages that the church does not,” Hanson said. He hoped the task force would look at and address whether the state is overstepping its bounds of authority in licensing marriages.

—Alissa Vernon



Phil Westra, Classis Atlantic Northeast: “Honesty is an imperative throughout scripture. ... We should avoid lying and deceit of any kind.”

“

Gerry Koning, after having been corrected on several word errors in his report: “I’m just glad to see that the RCA has clerical errors, too.”

Thea Leunk, vice president of synod: “I think it’s called total depravity.”

”

Ecumenical Delegates Bring Greetings, Reports, Thanks

CRC Has New Categories for Ecumenical Relationships

Synod 2019 adopted new labels to describe its ecumenical partners: *churches in communion* and *churches in cooperation*. Synod is proposing changes to the Church Order to reflect this, requesting they be adopted by Synod 2020.

As part of the revisions, the language of “fraternal delegates” has been changed to “ecumenical delegates” in the charter.

The EIRC has produced a condensed version of the Ecumenical Charter to serve as a guide to local congregations in their engagement with other churches and denominations. Synod is recommending this to the churches. Meg Jenista Kuykendall, Classis Hackensack, said it could be used in an adult education class or reviewed by church councils to “intentionally create and cultivate those relationships you (are forming).”

The new label *churches in communion* replaces the previous *churches in ecclesiastical fellowship*. It describes the closest relationship the CRC has with other churches, and only synod can place churches in this category. The new category *churches in cooperation* describes relationships in two previous categories: *churches in dialogue* and *churches in other ecumenical relationships*.

—Alissa Vernon

Several ecumenical guests from denominations in communion with the Christian Reformed Church brought greetings and reports to Synod 2019.

Chan Thieng, general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar, shared some history of the CRCM and of the Reformed Theological College of Myanmar, where he teaches. He described the context in which the CRCM ministers were being formed: in a country where more than 80% of the population practices Buddhism and “generally speaking, Christians belong to ethnic minority groups.”

Gustav Claassen, general secretary of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, told synod of challenges facing his South African church, including effects of climate change on the land, political movements highlighting differences and divisions, and the need for Scriptural responses to the prevalence of same-sex relationships.

William Julius of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa urged the synod to adopt the Belhar as a full confession in the CRC. The Belhar came out of the churches of the Uniting Reformed Church when South Africa was governed by apartheid, the systematic separation of the races. The Belhar declares apartheid and the ideas behind it heretical, a violation of the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith.

“Belhar is not a political document,” he said. It is a statement not for a certain period only, but for the church in all times and places.

Hirotsugu Mochida greeted synod on behalf of the Reformed Church of Japan. “We are grateful for seven decades of cooperation in mission and the many people brought to the Lord through that mission,” he said. Mochida includes himself among them. He became a Christian in response to hearing the gospel through Back to God Ministries at age 13.

Mochida described Japan as “a land of great spiritual darkness” where only 1% of the people are Christians.

Peter Noteboom, general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, brought greetings to Synod 2019 on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the CCC. The churches that make up the CCC include 85% of Canadian Christians.

Part of the work of CCC is sponsoring conversations among churches: faith and witness, faith and life sciences, justice and peace, and others.

—Clay Libolt, Alissa Vernon, Roxanne Van Farowe



Ecumenical guests included, from left, Hirotsugu Mochida, William Julius, Peter Noteboom, Gustav Claassen, Chan Thieng, and Monica Schaap Pierce.

RCA Ecumenical Visit Highlights Uncertain Future

The sister denomination of the Christian Reformed Church may be headed toward a painful split, Synod 2019 heard.

The Reformed Church in America's ecumenical guest gave the CRC synod a brief report on its own general synod, which met about a week earlier.

"The RCA is at a crossroads," Monica Schaap Pierce, ecumenical associate for the RCA, told Synod 2019 delegates. "Our denomination will never be the same. And yet, this gives us the opportunity to write the next hopeful chapter with the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

In 2018, the RCA formed a "Vision 2020" team to explore three options for the denomination's future: staying together, reorganizing, or dividing.

Factions of the denomination disagree on matters of sexuality, missiology, and more.

At their June general synod, the RCA changed its rules so that if accepted next year, a simple majority will allow for a split. Previously, a two-thirds majority would have been necessary.

"That was a very consequential decision," Schaap Pierce told *The Banner*. "We could end up with a polarization that does not require a consensus." Discussions

at the general synod indicated that the delegates were leaning toward the third option of dividing the denomination, she said.

In her address, Schaap Pierce praised the close relationship between the two denominations.

"Our efforts in discipleship, leadership, and mission have been enlarged and made more effective and efficient because of our collaboration with the CRCNA," she said.

She ended with a call for unity—a call that has resounded in her own denomination, she said. "May the unity that is our gift in Christ be strengthened for God's mission to the world," she said.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Monica Schaap Pierce

A Dispute About How to Resolve Disputes

Synod 2019 clarified the rules governing judicial code hearings—hearings held in disputes that cannot be resolved in any other way—and put in place procedures to increase the diversity of the Judicial Code Committee. The changes were approved without comment by a voice vote. But behind these relatively small changes is a larger story.

It's a story about a dispute. Actually, about two disputes. The first was a messy appeal that came to Synod 2018. In the words of the JCC, the group responsible for processing really messy disputes, this dispute "involved a CRC pastor (who had been a denominational employee), multiple complainants, a CRC classis, the council of a CRC congregation, the CRC's Safe Church Ministry, and persons assigned by Safe Church to an advisory panel."

Apparently it did not go well.

Synod issued a request to the executive director of the denomination to clarify the Judicial Code in some areas.

The executive director met with an expert on church polity, Kathy Smith of Calvin Theological Seminary, and the JCC itself. On the basis of their discussions, he formulated language to clarify the areas that synod had pointed out as difficult and procedures to increase the diversity of the JCC. That was when the second dispute erupted.

The JCC was not satisfied with the changes proposed by the executive director. And they were underwhelmed by the synod's demonstrated ability to conduct a judicial code hearing in a complex case given the time constraints of the synod calendar and number of participants. They "observed a significant 'mismatch' between the inherent complexity of the JCC matter taken up by Synod 2018 and inherent capabilities (or lack thereof) of that body to adequately process the matter." They wanted Synod 2019 to create a task force to make larger changes to the judicial code.

Synod accepted the changes to the judicial code proposed by the executive director with perfunctory voice vote.

But synod did not ignore the concerns of the JCC. They added an instruction that the judicial code be reviewed every five years.

—Clay Libolt

Synod Proposes Dropping the Second Service Requirement

Photo provided to The Banner



An impromptu 10th reunion took place at Synod 2019. These folks all graduated together from Calvin Theological Seminary. Back row, from left: Nate De Jong McCarron, Matt Stob, Dirk Van Eyk, Al Postma. Front row, from left: K.C. Vande Streek, Chelsey Harmon, Sarah Roelofs, Samantha De Jong McCarron.



Brian Kornelis, Classis Minnkota: “We should worship more, not less.”

Synod 2019 has proposed dropping two long-standing and fiercely defended worship requirements from the Church Order. One is the requirement that churches host two distinct worship services on Sunday; the second is that churches on an annual basis preach through the Heidelberg Catechism. The two are related.

The second service, as it was typically called, was not a repetition of the first service but a totally different, typically focused on the catechism. The services were not optional; the congregation was expected to show up twice.

The requirements have been hard to sustain for years. In 1995, synod, facing the fact that many churches no longer held two services, decided to enter the word “ordinarily” into the Church Order: “The congregation shall assemble for worship, ordinarily twice on the Lord’s Day . . .”

For several delegates, dropping the requirement to host a second service in this year is ironic. The requirements to hold a second service and to preach through the catechism go back to the Synod of Dort, 400 years ago.

Cary Gephart, Classis Illiana, noted that the difficulty faced by churches today

was already faced by Dort. People were not showing up for the second service. Despite that, so insistent was Dort on maintaining the practice of two services that, according to Gephart, they said to the churches, “You should do the evening service even if your pastor and his family are the only ones there.”

Others pointed out that not having a second service permitted congregations to gather on Sunday or other evenings for other purposes. Sidney Couperus, Classis Niagara, for example, said his 700-member church used Sunday evenings for small group meetings. Tyler Wagenmaker, Classis Zeeland, spoke of the power of the preached Word of God as opposed to those alternatives. “Preaching is something unique,” he said.

The question before synod turned on whether to recognize what churches

“This train has left the station.”

—Dwayne Nienhuis

and members have already done—leave behind the old practice of holding a second service—or to continue to insist on requiring a second service and the preaching of the catechism because the requirement lies at the heart of the Reformed faith.

For others, it simply acknowledges what has already happened. Dwayne Nienhuis, Classis Holland, spoke for the majority when he said, “This train has left the station.”

Changes to the Church Order require two synods so this synod proposes the changes to Synod 2020, where they can be adopted.

—Clay Libolt

19

Percentage of delegations without deacons.



Synod 2019 Considers Missionary Support by Region



Stanley Groothof, Classis Iakota: Our intent was to provide care for our missionary partners.

Synod 2019 encouraged regional groups of churches (classes) to take a larger, more proactive role in supporting missionaries, but declined to impose it as a rule.

Synod was responding to a request from Classis Iakota. Concerned that missionaries are being overtaxed by travel for fundraising, the classis asked synod to assign each missionary to a single classis.

But that approach “would rip our missionaries out of the communities they’ve developed and push them into places they might not be as comfortable,” said Zachary King, director of Resonate Global Mission, the CRC’s missionary-sending agency. Encouraging classes to consider shared missionary support is “less prescriptive,” he added.

“Thank you for recognizing that the intent of our overture (request) was to provide care for our missionary partners,” said Stanley Groothof, Classis Iakota.

“If a classis were motivated, we would love to connect them with a new missionary even as a pilot project,” said King.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Officers of Synod Play Musical Chairs

As Synod 2019 deliberated changes to the process and form of future synods, the duties of chairing the meeting were picked up in the end by all four officers of synod.

“This is a momentous occasion—the fourth person to chair! And a deacon!” said Melissa Van Dyk, stepping up to the chair.

The president and vice president of Synod 2019 had to step aside because they were involved in the matter being discussed.

First clerk José Rayas took the president’s chair. When one of his rulings was challenged from the floor, Van Dyk took up the gavel.

Once the challenge was resolved, Rayas continued in his chair duties.

During the session, one of the recommendations synod chose not to adopt was a recommendation not to require a second clerk at future synods. Instead, Synod 2019 chose to stick with four elected officers—perhaps influenced by this year’s need for all four officers to serve (even if briefly) as chair.

—Alissa Vernon



First clerk, José Rayas moved to the president’s chair during one session.

Faith Formation Leader Syd Hielema Steps Down



In his final act as the leader of Faith Formation Ministries, Syd Hielema (along with Christine Dekker) presented to Synod 2019 the philosophy of ministry that has guided this still new and innovative denominational ministry.

Faith Formation Ministries, only four years old as a denominational ministry, grew out of a “shepherding committee” appointed by Synod 2007 to help the denomination invite and incorporate children in the Lord’s Supper, something new to many churches at the time.

The approach taken by the shepherding committee became the seed of what is now Faith Formation Ministries. It owes much to the guiding genius of Hielema. Instead of creating programs, Faith Formation Ministries comes alongside churches, listening carefully to who they are and where they want to go, curating resources—often resources created by other congregations—and making them available to the churches, and walking with the churches as they explore new ways to take on the shape of Jesus.

Synod sent Hielema off with a standing ovation.

—Clay Libolt

Officers Reflect on Synod 2019

All four officers of Synod 2019 were happy with how this year's synod went. It took all the time allotted to finish the agenda, but the officers agreed it had been a smooth synod.

Thea Leunk, vice president, had been an officer in the past, and this was her fourth synod. "It was an irenic (peace-seeking) group, no big blow-ups," she said. "It was a very prayerful, congenial mood. People were looking to establish relationships, anxious to be the body of Christ."

Rev. William Koopmans was president, a role he has played before. "We had a very diversified agenda, wide in scope," he said. "There was a lot of enthusiasm generated for denominational ministries. My prayer is that the kind of unity we felt here will go back to the churches. We're going to need that denominational vision."

Melissa Van Dyk was the first-ever deacon delegate elected to the executive team. "It was such a privilege to serve the church," she said. This was her fourth synod.

First clerk Rev. José Rayas has been to synod 12 times previously and has also served on the executive committee.



Photo by Dianne Carroll Burdick

All four were moved by the liturgy that followed the discussion of abuse of power (p. 18). "Seeing how many people came to put (commemorative) rocks at the front," Van Dyk said. "You realize that it isn't just policy and procedure. It's personal."

Leunk said one of her best moments was when Rev. Hirotsugu Mochida from the Reformed Church of Japan told delegates that he became a Christian at age 13 in response to hearing the gospel through Back to God Ministries International, the CRC's media ministry, reminding delegates of how far CRC ministry reaches (p. 33).

These four are not without worries for the CRC's future. Van Dyk worries about an unwillingness to change, a lack of openness to the Spirit inviting change. Rayas fears the CRC will lose zeal for holistic ministry.

The shadow hanging over the CRC is the study committee report on human sexuality due at Synod 2021. The Reformed Church in America is further along in that discussion. "I listened to the report

L-R: Melissa Van Dyk, José Rayas, William Koopmans, Thea Leunk

of the RCA ecumenical guests (p. 32) and how they are struggling with questions of unity," Koopmans said. "I fear that conversation lies in our future as well."

They left synod with hope. "There is a much more missional vision to church today than what we saw in times past," Koopmans said. "It's a clear attitude of being much more intentional about our focus looking out into the world, not just inward-looking as a church."

"We are still passionate people, even when we wonder what the future holds," Van Dyk said. "We are Christ followers seeking to bring shalom. I have a lot of hope that we continue even when the work feels daunting, hard, frustrating. We're seeking God's face."

—Gayla R. Postma

58

Percentage of total delegates who were first-timers.



Celebrating God's Grace Through the Generations

On Sunday evenings of synod week, the delegates worship.

At this year's synod, worship was led by host church, Faith Community of Wyoming, Mich. Faith, formerly Wyoming Park Christian Reformed Church, celebrates its 100th anniversary this year. The service, although held in the austere, high-church precincts of the Calvin College Chapel, reflected throughout the life and faith of Faith Church.

The service offered praise to God with songs chosen from traditional and contemporary genres.

The pastor of Faith Church, Roger Groenboom, based his message on Psalms 90 and 91, under the title, "Place, Grace, Face."

We are, he said, looking for a place to stay, a home, adding, "Home can be more than a place." For those gathered, he noted, home may be the denomination, the Christian Reformed Church. In a deeper sense, drawing on Psalm 90, home is the Lord: "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations."

Calling attention to the last verse of Psalm 91, "I will show him my salvation," Groenboom pointed the congregation

to the face of Jesus. "There he was, Jesus, the face of God."

Turning to the synodical delegates, Groenboom said this story of God's grace in the presence of Jesus, is "the reason why you are here." The church has been given a mission to bring [this story] to those who haven't heard and to those who have heard but who need to hear it again. Synod has "the privilege of helping our entire denomination to do the job God has given us to do. This is a dream we dare not let die."

The service concluded with communion, the sacrament of Christian unity. In that setting in which diversity is usually emphasized, it was jarring to see the communion distributed solely by male elders, not a person of color among them.

At the end of the communion service, the congregation sang the words of "Build Your Kingdom Here." The chorus goes, "Build your kingdom here, let the darkness fear, show your mighty hand, heal our streets and land; set your church on fire, win this nation back, change the atmosphere, build your kingdom here."

With that prayer, all could agree.

—Clay Libolt

A List of Stories

Every year, synod reviews a long list of names of pastors and official actions taken with respect to them over the course of the past year. This year, the document was 31 pages long.

Synod ordinarily ratifies these actions that are taken in the classes. It would be easy to pass the document by as so much boring bureaucratic work.

But in each of the compact paragraphs written in the stuffy language of official documents, there is a story, some of occasions for celebration, some of pain.

The document began with a list of ministers who have retired, about 44 of them this year. President of Synod 2019, William Koopmans, had the delegates pause for a moment to acknowledge the years of service given by these pastors, noting their careers were filled with "joy, and at times struggle and agony."

Following the retirements were lists of newly appointed ministers, 59 of them.

Midway through the document is a list of what have come to be known as Article 17s. Article 17 in the denominational Church Order provides a way for congregations and pastors to part ways, often but not always in cases when the ministry is not going well. The language is anti-septic, but in the life of the minister and congregation going through the Article 17 process, the reality is often difficult and painful. These pages reek with personal agony.

At the end of the document, the lists turn from ministers of the Word to commissioned pastors. Forty-eight new positions opened up in this relatively new office.

At the end of its review of these pages, synod prayed, noting the many stories represented in these pages and the sum of human joy and human pain they chronicle.

—Clay Libolt



Photo by Tracey DeWeerd

Welcome to New Associate Editor



Sarah Heth, a journalist with 10 years' experience with *The Grand Rapids Press* and *The Holland Sentinel*, has joined *The Banner* as associate editor. Heth accepted the position in May after a candidate search. She's filling the position left by Judy Hardy, who retired May 31.

"Sarah Heth is an experienced and versatile editor, having been assistant managing editor, digital editor and most recently, assistant features editor for *The Holland Sentinel*," said *Banner* editor-in-chief Shiao Chong. Equally important, he said, "Sarah has a strong Christian faith admired by both her non-Christian colleagues and her Christian friends. We are excited to have her join our *Banner* team."

Heth lives in Holland, Mich., and is a member of Overisel Reformed Church, where she serves as a youth group leader. She has a degree in English with a minor in journalism from Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Heth said she's looking forward to moving from a daily newspaper environment and also to being in a workplace where her Christian faith informs her work, "where I can be part of conversations that are taking place ... where I can help provide and present voices and discussion topics that are of interest to a community that I'm a part of."

Bethany Christian Services' Foster Placement Policy Changed in Michigan

Bethany Christian Services, a child welfare organization approved by the Christian Reformed Church for offerings and support from congregations, agreed this spring to allow placing foster children with same-sex couples in its home state of Michigan after a lengthy legal challenge.

Bethany was one of two faith-based agencies sued by the American Civil Liberties Union two years ago. The ACLU, representing a same-sex couple, alleged that Bethany discriminated against LGBTQ families by not allowing them to take in foster children.

When Michigan's attorney general determined that the state would no longer financially support foster care and adoption agencies that refuse to allow placement of children with same-sex couples, Bethany's board of directors opted to change its policy rather than risk losing its contract with the state.

"For 75 years, Bethany has focused on serving vulnerable children in Michigan and around the world. We are disappointed with how this settlement agreement has been implemented by the state government," a Bethany spokesman said. "Nonetheless, Bethany will continue operations in Michigan, in compliance with our legal contract requirements. The mission and beliefs of Bethany Christian Services have not changed. We are focused on demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ by serving children in need, and we intend to continue doing so in Michigan."

When asked to comment, Steve Timmermans, executive director of the CRC, said, "I believe Bethany made a

faithful decision to stay in the public square, serving the children and adolescents they have been called to serve."

He acknowledged that similar challenges may face other affiliated charitable organizations, schools, and universities. "While there are many in the halls of government working hard to ensure exemptions for religious-based organizations, when those exemptions are not provided, we will face difficult choices. The goal will be to find ways to stay true to our missions in ways that keep us engaged in the world that so desperately needs to see the light of Christ," Timmermans said.

The decision by Bethany affects only foster care and foster care adoption in Michigan. The organization's placement practices in other states, as well as for adoptions outside the U.S., remains unchanged, a Bethany spokesman said. In 2018, Bethany worked with more than 1,000 children in Michigan's foster care system, representing about 8% of foster care cases in the state.

—Greg Chandler

Classis Watch: Spring 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's Church Order, the rules that govern denominational life. Here are some of the actions by classes in the past few months.

Those **welcomed into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** include seminary graduates Beverly Weeks, Nicole Veenkamp, and Paul Minbo Shim (Church Order Articles 6 and 10).

Those **welcomed into ministry in the CRC from other denominations**, following a satisfactory colloquium doctum (doctrinal conversation) establishing soundness of doctrine, sanctity of life, and knowledge and appreciation of Christian Reformed practice, include John-Peter Mukendi and Daniel Choi (Church Order Art. 8, p. 23).

Rev. Daniel Rhee was declared **eligible for call**.

Ministers loaned: Daniel Jin Su Hwang to Korean Christian Church; Tony Meyer to International Church, Madrid, Spain (Church Order Art. 13b).

Ministers released from a congregation: Rev. Robert Know, from Hope Fellowship CRC (Denver, Colo.); Rev. Nick Hopkins, from Shawnee Park CRC, (Grand Rapids, Mich.) (Church Order Art. 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 as follows: honorably released, released, dismissed, or in the status of one deposed (Church Order Art. 14).

Revs. John Burden and Gregory Cumberland were **honorably released**.

Steve Wolma was **released**.

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 (Church Order Art. 38).

Churches declared emerging: Mision de Fe McAllen (McAllen, Tex.)

—Gayla R. Postma

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Barry B. Blankers

1936-2019

A pastor for 58 years, Barry Blankers was gentle, humble, godly, wise, and a genuine role model who tried to live what he preached. Described by some as a "silent undertow," he was a quiet, continuous force influencing people as he visited, baptized, married, counseled, and preached the word of God. Blankers died April 2 at age 82.

Following graduation from Calvin College and Seminary and ordination in 1961, Blankers pastored Cedar (Iowa) CRC. He then served for 11 years as a missionary and church planter in the Philippines with what was then called Christian Reformed World Missions. After returning to the U.S., he pastored the following congregations: Calvin CRC, Wyckoff, N.J.; First CRC, Ripon, Calif.; and Ochededan (Iowa) CRC. Although officially listed as having retired in 2001, he never did retire, continuing to minister for another 17 years at First CRC, Lynden, Wash., until the time of his death.

He had an adventuresome spirit and enjoyed travel, including cross-country drives, trips to Costa Rica, and biking in Europe.

Blankers is survived by Clarice, his wife of 60 years, their four sons and spouses, and 11 grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Markus Johannes Lise

1942-2019

"You are loved" was the message that echoed throughout Markus Lise's life of ministry. He is remembered as a pastor who challenged and inspired his congregations to think "outside the box." He shared his passion about nature with others through hobbies such as astronomy, birdwatching, cycling, cross-country skiing, and walking. Love for God and creation often gave rise to his singing wholeheartedly around the dinner table, in the car, and on his sailboat. Lise died peacefully March 26.

After graduating from Calvin College and Seminary and ordination in 1970, Lise pastored the following Christian Reformed churches: Burdett, Alta.; Holland Marsh, Newmarket, Ont.; Hope Community, Mount Brydges, Ont. He then served for 20 years as chaplain at Whitby (Ont.) Mental Health Centre.

Two years after retirement in 2007, Lise cycled 7,000 km (about 4,350 miles) across North America with Sea to Sea, raising money to help eradicate poverty. He continued to engage with his local community, writing a column for the Orono Weekly Times and was a member of the Durham Region Field Naturalist Society.

Lise is survived by Jeanne, his wife for almost 55 years, five children and their spouses, 13 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus



The Christian Religion and Civil Religion

James Bratt

The Old Testament is very hard on idolatry, and so have been Reformed Christians over the centuries. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 94 interprets the first commandment (that we shall have no other gods before God) to mean that we “avoid and shun all idolatry” at the risk of our very salvation. And what is idolatry? “Having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the only true God” (Q&A 95).

The first generation of Reformed people sometimes turned this mandate to destructive violence in smashing the statuary and stained-glass images in Roman Catholic churches. We ourselves have become better aware (even if our walk doesn’t always match our talk) of how money, sex, or “success” can function as idols in our lives. But one of the great challenges in the matter is that “idols” are not necessarily bad all the way down. Many, in fact, are good things that have gotten out of place, created things

that we have inflated to take a place above or next to the creator.

Family is one of those good things. At best it is something dear and precious, and the site of our most pressing duties. But contrary to a common mantra, family should not be the most important thing in our lives; that should be God. Nor should it mark the full range of our love and concern; that is to be our neighbor as defined by Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan.

The Danger of Civil Religion

Loyalty to country can offer the same temptation. At their best, nations provide their citizens with rights and protections, so we in turn have certain obligations as citizens. But beyond obligations lie the ties of emotion. Most of us feel we have a “homeland” (whether or not we are living there right now), and we naturally feel some affection toward “home” and the more immediate circle of neighbors living there.

When nations get out of their place, they can be very jealous and very hungry gods. The two world wars of the 20th century caused the deaths of well over 100 million people, not to mention wounding for life many more, plus wreaking untold destruction of property. Well was nationalism named the Moloch of the age, the idol to whom people sacrificed their young in the name of national pride or greatness or security.

Nationalism can be deadly to the spirit as well. Under its spell neighbors become enemies. Hymns of true religion are displaced by national anthems. The flag becomes synonymous with the cross. A good thing is elevated above its place to become *the Good*, our source and center of meaning, the object of our ultimate allegiance.

As high as this idol has risen, however, so have Christian voices emerged to warn of it, denounce it, and call for the church to have no part of it. A term commonly used in this critique is “civil religion,” taken to mean patriotism as

religion or nationalism filled with religious fervor. On those terms the critique is justified and necessary. But if we look at the term differently, we might see that in the toppling of the idol, something good—a secondary but nonetheless genuine good—has been obscured.

Nowhere has this conundrum been more vexed than in the United States. To be sure, the land of the maple leaf (and the fleur-de-lis) has a civil religion—or two—of its own. But over the long history of the U.S., and especially in its more recent role as a global superpower, civil religion has been more evident and assertive. With apologies to the *Banner's* Canadian readers, then, we will try to parse the concept with American examples.

At its worst, American civil religion works like the religious nationalism that has manifested itself throughout world history among any number of peoples and states. It holds that America is the best and most favored of all nations on earth because it is God's elect people, the ark of divine purpose in the world. It assumes divine blessing on any American enterprise. American symbols stir the greatest pride, the keenest affection. Holidays such as Memorial Day or the Fourth of July are taken to be holy days. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution function as sacred scriptures. (One Mormon document even regards the Constitution as divinely inspired and thus inerrant.) Places like Gettysburg and the D-Day beaches of Normandy are held to be sacred sites of blood-bought salvation. Freedom and democracy, liberty and equality are held to be ultimate values.

Civil religion of that sort is idolatrous, and casual talk in this vein can be blasphemous. Nonetheless, it has held great allure for Christians throughout the nation's history—conservative Christians more often today, but liberal or progressive Christians in times past. Here the Bible and patriotism intertwine so that Christians drape the cross with the flag. Some invoke 2 Chronicles 7:14 ("If my people,

who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land") in reference to the U.S. instead of to Old Testament Israel

With all their differences, people need a common frame of reference that respects their particularities while making possible a life together.

or the worldwide church. The temptation arises to believe in God because God believes in America. Thus of necessity, the founding fathers must be described as far more orthodox in their Christian conviction and practice than they actually were.

The Possibilities of Civil Religion

But there is another understanding of civil religion that holds better possibilities for Christians who want to bear forth biblical values in public life. This understanding first of all sees the U.S., in fact and in ideal, from the start and for any foreseeable future, as a country whose citizens hold many different religious faiths—or none. Second, it argues that some common rhetoric and standards of judgment need to be in place to bring such diversity into an intelligent conversation

and a modicum of mutual trust. With all their differences, people need a common frame of reference that respects their particularities while making possible a life together—one that sees considerable overlap between the biblical witness and Americans' historical aspirations, but does not find an identity there. Finally, this understanding casts God's relationship with America (or any other nation) in a very different light from that of religious nationalism. It lifts up the Bible's prophetic tradition to place the country under a transcendent standard of judgment, not the assurance of divine blessing.

A classic example of this chastened type of civil religion comes from one of its great saints, Abraham Lincoln. Far from an orthodox Christian, Lincoln was nonetheless schooled on the Bible and used its language regularly in public addresses. That, along with the strict Calvinism that his Baptist father preached, was transmuted in his second inaugural address, which put *both* sides in the Civil War beneath the righteous judgment of God. It might be the greatest political sermon ever preached on North American soil. His prophetic edge came through more succinctly still in response to the typical sentiment of civil religion voiced by a preacher of the day to the effect that "God is on our side." To the contrary, Lincoln said: "My concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."

At Lincoln's hand the better part of American aspiration—human equality, democratic self-rule, the abolition of slavery—had much overlap with genuine Christian ethics. Indeed, given the continuing endorsement that many American Christians at the time gave to slavery and racist hierarchies, we can say that Lincoln's American creed took Christianity to school. Moving in the other direction, genuinely Christian leaders have more than once been able to find solid purchase for the values of their faith among American ideals.

Jimmy Carter did so in proposing that human rights be the guiding star of American foreign policy. Barack Obama invoked and then sang “Amazing Grace” to a national television audience at the memorial service for Pastor Clementa Pinckney, who along with some of his parishioners had been gunned down at a Bible study by a white supremacist.

Further Complications

This traffic between church and state brings up objections from two opposite poles. People who are afraid of religion tainting politics wonder why even a generic faith, much less a particular sort such as Judaism or Christianity, has to come into the picture at all. The answer is twofold. First, biblical religion has deeply saturated American culture, infusing the language of the nation’s better hopes and aims. Yet the values of the Bible’s prophetic tradition, as leaders like Lincoln showed, are universal enough to offer a positive frame of reference for life together without succumbing to charges of religious privilege. Second, the other possible sources of a common language—the law and the marketplace—lack emotional vitality, or any kind of elevated aims, or both. It is lived religious tradition, woven through centuries of experience and memory, that can move people in their hearts and souls, and it is only something nobler than legalese or the bottom line that can inspire a common life worth living for.

But the matter of emotional vitality raises worries in the other camp, those who fear the corruption of the state on the church. After all, Jesus himself warned that “the road that leads to life” is narrow and found by only a few (Matt. 7:14). Why confuse or tempt the faithful with the glitter of national glory? The nation already has enormous propaganda powers in official state agencies but also in corporate commerce, athletic ceremonies, and the like. With Super Bowl Sunday being the nation’s real High Holy Day and Disney World its top pilgrimage site, American Christians need

to gather all the powers of resistance they can to the cultural blandishments around them. Adding patriotic religion into the mix is a fatal step too far.


Then there’s the problem of theological clarity and integrity. American civil religion borrows Christian language (e.g., the Redeemer Nation, the cause of righteousness), but it does not—it cannot—bear the whole body of doctrine that defines Christian teaching on these matters: That Jesus is the Redeemer. That doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God is the full sum of righteousness. That the kingdom of heaven will number “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev. 7:9)—not just Americans (or Canadians or Nigerians or Koreans).

Finally, say the religious objectors, the language of sacred things is potent and precious and must be used exactly. Using it loosely to speak of or to a nation rather than of or to the church is to court danger and profanation. Look at the sainted Lincoln himself. In his annual message to Congress on Dec. 1, 1862, he forecast the Emancipation Proclamation to come one month later, saying: “In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free.” Upon that decision “we shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth”—namely, the American union. “The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just—a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless.”

By Christian teaching, there is something profoundly wrong in Lincoln’s words. The “last best hope of earth” is not the United States or any other nation. It is God working through the church as it lives out the message of Christ, being ever purified by the Holy Spirit. There is also a real question about Lincoln’s last phrase. *Must* “God forever bless” a particular political project? No. But the testimony of both the Old Testament and the New is that God wants slaves to be set free, and not just in a spiritual sense. God must indeed applaud the abolition

of slavery of every sort and in any place. And a nation that undertakes that liberation for 15 percent of its population, as the U.S. did by the Civil War’s end, is to be accounted blessed, especially if—unlike the U.S. over the next hundred years—it follows through consistently on that act.

Wise as Serpents, Harmless as Doves

Let’s conclude with some other words of Jesus. In the King James Version of the Bible, the one familiar to Lincoln, Jesus sent out the 12 disciples with these words: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16). To bear out our faith in public life and policy with neighbors who do not all share our religious convictions is to walk a minefield. Yet walk it we must, for to stay home is a political commitment too. Discernment is of the essence. We keep our first loyalty clear: to seek the kingdom of God and *its* righteousness. We appreciate the secondary loyalties into which we’ve been born or which we have acquired: family, country, occupation, recreation. When the loyalties overlap, we give thanks. When they conflict, we bear witness, always attending to the Word and to the Christian community around the world. Thus may we be light and leaven. 



James Bratt is professor of history emeritus at Calvin College. His specialty is American religious history, especially in its interaction with politics. He’s a member of Eastern Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the phrase “civil religion”? Why?
2. Can you name examples of when love of country, which is good, becomes distorted into idolatry?
3. How do we know whether we are truly seeking to be on God’s side . . .

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

Candidates 2019: Anonymous?

Together with their pastors, all communities of faith pick up the towel of the servant and even welcome anonymity in order for the name of Christ to be lifted up.

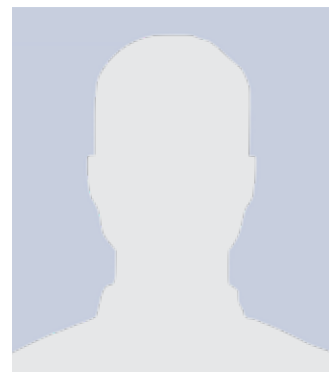


David Koll is director of candidacy for the Christian Reformed Church.


ON THE NEXT FEW PAGES you will find the names and photos of persons approved as candidates for Minister of the Word by Synod 2019. One striking feature—a first in recent years and perhaps ever—is that some of the candidates have requested public anonymity. That’s because they have been and will continue to be involved in ministry where the security of those to whom they minister requires that their names and photos not be made public. Being anonymous as an ordained pastor will also enhance their ability to go into and out of closed countries as a public citizen.

The request has made me consider one of the primary qualifications of all who are called to ordained pastoral ministry: humble service. If a pastor enters ministry motivated by a love for the spotlight and an expectation of personal gratification through public recognition, his or her potential for effective ministry is truly threatened. Consider these words of Jesus: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43-45).

These are great words of challenge for those approved as candidates for ministry. They are also great words of challenge for all of us as disciples of Jesus. Together with their pastors, all communities of faith pick up the towel of the servant and even welcome anonymity in order for the name of Christ to be lifted up. Yes, we surely encourage one another, and these approved candidates will rightly be blessed with a lot of encouragement. Perhaps in some cases our



encouragement may need to come in the form of helping one another accept anonymity with grace and joy. Many of those who read these words have quietly and humbly encouraged these candidates through the candidacy process. May we move into the future with the combined goal of anonymously lifting the name of Jesus until he comes again.

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

CANDIDATES



Joel S. Altena



Israel Alvarado



Ram S. Aryal



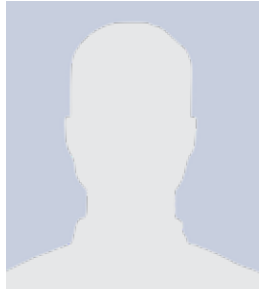
Seth Atsma



Jonathan Bosma



Christopher L. Bouma



J.D.C.



Luke Carrig



John Cleveringa



Jason Douglas Crossen



Zack DeBruyne



Cara DeHaan



Christopher Ganski



Daniel J Gregory, Sr.



Nathan Groenewold



Aaron Gunsaulus



John Kyu Hahn



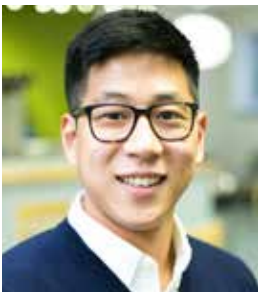
Cris Harper



Libby Huizenga



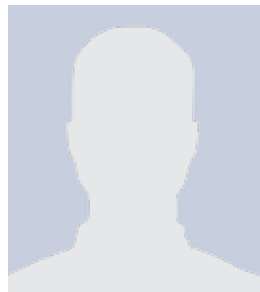
Mark A Janowski II



Daniel Joo



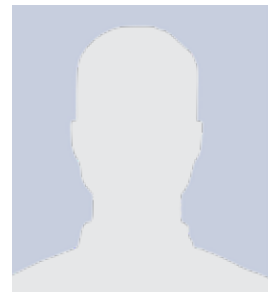
Seok Won Jung



S.K.

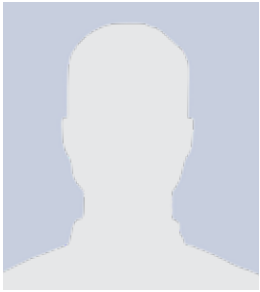


Kiseok Kang



C.L.

CANDIDATES



L.L.



Aaron Mamuyac



Timothy J. McHugh



Matthew Mulder



Shawn Richardson



Kyle J. Sandison



Garrett Saul



Terence Schilstra



Mitchell Sheahan



Hilary Smith



Loretta Stadt



Jaleesa Stanford



Brad Stolman



Kathy Vana



Klaas Walhout



Chad Werkhoven

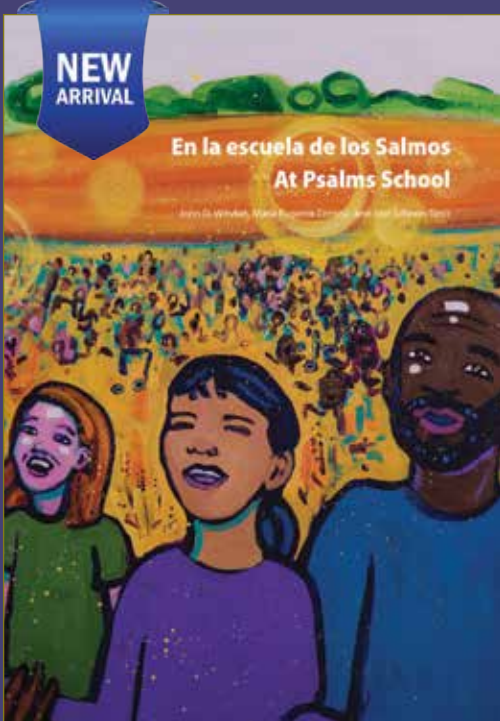


William R. Whitt

CALVIN INSTITUTE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

for the study and renewal of worship

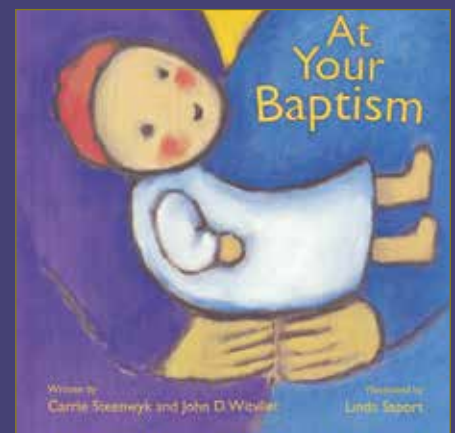
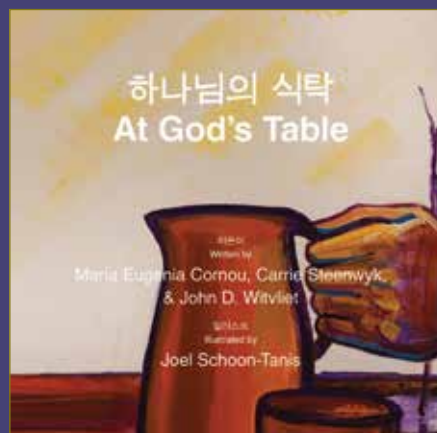
FORMING CHRISTIAN WORSHIPERS



En la escuela de los salmos / At Psalms School is a new bilingual children's book on the psalms.

Psalms is a prayer book that we find in the middle of the Bible. Reading Psalms is kind of like going to school. The psalms teach us how to listen to and talk with God in worship, at church, and every day. What do we learn at Psalms School? Let's read and find out!

Salmos es un libro de oraciones que se encuentra en la mitad de la Biblia. Leer los Salmos es como ir a la escuela. Ellos nos enseñan a escuchar y a hablar con Dios cuando le adoramos en la iglesia y en la vida diaria. ¿Qué aprendemos en la escuela de los Salmos? ¡Leamos y descubrámoslo!



Swimming in Swamps

THIS SUMMER you might enjoy swimming in your neighborhood pool or in a lake. But it's not a good idea to go swimming in a swamp! The dark, muddy waters of a swamp are not the best place for people to swim. But it is home for hundreds of creatures who love swimming in swamps.

A swamp is a type of wetland that is . . . well, wet! Swamps are shallow ponds found in forests with lots of trees. There are two kinds: freshwater swamps and saltwater swamps. Freshwater swamps form near large lakes and streams. They can also form when there is lots of rain. Saltwater swamps can be found near the ocean, which makes the swamp water salty.

The world's largest swamp is in Brazil. It is called the Pantanal. It covers more than 60,000 square miles of wetland. That's larger than the country of England! This huge swamp is home to around 3,500 varieties of plants, 656 kinds of birds, 325 species of fish, 159 types of mammals, 53 kinds of frogs, and 98 reptile species!

Swamp Critters

American Alligators: These huge reptiles can grow as long as 11 feet (3.3 meters) and can weigh up to 1,000 pounds (453.6 kilograms)! American alligators live in swamps in the Southeastern United States.

Redbelly Water Snakes: These snakes are mostly brown but have pale-red bellies. They eat mostly frogs, toads, and salamanders. They can grow up to 5 feet (1.5 meters) long.

Northern Cricket Frogs: With dark spots of brown, green, and grey, Northern cricket frogs live in swamps around North America and eat small bugs and mosquitoes. They can

jump up to three feet (1 meter) in a single jump!

Make Your Own Swamp!

Want to make your own swamp? Here's what you'll need:

- » 2 packages of lime-flavored gelatin (or use unflavored gelatin and add green food coloring)
- » Toy swamp critters (plastic frogs, snakes, and bugs)
- » Large, shallow plastic container

With an adult's help, follow the directions on the gelatin package and put the gelatin in the refrigerator. Let it chill for at least three hours or until it's set.

Add your swamp creatures and enjoy your swamp!

All Creatures Great and Small

If you have a chance to visit a swamp this summer, be sure to give thanks to our creator God for making great places like swamps for creatures to live! If you have a notebook or a piece of paper, write down this prayer from Psalm 104:24: "How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures." How many creatures can you find in the swamp? **B**



Christin Baker is a full-time stay-at-home mom who also writes for Faith Alive. She is a member of Resurrection Fellowship Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

The Transportive Power of Audiobooks

IT WAS 2011, and my family and I were stranded on a desolate stretch of Colorado prairie, waiting for the second time that trip for a tow truck to pick up our lemon of a minivan and haul it to be fixed. I burst into frustrated tears as my children literally played with locusts by the side of the road. (The locusts made our trials seem biblical in scope.) But one thing made our travel challenges bearable: listening to *Okay for Now*, one of Gary Schmidt's fantastic young adult novels, on audiobook. Among breakdowns, tow trucks, and locusts, from Michigan to Colorado and back again, we listened and were transported from our troubles.

Fueled by the omnipresence of handheld devices, the popularity of audiobooks is surging. Previously, buying (or borrowing) an audiobook meant being chained to your CD player, but now you can go anywhere and listen to a book (or poetry, Scripture, audio dramas, and podcasts).

As many hit the open road this summer, audiobooks could be the ultimate family bonding agent, the charm for getting everybody and their devices on the same page. With or without kids, listening to a story is just a wonderful thing to do.

Looking for something to listen to this summer? You'll fall headphones over heels for one of these fresh listens:

Rayne & Delilah's Midnite Matinee, by Jeff Zentner. Narrated by Sophie Amoss and Phoebe Strole. Listening Library. Run time: 10 hours, 20 minutes

A young-adult novel about two high school seniors who host a campy creature-feature show called *Midnite Matinee* on the local cable station. (See our review online: bit.ly/2Xo7hMM)

Gmorning, Gnight! Little Pep Talks for Me & You, written and narrated by Lin-Manuel Miranda. Headline Publishing Group. Run time: 46 minutes

A short collection of the *Hamilton* creator's most optimistic tweet-length pep talks.

Anne of Green Gables, by Lucy Maud Montgomery. Narrated by Rachel McAdams. Audible Studios. Run time: 9 hours, 22 minutes.

Heartwarming and surprisingly funny, this Canadian classic is revisited with McAdams' sprightly narration.

Lincoln in the Bardo, by George Saunders. Narrated by Nick Offerman, David Sedaris, George Saunders, Carrie Brownstein, Miranda July, Lena Dunham, et al. Random House Audio. Run time: 7 hours, 25 minutes.

Written by George Saunders, a favorite of Calvin College's Festival of Faith and Writing, this critically acclaimed novel about Lincoln's grief has an all-star cast of narrators.

The Watsons Go to Birmingham, by Christopher Paul Curtis. Narrated by LeVar Burton. Listening Library. Run time: 4 hours, 54 minutes.

LeVar Burton shines at highlighting the funny and the tragic in this modern classic about a family from Flint, Mich., who travel to a racially explosive South.


Unashamed, written and narrated by Lecrae Moore. christianaudio.com. Run time: 5 hours, 30 minutes.

The two-time Grammy-winning rap artist shares lessons learned through deep adversity and an unwavering faith in Jesus.

The Hiding Place, by Corrie ten Boom. Narrated by Bernadette Dunne. christianaudio.com. Run time: 9 hours, 30 minutes.

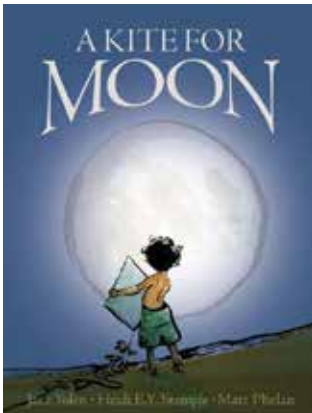
The classic memoir with deft new narration.

The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery, by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile, narrated by Ian Morgan Cron. christianaudio.com. Run time: 9 hours, 17 minutes.

A practical, wide-ranging way of understanding Enneagram wisdom and exploring its connections with Christianity. 



A native of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Lorilee Craker is the Mixed Media editor of *The Banner* and a member of Madison Square CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.



A Kite for Moon

by Jane Yolen and
Heidi E.Y. Stemple,
illustrated by
Matt Phelan

reviewed by Sonya
Vanderveen Feddema

As a young boy flies his kite on a beach, he looks up and notices that Moon is sad. He runs along the beach, trying to get closer so he can give Moon a hug. But it's impossible. Moon is too far away. Undaunted, the boy launches his kite up and away, hoping it will reach Moon. In the days ahead, he sends more kites. Some fall to the ground; others disappear into the sky. As the years pass, Moon waxes and wanes, worries about peace on the earth, and watches the boy grow up. Illustrator Matt Phelan's tender paintings complement mother-daughter authors Jane Yolen and Heidi E.Y. Stemple's charming tale of a boy who fulfills his childhood aspiration. (Zonderkidz)



The Nickel Boys

by Colson Whitehead

reviewed by Kristy Quist

When idealistic achiever and fledgling civil rights activist Elwood Curtis hitchhikes to his first college class in the early 1960s, the car that picks him up turns out to be stolen, and in a moment, all his dreams for the future are shot. He is sent to Nickel Academy and discovers the heinous realities of being a person of color there. Alternating passages narrate Elwood's life as an adult trying to come to terms with his traumatic youth. Based on a real-life Florida reform school, Whitehead's novel outlines the many ways Jim Crow laws made it almost impossible for African Americans to succeed. Savage behavior and profanity plus history and gripping prose make this short novel a devastating but worthwhile read. (Doubleday)



Mood

by Social Club Misfits

reviewed by Matthew Cooke

The new five-track EP *Mood* from Social Club Misfits feels like an emotional roller-coaster by design. The South Florida rap duo of Marty Mar and Fern tracks the feelings surrounding their recent taste of success and asks: Do we trust God through every mood? Ultimately, *Mood* aims to share the promise of God's perseverance through all the ups and downs. In the songs "Everything" and "Up," the rappers take us flying high. Even in moments of confidence, the pair yearns to stay grounded and dependent on God. The worshipful final cut, "So Our God Came to Us," featuring Jung Youth, welcomes us into the full scope of emotional valleys. Wherever God may lead the listener, *Mood* is worth the trip. (Capital Christian Music Group)



Les Misérables

reviewed by Lorilee Craker

As a fan of *Les Mis*, the musical, I wondered how a song-free six-hour miniseries would go. Plenty of terrible things happen, yet a golden thread of redemptive hope runs throughout. Viewers lean in for one of the most deeply Christian scenes in all of literature: Valjean (Dominic West) finds post-incarceration rescue and shelter in the home of a bishop whose mercy sets him on the path to redemption. Standouts include West, Lily Collins as a harrowing Fantine, David Owelowo as the seething Inspector Javert, and Erin Kellyman, whose raw, tender Eponine should win an Emmy. Themes of human rights, poverty, sacrificial love, and spiritual awakening and redemption simmer throughout the series, making it ideal fodder for personal reflection or even group discussion. (BBC/PBS)

The Lowdown

Formative Words: *Shades of Light*, a spiritual formation novel from *Sensible Shoes* author Sharon Garlough Brown, will be released Aug. 8. (InterVarsity)

Spidey Swings Again: *Spider-Man: Far From Home* picks up after the events of *Avengers: Endgame*, swinging into theaters July 2. (Marvel)

Monster Show: For fans of the Netflix megahit *Stranger Things*, the long wait is over July 4 as the show's third season drops in all its gory glory. (Netflix)



A New Normal of Bivocational Ministry

By Cassie Westrate, Resonate Global Mission

An increasing number of Christian Reformed Church pastors are bivocational—they work another job in addition to pastoring. For many, this second job is a way to pay bills. For others, their work outside of their congregation is a crucial component of their ministry.

“Pastors embody Christ, they share God’s love with conviction and with reverence, and they usher you into the space before God,” said Sam DeJong McCarron, a ministry vocational consultant for the CRC’s Pastor Church Resources. “That can be in a hospital room, in a Starbucks or in a grocery store. I think the biggest challenge is that it’s not just on Sunday morning.”

About 45% of church planters associated with Resonate Global Mission, the mission agency of the CRC, work an additional job outside of their church. While working another job can be demanding on a pastor, it can also be rewarding for them and their church. Many classes and churches seeking to plant a church are discovering that bivocational pastors are a good fit, not a limitation. Resonate church planters have also found that bivocational ministry can be an answer to challenging questions on how churches can grow and bring a robust gospel to their communities.

How do you sustain a church financially?

“Church planting is hard. It’s even harder if you’re trying to reach those outside of the church,” said Joe Paravisini, a software engineer and pastor of The Neighborhood in Providence, R.I.

Many people in the community have little or no understanding of what it means to follow Jesus and be part of a church family, Paravisini noted, and many families in his church plant’s neighborhood also struggle financially.

“Less than half of the households have both parents around, with a majority being single working mothers of several children,” he said. “Planting a church here means understanding that the local giving will always be a struggle, so finding ways to supplement that is important.”

Paravisini’s career as a software engineer supports his family. That means funds given toward the church plant can be directed to other aspects of its ministry. “I can afford to

Karlos Palacios is a university professor and the pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Reformada Comunidad de Fe Poinciana in Florida.

slow down and walk with people on God’s time since there is no ticking clock on a budget running out,” he said.

But it’s more than finances that keep Paravisini bivocational in this season. He cherishes his software engineer job for the people he’s met and the relationships he’s formed with his coworkers and clients.

How do you engage the community?

“Identifying to people outside the church as a pastor can put people’s guard up,” said John Vanderstoep, pastor of The Bridge, a church planted with Resonate’s support in Fergus, Ont. He’s also a real estate agent.

“There are so many people who are just very guarded about Christianity for a host of reasons,” said Vanderstoep. He said they may have been hurt by the church or they may have found Christians to be judgmental or close-minded.

“When I’m not first a pastor to people but a Realtor, then that helps them to be a little more relaxed,” said Vanderstoep.

He recently officiated a wedding for a couple—she had been raised in the church, but her partner had not. “He wasn’t interested in the church,” said Vanderstoep, “but they asked me if I could do the wedding, and I did.”

Now, the couple is working with him to find a house.

“I see a curiosity he has about Jesus,” said Vanderstoep. “He might not invite me to regularly meet with him as a pastor, but as a Realtor, I’m meeting with him regularly. Sometimes, our conversations move over to some of his curiosities ... because (he’s working with me,) it gives him space to be in conversation with me without him feeling like he’s going to a pastor. You never know how God is going to set up relationships.”

How do you raise up leaders in a congregation?

“There are people stepping ahead all the time,” said Pastor Karlos Palacios, a university professor and pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Reformada Comunidad de Fe Poinciana in Poinciana, Fla. “They’re not waiting for the pastor to tell them what they have to do.”

Palacios trusts that God did not send him to plant a church alone, but sent many believers to work alongside him. When a need arises while Palacios is busy working outside of the church, he said it’s not a problem because someone from the church is ready to assist. He’s thankful for the members who



Through her various roles, Mirtha Villafane works to raise up ministry leaders to empower the Latino community.

commit to pray for the church, help with administration, feed people living on the streets, visit people in the hospital, and empower the church's young people to serve.

"I was very intentional finding those gifts in them and meeting with them," he said. "I taught them what it means to be the church and encouraged them to serve God's kingdom with their gifts and talents."

How do you bring the gospel to the church's community?

"Church is not only on Sundays or in the church building," said Mirtha Villafane, pastor of Latino American CRC in Anaheim, Calif. As the Hispanic ministry developer for Classis Greater Los Angeles and a local mission leader for Resonate, Villafane is involved in many roles dedicated to seeing the Latino community in Southern California thrive.

"All my jobs are interconnected," she said. "I love to do this. That's one of the reasons I wear hat and hat and hat. . . . I want to see results."

One of Villafane's focuses is training and equipping leaders. She works closely with a leadership team at Latino American CRC to oversee the church's ministry. She said her other roles connect her with many resources that are helpful to her church members and enable creativity in their shared ministry.

"I'd like to see many people in ministry and changing the Latino community," she said. "That's a dream."

What are the challenges moving forward?

"I am limited in how many conferences I can attend, how many meetings I can participate in or hold, how much reading and prep work I can do," said Paravisini. "There is not enough time, and some of the best hours of the day are given to my place of employment. It is exhausting to work at two jobs with the same level of passion and energy."

"Ministry jobs are never half time," said DeJong McCarron. "No matter what, it's living inside you and in your person. We're all called to live out our identity in Christ where God calls us."

Resonate strives to support bivocational church planters wherever they are called—not just with funding for a building and Sunday worship, but also with coaching and training opportunities for pastors. But supporting bivocational church planters is an ongoing conversation within Resonate and the denomination.



John Vanderstoep's job as a real estate agent provides opportunities to connect with people in his community.

"I think the issue is one of expectation," said Kevin Schutte, who leads Resonate's church-planting initiative. "Bivocational church planters still have the expectation of a full-time church planter—both their own expectations and the expectation of the [denomination]. I think we need to have honest conversations with our [pastors] about what their expectations are so everybody at the table understands the process and expectation." ^B

*Not her real name

—Resonate Global Mission is the mission agency of the CRC.

Rehoboth Choir Members to Help Lead Worship at Inspire 2019

ON THE TOUR OF HOPE they took in April 2018, members of the Rehoboth (N. Mex.) High School Choir volunteered to help rebuild homes damaged by Hurricane Harvey in Texas.

While there, they performed concerts—mostly at churches, but also at a Port Arthur firehouse for firefighters who were among the first to respond to the hurricane that hit in August 2017 and left almost the entire city of 54,000 underwater for several days.

“We sang for people who were having a hard time and tried to give them hope they can get by putting their trust in Jesus Christ,” said Pete Garcia, one of the choir’s 60 members. “I love being in the choir and with people who have the same passion as me and want to sing about God’s strength.”

Along with another current choir member and two alumni, Garcia will have the chance to once again sing about the power of the Lord at Inspire 2019, the Christian Reformed Church gathering of ministry leaders and volunteers taking place Aug. 1-3 at St. Clair College Centre for the Arts in Windsor, Ont.

“It is a huge honor for members of our choir, coming from a community tucked away in New Mexico, to be on a national stage like this,” said Gail DeYoung, codirector of the choir who will help musician and pastor Jeremy Simpson lead worship at Inspire 2019.

Reflecting the choir’s repertoire, DeYoung added, music at Inspire will incorporate numerous musical styles including traditional, sacred, contemporary, and gospel. Garcia will perform a song in Navajo, his native language.



The Rehoboth Choir has toured nationally and internationally in places such as Michigan, Canada, Germany, California, Washington, Iowa, Illinois, Louisiana, Texas and Colorado. Several current and alumni members will help lead worship at Inspire 2019.

“Hopefully the whole picture of worship at Inspire will be to present the beauty of God,” De Young said. “There is a spirit that comes when we come together in praise.”

Elizabeth Howard, a current choir member, also will be part of the praise team. Like Garcia, she lives outside Gallup in the community of Tohatchi. Her years in the choir have been very important for her and helped her win a music scholarship to attend Eastern New Mexico University this fall.

A highlight of Howard’s time in the choir came about a year ago when they sang for and with students at West Side Christian School in Chicago. “We started out all nice and proper,” Howard said, “but when we really got going, the kids jumped out of their chairs and we started dancing.”

Looking ahead to Inspire, she said she hopes times of worship can ignite some of that same energy.

Jonathan Lynch is excited to be part of the Inspire 2019 praise team. He hopes the Holy Spirit will be at work in the worship to help open hearts and minds to things being shared by the plenary speakers and during the breakout sessions.

“I am so thankful that we are being given the opportunity to facilitate worship, but more importantly to hear from the word of God,” Lynch said. “I pray that every single person attending gives thanks for that opportunity alone, and I look forward to worshipping with everyone.”

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

The View from Here

Becoming a Denomination of Support for Bivocational Pastors

IT HAPPENS TO ME QUITE OFTEN:

Someone asks whether I've pastored a church, and I start by saying, "No. Before I stepped into this role with the CRC, I was a college president." That usually leads to more questions, and soon I've laid out my unusual vocational journey: special education teaching principal, pediatric psychologist, college administrator and professor, college president, and then executive director of the CRCNA.

For some of us, God's calling comes with a singular focus in a clear and unmistakable way for a lifetime. But that isn't always the case. You've probably heard a statistic that the average person has seven different jobs in his or her lifetime. I'm getting close to hitting the average!

And it is not just the number of jobs a person holds that can vary. It seems there are new types of jobs and new ways of working everywhere. Some people work at home for a company half a continent away. Some work part-time or flexible schedules in order to make time for family or passions. And some pastors are called to simultaneously pastor a church while also working in an additional endeavor. Some call these pastors, "bivocational."

Synod discussed bivocational pastors earlier this summer. While the number of congregations in the CRC remains fairly consistent, the average size of those congregations is decreasing. This means we have more small congregations than before. For example, the number of congregations with fewer than 100 adult professing

"Although the bivocational pastor has two incomes, he is fully the pastor of the church and should not be considered 'part-time.'"

members has increased from 40% to 45% of our churches in the past seven years, making it challenging for some congregations to support a full-time pastor.

That's just one of the many factors leading some congregations to consider having a bivocational pastor. Some ministers prefer this dual-focused role; they find their "other job" is an opportunity for evangelism, connecting to the real world, or a better use of their varied set of gifts.

The task of being a bivocational pastor, however, is not as simple as dividing one's work in two. As CRC bivocational pastor Jose Rayas once reported, "Although the bivocational pastor has two incomes, he is fully the pastor of the church and should not be considered 'part-time.' He is to tend all the pastoral duties of the church."

I resonate with Rev. Rayas' comments. I've been a member of larger churches and smaller churches, but the many tasks of ministry seemed to me, in all

of these settings, neverending. Yet, the trend of bivocational pastors is one we must face. I have three suggestions:

First, we need to learn from those denominations and traditions that have long relied upon bivocational pastorates. Many ethnic minority communities, for example, can help us understand how the expectations of congregants can best be aligned with those of a pastor whose service is divided.

Second, we need to erase a bias that isn't always spoken but is often felt: that a congregation with a bivocational pastor is failing to meet a standard of worthwhile ministry. This simply isn't true. Look at the many examples of tent-making ministry in the New Testament.

Third, let's be supportive of synod's action to set up a task force in order to look more carefully at bivocational ministry. Let's trust the Spirit will guide the task force so we can welcome a model of ministry that will certainly be with us in the years ahead.



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

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

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

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

A Faith Across Generations

BACK IN 1980, Lori Persenaire lay in the hospital where she would soon pass away. She was only 20 years old, but cancer had ravaged her body. Still, Lori offered some encouraging advice for the patient on the other side of her room's dividing curtain.

"Lilian, I can't see you, but I know you're there," she said. "I don't know if you love the Lord, but you can get through this so much better if you do."

Lori shared this message with as many people as she could. Her demonstration of unyielding faith while living with cancer left an impression on nearly every person she met or who heard about her, including Rev. Joel Nederhood of the *Back to God Hour* radio program.

"When Rev. Nederhood called me, it took me off guard," says Lois Persenaire, Lori's mother. "We had always listened to the *Back to God Hour*, so I knew his voice, but I wasn't expecting him to call."

Nederhood, who hosted *Back to God Hour* from 1966 to 1996, was preparing an Easter message, and he saw Lori's story—a story of victory in the face of death—as a way to celebrate Christ's resurrection with listeners in North America and around the world.

Soon after Lori's story aired, Lois and her husband, Phil, received letters from across North America, and because the message was translated on some international *Back to God Hour* programs, they also heard from people overseas.

"We would never have believed that the Lord could use Lori's story in so many ways," said Lois. "But we're thankful that we had her and the Lord has used her like that, and that Back to God Ministries could share it even further."



Phil and Lois Persenaire try to use every opportunity to share God's Word.

Still today, Phil and Lois listen to *Groundwork*, a radio program that's a reformatting of *Back to God Hour*.

They also share copies of the 1981 recording of Lori's story with friends and others they meet as a means of sharing the gospel.

Recently, Phil has been experiencing early signs of dementia. Just as Lori did, he has used this as an opportunity to share a message of hope, offering his doctor one of his CDs with Lori's recorded story.

"Sometimes you wonder why Lori was taken so young," Phil said, adding that God has been able to use this tragic loss "for this work of spreading God's Word."

—Brian Clark,
Back to God Ministries International



Lori Persenaire's faith while living with cancer gave hope to many.

Helping Seniors Improve Balance and Enjoy Community

“WE FEEL CALLED TO IMPROVE the health of the community by helping improve their balance,” said Steve Vanderkamp, clinic director at Calvin College Rehabilitation Services. “In doing so, we hope individuals will be more inclined to get back into their communities, spend time with family, and attend church activities.”

Calvin College Rehabilitation Services, in partnership with the United Methodist Church and the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan, is providing balance screenings and classes to improve balance and reduce the risk of falls for people over 60.

“We are trying to reach individuals from all types of settings,” Vanderkamp said. “We are doing everything we can to make this class very accessible.”

Part of this includes offering the classes at no cost to the community thanks to a grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund.

Throughout the class—taught in two-hour sessions over eight weeks—participants hear from health professionals on topics related to balance, such as cognitive changes, loss of hearing, medication, and anxiety.

“These classes help keep my mind alert and help me get around better,” said Edna Williams, a 74-year-old retired social worker.

Last winter, Williams had a major fall. Though she did not sustain any permanent injuries, she admitted that the incident made her less confident.

“After the fall, I felt like I couldn’t do the things that came easily to me before,” she said. “But after six weeks in this class, I’m much more confident in my walking, standing, and going up stairs.



I may not be able to do everything I used to, but I am very confident in what I can do.”

Williams said the class has made her more excited to get back out into her community, something she has always enjoyed doing. “I am now much more aware of myself and the people around me.”

As the second year of offering this class comes to a close, preliminary results are very encouraging, Vanderkamp said. In surveys sent 10 weeks and then six months after the class, most participants had shown improvements in their fall risk as well as in their confidence levels.

With the Michigan Health Endowment Fund’s two-year grant period coming to an end, Vanderkamp and others

Calvin College Rehabilitation Services help people regain confidence through classes in balance and movement.

hope to continue the class by seeking support from other local partners.

If you are interested in attending a fall-prevention class or in scheduling a free health assessment, email rehab@calvin.edu.

—Hannah Ebeling,
Calvin College

Evangelism is Relational

“EVANGELISM IS RELATIONAL!”

This was the resounding phrase of the Go and Tell Evangelism Seminar earlier this year at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Founded in 2013 by Pastor Jim Halstead of Community CRC (Fort Wayne, Ind.), Go and Tell was endorsed by Synod 2018 as a recommended resource for church outreach and evangelism.

“We’ve grown in the past for two reasons: procreation and immigration,” Halstead says. “But God’s called us to evangelization, and it’s the church sharing the gospel with the people God has placed in their lives. God wants to use us, and God will prepare people to bring to us.”

The three-hour seminar opened with Halstead’s evangelistic conversion: at 17 years old, a Fellowship of Christian Athletes coach shared the gospel with him, and he became a Christian.

Halstead immediately began sharing Jesus with friends, family, and strangers, and many responded to him.

Structured around the themes of sin, salvation, and service, Go and Tell includes teachings on the Heidelberg Catechism as foundational principles for Reformed evangelism.

Building on this, attendees learned various evangelistic approaches and practiced with one another in groups.

Halstead emphasized prayer as the prerequisite to evangelism, encouraging participants to pray daily for five people within their social circles who did not know Christ.

“Those who pray for the salvation, by name, of others are those who will share the gospel.”



Pastor Jim Halstead facilitates Go and Tell Evangelism Seminars to encourage churches in outreach, prayer, and evangelism.

Grounded in Reformed theology, Go and Tell reiterated the importance of trusting the Holy Spirit to bring people to Christ, reminding attendees that the responsibility of salvation belongs to God.

“Who opens hearts? The Holy Spirit,” Halstead said. “If I share the gospel and they don’t accept it, that’s not on me. I can’t convict them, and God doesn’t expect me to do that. God expects me to love my neighbor and to tell them about Jesus. God only asks us to be faithful to share about him.”

The Go and Tell Evangelism Seminar can be found free online at declarethegospel.com.

—Christi Anne Zeiger,
Calvin Seminary

DEADLINES: 8/5/19 for September; 9/2/19 for October Subject to availability. Details online.

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

PRICES: Most ads are \$0.41^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.34^{US} per character and \$50 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

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

General

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CANDIDACY

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

Church Anniversary

50TH CHURCH ANNIVERSARY

CROSSPOINT CHURCH in Chino, California, formerly known as Calvary Christian Reformed Church, invites you to join our 50th Anniversary Celebration activities on October 19 & 20. For more information and to RSVP, visit www.crosspointchino.org/anniversary

Birthdays

BIRTHDAY 104

FRANCES J. WORST July 7 marks birthday 104 for Frances. Celebrating with her are John, Jim, Steve and Mary, many other family members and friends. Cards may be sent to Christian Rest home, 1000 Edison NW, Grand Rapids, 49504.

100TH BIRTHDAY

HERMAN SCHUTT of Sheldon Meadows Living Center in Hudsonville, MI celebrated his 100th birthday on June 18, 2019 with family and friends. Phil and Muriel Bouman, Mike and Lenore Klunder, Nick and Debbie Schutt along with grandchildren and great grandchildren praise God for his Christian walk and love for family. Thanks be to God for His abundant blessings.

BIRTHDAY 97

JOHN KOOY of Meadowgreens Retirement Community, 301 Homestead Blvd, Lynden, WA 98264, will celebrate 97 years on July 2. John and his wife Dena have 6 children and spouses, 13 grand children, and 3 great-grandchildren. Thank God for many blessings!

BIRTHDAY 95

DAVID BYRON ZYLSTRA of 2105 Raybrook SE, Apt. 2039, 49546 will celebrate his 95th birthday on July 15, 2019. His children, grandchildren and great grandchildren give thanks for a life well-lived.

BIRTHDAY 90

DOKTER, G. B. (PASTOR BERNIE) 90 yrs. old on July 27, 2019. Four generations five thanks

for God's goodness. Address: 2000 32nd ST. S.E. #445 Grand Rapids MI 49508

DOROTHY (WIGBOLDY) MIERSMA will celebrate her 90th birthday on July 18, 2019. Her children and grandchildren praise God for her life of faith, prayer, devotion to the gospel and love for her family. Thankful to God for His abundant blessings!! Her address is 1950 S. Mountain Ave., #1009, Ontario, Calif. 91762

HENRIETTA AND GEORGE TAMMINGA celebrate their 90th birthdays on May 24 and August 25, respectively. They are loved and cherished by their children and grandchildren, who have been blessed by their Godly example. Greetings can be sent to 344 Manor Hill Court Lombard, IL 60148

PAULINE COMPAGNER STROVEN of 281 Interlaken Ct Zeeland, Michigan 49464 has achieved her 90th birthday as of August 2, 2019! Her children Stuart Compagner, Amy and Jeff Basch, Ross and Julie Compagner, Dean and Lorie Compagner and Tyce and Patty Compagner along with 14 grandchildren, 19 great grandchildren will celebrate with a family picnic. Our family is grateful for her love and hard work that has meant so much to us in our lives.

Margaret (Marty) DePuyt Van Anandel of 3953 Milmar Way, Sacramento, California 95821, will celebrate her 90th Birthday on July 22, 2019. Children: Jim and Barb Hoogeboom, Linda Bowman, Rich and Virginia Van Anandel, Sharon and Bruce Pennell, Jim and Lucy Van Anandel; 12 grandchildren and 8 great grandchildren Proverbs 31:28-30

BIRTHDAY 80



MARGARET TE VELDE HOUTSMA Celebrates #80 on July 8. Born in Artesia, CA - eldest of Harm and Zwaantina te Velde. Her 6 children and 16 grandchildren say happy birthday!

Thanks for your kind, loving influence in our lives and how you share your trust in the Lord. Ps.23, Prov.31. Greetings can be sent: PO Box 1478 Syracuse KS 67878

Anniversary

75TH ANNIVERSARY

LEMMEN, Wayne and Helene, of 2885 10 Miles Rd, NE, Rockford, MI celebrated their 75th anniversary on June 24, 2019-5 children, 12 grandchildren, and 20 great-grandchildren. Great is thy faithfulness.

70TH ANNIVERSARY



KUIZEMA, Harold and Jessica (DeBoer) Kuizema celebrated their 70th anniversary on June 28. The celebration included a dinner at the Prince Center with their family. (2121 Raybrook Ave. Grand Rapids, MI 49546). Harold's family: Jean Rypma.

Jessica's family, Anne Dekkard, Julia Rinvelt (deceased), Clara Housekamp (deceased) Irene Kwantes and Dorothy Sheler. Children: Diane DeHaan (Mark), Ellen Thomasma (Norm), Carole Valk (Albert) and Joan Chee (Kock Seng). Grandchildren - 6. Great-grandchildren - 7. The family is grateful for the example of honoring God through generous hospitality, faithful prayers, acts of encouragement, a strong work ethic and devotion to children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and the Oakdale Park Church family.

POEL, Norm & Lu, 2121 Raybrook St., SE #152, G.R., MI 49546, will celebrate 70 yrs. of marriage on Aug.18. Their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren invite you to celebrate God's faithfulness with them Sat., Aug.10, 2-4 pm in the Raybrook Friendship Room.

65TH ANNIVERSARY

BAKKER Bob and Mary Ann of 481 Timberlake Dr., W., Holland, MI 49424 will celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary on July 16. Grateful to God for them and with them are their children Keith & Debbie Bakker (Dirk & Linda, Kent & Viki, Julia and Zach Veenstra), Bob & Lynda Bakker (Bob & Kristin, Tony & Bethany, Becky & Joe Schra), Patti & Jim Wallinga (Kimmy and Mike Eling, Krissy & Camren DeWaard, Jimmy) and 14 great-grandchildren. "The Lord has done great things and we are filled with joy." Ps.126 vs.3

VANDEN HOEK, Ken and Arlene were married on May 28th, 1954, in Woden, Iowa. Children Cliff and Linda Hoekstra, and John Vanden Hoek, along with their grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren are thankful for their Christian marriage. They live in Britt, IA, and attend Britt CRC. God's richest blessings!

60TH ANNIVERSARY

BOSMAN Ben and Lois will celebrate their 60th anniversary on July 24. Their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are so thankful for their example of a Christ centered marriage. We will be having an open

house for friends and family on July 20 from 1-4pmET at 10300 Gordon St Zeeland MI

MARTINIE, Gord & Betty thank God for 60 years of marriage on May 26. Celebrations included dinner with their three sons and their families and a cake reception after church on Sunday.

STEENSMA, James and Judith (Vonhof) are celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary on July 15th. Their 4 children and spouses, 8 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren will honor them at a family gathering in Grand Rapids on July 20.

50TH ANNIVERSARY

DEVRIES, Henry and Judy. The children of Hendrik and Judith (VanDam) DeVries joyfully announce their parents' 50th anniversary. Henry and Judy were married on June 6, 1969 in Kalamazoo, Michigan and have been blessed with 4 children and 9 grandchildren. Henry and Judy served the church as missionaries for 26 years in the Philippines and Guam. They also pastored churches in South Dakota, Illinois, and Michigan. After "retiring" they continue to serve their local church, lead weekly worship at Park Village Pines, and extensively volunteer in Kalamazoo. Congratulations Mom and Dad, Oma and Opa ~ we praise God for His faithfulness!

Obituaries

BUINING, Mary Jane Scheffers, Age 87, of Sun City, AZ. We praise God that Jesus took her by the hand and brought her to eternity May 15, 2019. She is survived by her husband, Rev. Rodger Buining. Her children: Vicki (Karl) Roelofs, Randy Buining, and Bonnie Buining. Her sister and brothers: Ruth Jepkema, Jake (June) Scheffers, and David (Carol) Scheffers. Her sister-in-law: Eleanor Vander Mey.

DE VRIES, Harold, age 89, of Peoria, IA passed away May 19, 2019. He is survived by Leona (nee Langstraat), his wife of 68 years, and his children: Harlan (Donna), Larry (Rosie), Dennis (Bev), Pat (Stan) Dykstra, Bryce, Wavern (Bev), Kevin, and Kimberly (Brian) Vander Berg; 19 grandchildren and 47 great-grandchildren; and siblings Syburn De Vries, Gertrude Visser, and Joyce Heynen.

ENGEL, Jake, of Ripon, CA, passed away peacefully at the age of 96 on June 1, 2019. Jake leaves behind his loving wife of almost 66 years, Frances Engel; his children Charlene Engel, Twyla Engel and Randy (Janet) Engel; his granddaughters Janelle (Greg) Mulder and Kelly Engel; his great-granddaughter Noelle Mulder; and his sister Corry Engel. "The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Deut. 33: 27.

GRIFFIOEN, Martheen Mae, age 87, Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on May 20, 2019. She is survived by her husband, Dr. Donald J. Griffioen; son Thomas (Sherril) Griffioen, daugh-

ter Cheryl (Trent) Chambliss; eleven grandchildren; 4 great grandchildren; brother Dr. Glen Geelhoed; sisters, Shirley (Arnie) Snoeyink and Mildred (Doug) Holtvulwer; brothers-in-law Roger (Margerite) Griffioen and Robert (Toni) Griffioen; sisters-in-law Jean (Herm) Kok and Eleanor (Peter) Kamstra.

KEIZER Carolyn, nee Boonstra, went to be with Our Lord on May 8th. 47 South 3rd Avenue, Lombard, IL 60148. Beloved wife of Robert "Bob" Keizer; loving mother of Diane (Dr. Nicholas) Vogelzang, Carrie Keizer, Catherine (Timothy) Vugteveen, and Robert M. Keizer; mother-in-law of the late J. Peter Meyer; devoted grandmother of Stephanie Meyer, Brendan Meyer, and the late Elizabeth Meyer, Madelyn, Colin, and Avery Jones, Abigail, Emma, and Chase Vugteveen, and Heather (Nick) Ursuy, and T. J. Keizer; great-grandmother of 2; fond sister of Alice (Ken) Lanenga and Beverly (Herman) Havinga; aunt of many nieces and nephews.

KREYKES, Coral Jean, age 87, of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on June 8, 2019. She was preceded in death by her husband, Donald; and is survived by her children, Cheryl and Michael Brandsen, Barbara and Robert De Vries, Jon and Michele Kreykes, James and Katrina Kreykes; 9 grandchildren; and 6 great-grandchildren.

KREYKES, Donald of Grand Rapids, MI, age 87, passed away on Sunday, May 12, 2019. He is survived by his wife, Coral; his children Cheryl and Michael Brandsen, Barbara and Robert De Vries, Jon and Michele Kreykes, James and Katrina Kreykes; nine grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

LIEN, Lawrence "Bud", 84, of San Jose, CA passed away Feb. 27, 2019 after a short illness. He is survived by his wife, Agnes (Koolstra), sons Jeff (Paige), Mike (Laura) and Ken; 5 granddaughters.

OLTHOFF, John Peter, age 94; Grand Rapids, MI; died May 13, 2019; preceded in death by his wife, Shirley and his son, Richard Olthoff (Michele); survived by children: John Robert Olthoff (Delores), Jacquelyn Ford, Marcia Olthoff and David Olthoff (Karen); nine grandchildren and many great grandchildren.

ROTTENBERG David, 92 of 5528 Chollos Sta. Rd, San Diego, CA. 92105, passed away on April 5, 2019. He is survived by his wife, Kathryn (Huizenga); sons David & Nancy, Michael & Joyce, Curtis & Susan; 8 grandchildren & 4 great-grandchildren.

SCHOONE-JONGEN, Herman, Jr., 73, of Grand Rapids, April 28, 2019. He is survived by children: Angie, Scott (Marcie); granddaughter: Alex; and siblings: Joyce, Jean Janecek, and Robert. Herm was raised in Prospect Park, N.J., served three years in the U.S. Air Force, attended Calvin College, and lived for many years in the Grand Rapids area.

Explore. Connect. Experience.



Grote Knip Beach, Curaçao

2019 GUIDED ITINERARIES:

GREECE & ITALY: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Sep 19 – Oct 1 | Pr. Bill & Lyn Vanden Bosch

PARIS GRAND OPERA TOUR

Oct 5 – 11 | Craig Fields

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS: ISRAEL & JORDAN

Oct 10 – 22 | Dr. Jeffrey A.D. Weima

2020 GUIDED ITINERARIES:

CARIBBEAN CRUISE WITH THE PANAMA CANAL

Jan 14 – 26 | Ellen & George Monsma

HIGHLIGHTS OF SOUTH AMERICA

Jan 17 – 30 | Bruce & Judy Buursma

IN THE LIGHT OF JESUS: PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

Mar 16 – 28 | Pr. Bill & Lyn Vanden Bosch

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS IN GREECE

Apr 2 – 14 | Dr. Jeffrey A.D. Weima

ITALIA: TREASURES OF SOUTHERN ITALY & SICILY

May 5 - 18 | Bruce & Judy Buursma

EUROPEAN HIGHLIGHTS

feat. Oberammergau Passion Play
Jul 11 – 24 | John Witte

SIGN UP TODAY!
www.wittetours.com/banner

witte
Travel & Tours
Grand Rapids, MI | 616.957.8113

Enter discount code "TCFTB" at registration to save 10%

SEPT
12-14
2019

Gather Practice Witness

a journey toward hope

The Colossian Forum Annual Conference

Featured Speakers



Dr. Ruth Haley Barton
Founding President/CEO,
Transforming Center



Dr. Bungishabaku Katho
Professor, Shalom
University of Bunia,
Democratic Republic
of Congo



Dr. Robert Chao Romero
Professor, Chicano/Latino
Studies, UCLA



Rev. Michael Gulker
President, The Colossian
Forum

Join a growing community of Christians who see conflict as an opportunity to display the reconciling power of the gospel in our polarized culture.

Register before Aug. 2 and save \$50!
For an additional 10% off, enter discount code "TCFTB" at registration.

colossianforum.org/conference



VAN LAAR Barbara (Hoeksema), age 75, of Grand Rapids, MI passed away peacefully and went to be with her Lord and Savior on May 27, 2019. She is survived by her husband John of almost 50 years, her

daughter Lynn (Jerry) Sytsma, 4 step-children, 15 grandchildren, 3 great grandchildren, brother Walter (Janice) Hoeksema, and 1 nephew and niece.

WIERSEMA Nellie (Scheurwater), age 96 of Kalamazoo MI, passed away June 4, 2019. Preceded in death by husband, Nicholas Wiersema. Survived by sisters Connie Scheurwater and Anne (August) Faber; nieces and nephew Karen (Bruce) Behrendt, Judith (David) Bareman, Gregory Faber; several grand and great-grand nieces and nephews.



YPMA, Rev. Benjamin, age 100 of Grandville, met his Lord and Savior on March 7, 2019. He was born on February 5, 1919, in Farmington, IA. He lived a full and joyful Christian life. He was preceded in death by his

first wife, Marjorie Greenfield of 54 years and his second wife, Ruth VanKoeveering of 12 years. He is survived by his daughters, Ruth DeHamer and husband Dan of Grandville, Mary Koster and husband Brad of Rochester Hills; his grandchildren, Alyssa Olson, Ben DeHamer, Ashley DeHamer, Ryan Koster, Lindsey Suszek, Kyle Koster, and eight great-grandchildren. Ben was raised in a farming community and drafted into the Army in 1941. He was stationed in Brisbane, Australia as a military police officer and bodyguard for General MacArthur. While serving his country in New Guinea, he was shipped home with a severe case of jungle rot to Walter Reed Hospital for one year. Ben then married his wife Marjorie in 1946 and entered Calvin College and Seminary where he completed degrees in general studies and Divinity in six and one-half years. Ben and Marge served as missionaries in India, Japan, and Korea for four years. He also served as the pastor of First Christian Reformed Church of Grand Haven, MI, and Bauer Christian Reformed Church until 1973. Ben was trained in pastoral counseling at Pine Rest until 1975. He then became a counselor at Koinonia Medical in Muskegon, MI until 1995. During that time Ben also worked as a probation officer, substance abuse counselor and bailiff for the Ottawa County Court. He served part-time at World Vision and Fruitport Reformed Church. In retirement, he enjoyed working in his son's tree nursery. In the words of Dr Vincent Peale, "How to Stay Alive All Your Life," thanks to his Lord and Savior whom he served with deepening gratitude, Ben never just existed, he stayed alive all his life. As Paul states in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have remained faithful."

ZWIERS, Jane Elizabeth (Hofstra), age 73, died May 4, 2019, in Grand Rapids, MI. Survived by three children Elizabeth (Kip) Horton, Jennifer (David) Van Dyke, Bill (Anita) Zwiers. Sister, Cynthia Abraham and brother-in-law, John Waanders. 6 grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her sister Judy Waanders and brother-in-law Thomas Abraham.

Church Positions Available

CHURCH RESOURCE AVAILABLE Is your church short on resources but growing in vision? Is wisdom brewing in the pew but having trouble gaining traction? Contact Allen Schipper MA., MDiv. to explore a unique part time/short term strategy. No guarantee other than a successful track record. Call 269-967-1690 or email schippea@gmail.com to begin the conversation.

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH & EDUCATION Faith CRC in Pella, IA, is seeking a Director of Youth and Education Ministries to oversee our growing youth programs and facilitate educational programming for K-12. The successful candidate must create opportunities and environments to reach and shepherd youth and partner with parents in guiding children toward a life-long relationship with Jesus Christ. Additional opportunities available depending upon the gifting and passion of the individual.

LEAD PASTOR - The Aylmer Christian Reformed Church of Aylmer, Ontario is seeking a full-time Lead Pastor following the retirement of our Pastor. 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 on the Portal.

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@cpccr.org.

LEAD PASTOR Modesto CRC in Modesto, CA is seeking a Lead Pastor for our church family. Please contact Jan Viss at 209-402-6716 or email at janiceviss@sbcglobal.net.

PASTOR Rimbey CRC, located in Central Alberta is seeking a full time pastor to lead us in our current vision of making more and better disciples and equipping them for service in Jesus Christ. Contact: Will Weenink 403.843.6867 or gutterguy3784@gmail.com.

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

PASTORAL OPPORTUNITY open at Second Church in the small but quickly growing town of Allendale, Michigan. We are searching and praying for our next Senior Pastor. We invite you to access our Church Profile for details of who we are as a church family at secondchurchallendale.org or to email Nels Johnston at nj38@gmail.com with more questions or to submit a resume. We look forward to hearing from you!

TEACHING PASTOR Rosewood CRC in Bellflower, CA, is seeking a fulltime Teaching Pastor who will preach, plan worship, provide pastoral care, and partner with a staff team. Essential: Cross-cultural experience and passion for outreach. Co-pastor position. Send resume to Governingboard@rosewoodchurch.com.

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

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

YOUTH DIRECTOR Pathway Church in St John, Indiana is seeking to hire a part-time Youth Director. For more information, visit www.pathwaycrc.org/YouthDirector.

YOUTH LEADER Hanley CRC, located in Grandville, MI, is seeking a part time high school youth leader starting this fall. We are a warm, supportive congregation who desires an energetic leader who has a heart for developing strong, caring relationships with our high school youth and has a passion for serving Christ. To request a job description, please contact Cari Wiersema at 616-813-0626 or kcwiersema@att.net

Employment

ESTATE PLANNING ATTORNEY Are you looking for a way to use your experience and expertise for immense good? Would you like to exchange your billable hour requirements for an opportunity to serve some of the most generous people in the world as they make their most significant charitable gifts? Barnabas Foundation is looking for a dedicated Christian attorney to join the foundation's charitable planning team.

You would serve individuals in Chicagoland and the central region of the U.S., and you would be based out of our Crete IL office near the border of Northwest Indiana.

Qualifications include a Juris Doctor degree with training/experience in the field of gift and estate taxation and estate planning. Familiarity with the field of charitable planned gifts and biblical stewardship principles is preferred.

Learn more www.BarnabasFoundation.com/careers

BOOKKEEPER / PAYROLL Concrete Company in Jenison, MI looking for a Bookkeeper with knowledge of Payroll, AP.AR. Full time, Benefits. e-mail resumes to shirley@tedmiedemaconcrete.com



Why Kuyper

Often prospective students and their parents ask our admission representatives a simple but powerful question—Why Kuyper? Here are some answers.

- **Ranked No. 6 Among the Top 10 Michigan Colleges**
Kuyper is ranked sixth in the state by WalletHub based on comparison of 1000 U.S. colleges and universities across 30 metrics including: student selectivity, faculty resources, cost, graduation rates and career outcomes.
- **Ranked No. 2 in Student Satisfaction Nationally**
Kuyper is ranked 2nd nationally in student satisfaction among all Christian colleges and universities by College Consensus based on national student scores.
- **Affordability**
Kuyper tuition is significantly lower than comparable Christian colleges—an average of \$5,000 less per year.
- **A Financial Safety Net**
The *Kuyper Loan Repayment Assistance Program* helps repay loans after graduation if a graduate's income does not meet a specified threshold.
- **Students Graduate Career Ready**
KuyperWorks, provides students with workplace and career readiness skills for post-graduation employment.

KUYPER  COLLEGE

Bringing God's Grace into Today's Culture

Grand Rapids, Michigan kuyper.edu

TRUE BLUE CAREGIVERS is hiring caring people to assist seniors in their home. Duties include: light housekeeping, personal care, and meal preparation. We service the greater Grand Rapids area and pay is 13-16 dollars an hour. Send inquiries to: truebluecaregivers@gmail.com or call 616-406-6819 for more information

Products and Services

ABSOLUTELY BEST PRICES paid for religious books. Contact Credo Books, 1540 Pinnacle East SW, Wyoming, MI 49509, ph. (616) 249-9291. gvsbooks@gmail.com

BOERS' TRANSFER & STORAGE, INC Offering professional moving services within the United States and Canada. EXCELLENT CLERGY

DISCOUNTS and an approved mover for retired CRC clergy! 13325 Riley Street, Holland, MI; 1-800-433-9799 or 616-399-2690 email: larry@boerstransfer.com; www.boerstransfer.com Agent for Mayflower Transit, LLC.

I CAN LIST YOUR HOME FOR \$1000 OR 1.5%. 1992 Calvin grad will list your property using a cost effective business model- full service, with savings. The system works! 175 closings in 2018 with 15 Banner clients. Contact Doug Takens of Independence Realty, 6801 Gettysburg, Hudsonville, 616-262-4574 or takens@sbcglobal.net

NEED A NEW CHURCH WEBSITE? Black Sheep Consulting is a full service digital marketing company started by a former CRC pastor. We

help churches communicate in engaging ways with their community. Visit Blacksheepconsulting.org for more details.

REMODELING? Call Ken DeVries today for an estimate on windows, kitchen/bath renovation. 616-457-5880. Since 1985. www.home-work-construction.com

SECURITY CONSULTANT: Church building security, receptionist and pastor safety, alarm systems, video, volunteer security teams, shooter response preparation and policy. 37 years experience. www.churchbuildingsecurity.com

TRUE BLUE CAREGIVERS offers in home (non-medical) care to seniors. Contact us at truebluecaregivers.com or call 616-406-6819. Owned and operated by Calvin alums serving the greater Grand Rapids area.

Real Estate Sales / Rentals

ANNA MARIA ISLAND CONDO RENTAL Pool, fishing dock, Sarasota Bay and Gulf views and access. Weekly or monthly rates. Contact Alma at 616-915-9083 or almadevries24@gmail.com

ANNA MARIA ISLAND FL condos, pool, beach access, linens, fully equipped. 1 and 2 bedrooms. \$700-850/wk. Ask Tim Redeker about off-season and extended stay specials. 941-704-7525. Online: redekercondos.com

FORT MYERS BEACH FL One bedroom park model in Indian Creek Resort. Available Jan-March 2020. Laurie 616-293-9143.

FT MYERS POOL HOME FOR RENT by the week or month, Oct - May. 905-630-6711.

MOVING TO/FROM SEATTLE/ BELLEVUE/ WA? 35 + yrs exp! Allan Kuipers, Coldwell Banker Danforth. 206-850-2724, rlst8brokr@comcast.net. www.allankuipers.com

ST AUGUSTINE, FL BEACH HOUSE FOR RENT by the week or month, private drive and beach access - October thru May 701-741-7724

Travel

BEST OF ITALY ADVENTURE TOUR MAY 2, 2020 - 16 day fully escorted tour through Italy. Luxury coach tour with transfers, hotels, local guides, V.I.P. access to sites, 21 meals, and much more! \$3,850.00 per person, flights extra. Unique Adventures Travel visit www.uniqueadventures.us and go to contact us then request 'Italy2020 brochure' or call 616 822-5330.

NIAGARA FALLS Trillium Bed & Breakfast all rooms with a/c, private bath, www.trilliumbb.ca, info@trilliumbb.ca call or text us 905-354-3863

HOLIDAY IN HOLLAND A self-contained Cabin. We offer car rentals and tours.



I will be your champion.

—Jill, Hospice Nurse Practitioner

In-home Hospice Care • Trillium Woods • Bereavement Services
• Pastoral Services • Palliative Care

For information on Faith Hospice In-Home Care or our Trillium Woods in-patient facility, contact 616-235-5113 or faithhospicecare.org.

His Wounds

Thanks be to God
that we have one . . .
by whose wounds
we are healed.



Luke Carrig is a graduating student at Calvin Theological Seminary and a candidate for ministry in the CRCNA. He resides in Grandville, Mich., and also serves as a chaplain at Oasis of Hope in Grand Rapids.

IT IS WEDNESDAY. The room has yellow walls and an aged floor. It is big enough for a sink, a medical examination table, two chairs, and a computer. But it's small enough for his knee to be just a foot from mine.

His hair is frizzy for want of a comb, his pants sagging for want of a belt—though the fraying twine he is currently wearing seems a worthy substitute. His body stinks for want of home.

It is his first time here in this place of safety that seeks to provide medical care in the name of Jesus without cost or judgment.

"I am the chaplain here," I said gently.

He sniggers, looking at the floor.

"What's God ever done for me, eh?"

His voice sharpens as if he's about to pounce. "I've been beaten, spat on . . . where's God in all that?"

He pulls his hands out from his coat and lifts them before my face like a man at worship. "Look at what the coldness has done to my hands," he says, as he pushes his bloody, cracked, and chiseled hands closer. He quickly pulls back his sleeves to reveal self-inflicted wounds like neat lines on a page, each one an entry of agony.

"Where's your God in that?" he shouts.

I do my best to breathe slowly in the midst of his onslaught. But more importantly, I reach within myself to source that helpful Spirit who empowers and guides.

He continues: "Look at my feet!" He kicks off an untied boot to reveal a holey sock and a painfully bent foot—red, blistered, and wounded. I try not to wince and reach deeper still.

"I'm tired out here on these streets, man," he finishes, leaning back in his chair while his foot finds its boot.


We sit in a moment of silence, catching our breaths.

"I know another whose hands are wounded," I say as calmly as I can. "His feet, too, coiled in pain. In fact, he knows what it is to feel unwanted and spit on, too."

He stares at me curiously. "Oh yeah? Who is that, then?"

"God's very own son, Jesus," I say, my voice quivering. "His hands and feet know wounds like yours."

His eyes begin to glass over as he makes the connection between his wounds and those of Jesus. He buries his hands in his face, and I hear him whisper, "Help me, Jesus."

Thanks be to God that we have one who "shared in [our] humanity," (Heb. 2:14), who is able to "empathize with our weaknesses," (Heb. 4:15), and by whose wounds we are healed (Isa. 53:5). 



When you
change
a story...

STORIES start small. A village savings program. Access to clean water. 1,000 days of healthy food to start a baby's life. But rarely do stories stay small. Because when you renew hope in one story, you renew hope in every life that story touches. You renew hope for many. One story can change far more than you imagine.

GRACE

Sustainable farmer
Nebbi District, Uganda

...she gets to
change
the world.



Give to a story at
worldrenew.net