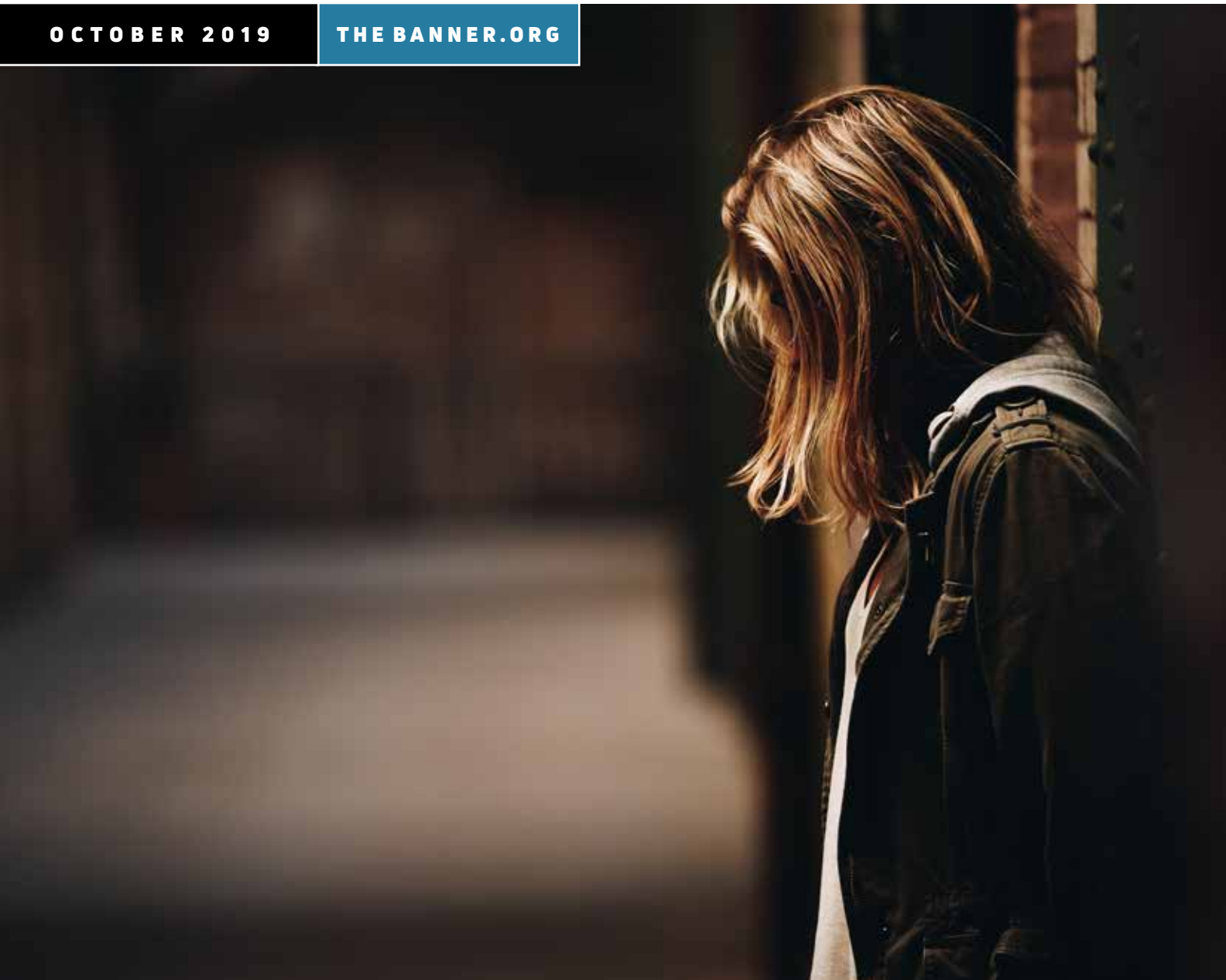


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BANNER

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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
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Everybody Belongs

We need to enlarge our default mindsets. When we think about serving and ministering with people, do we imagine serving people with disabilities, people from different cultures, young and old?



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.

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I COULD HEAR THE PAIN and frustration in her voice as she recounted her story. Visiting a church for a pastor's installation service, Elizabeth Schultz felt like she didn't fully belong because of what two people didn't do. During the Lord's Supper, when Schultz went forward in her motorized wheelchair to receive the elements, the two servers did not speak the usual blessing to her: "The body of Christ given for you; the blood of Christ shed for you." Instead, there was an awkward silence as they served her the elements. Schultz felt excluded; everyone else had received those blessing words. She couldn't help but wonder if other persons with disabilities have had similar experiences there or elsewhere.

I suspect the servers were not intentionally being ungracious, but they were probably unprepared and unsure of what to do. Of course, that raises the question of why they would be unsure of how to serve a person with disabilities. Perhaps this shows how our minds default to typically abled people. When the servers mentally prepared themselves to serve the Lord's Supper, they were probably not thinking about or imagining how to serve people with disabilities. For too many of us, people with disabilities are often an afterthought, and to be an afterthought is not to belong.

This year's Disability Week (Oct. 13-20) celebrates disability advocates who "champion, advise, and bear witness to the coming reality of God's kingdom where everybody belongs and everybody serves" (crcna.org/disability/disability-week). Schultz is also a Regional Disability Advocate for Disability Concerns—and she advocated. She found me and told me her story for the sake of all people with disabilities. Having a daughter with Down syndrome, I am sympathetic to their concerns.

We need to enlarge our default mindsets. When we think about serving and ministering with people, do we imagine serving people with disabilities, people from different cultures, young and old? When we write a sermon, whom do we imagine the sermon is for? Who are our intended participants when we plan a worship service?

When we think of people with disabilities, we should include those with mental illness. Mental illness can vary, from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and anxiety disorders to depression and dementia. Mental illness is often chronic and can require medication. We need to remove the stigma attached to mental illness. As with any illness, people with mental illness need help and support, not judgment. When I had depression back in my university days, I would isolate myself in my room and sit alone with my dark thoughts. If it wasn't for God's grace and supportive friends, I don't know where I would be today.

Everybody needs to belong because belonging to the body of Christ helps us to grow, individually and collectively, into Christlikeness. I admit it takes time to grow and establish new default mindsets and practices in our personal and collective lives. That is why we need special focus days or weeks, like Disability Week, to bring awareness and to train our minds. And it's why we need advocates and champions to regularly remind us to fully include people with disabilities.

I am proud of the CRC's growing awareness of disability and mental illness issues. I think it is one of the ministries we do well relative to other denominations. Let us keep up the good work, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these as well. **B**



REPLY ALL

Intellectual Pride

The point made in the editorial “Intellectual Pride” (June 2019) is well taken and important for the CRC to not get caught up in. However, I feel we are losing our intellectual robustness, as I seldom see confessions and catechism taught or recited within our services anymore. These are great faith-building resources that I hope we can utilize more and find the right balance of a humble, yet intellectual church.

» Andrew Elgersma // Elora, Ont.

Healing the Sick

Calvin Theological Seminary student Luke Carrig believes the best comforting words we may offer the destitute, the sick, and the suffering is the Bible’s assurance that God knows exactly what they’re going through because in the person of Jesus “we have one who shared in our humanity and is able to empathize with our weaknesses” (“His Wounds,” July/August 2019).

However, Carrig fails to proclaim Christ’s compassion and willingness to heal all who turn to him in faith as documented in Scripture, saying, “When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases’” (Matt. 8:16-17). And Carrig could add, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

» Joe A. Serge // Oshawa, Ont.

Civil Religion

There is a lot in this article that is commendable (“The Christian Religion and Civil Religion,” July/August 2019). I think (James D.) Bratt finds a nice balance, striking a blow against those who would say even reciting the Pledge of Allegiance is idolatry while also rightly challenging the idea that the U.S. has some sort of special biblical standing.

I do think Bratt misses an important opportunity, though—one that is particularly apropos in our current CRC climate. Bratt misses the opportunity to show the same type of balance he admired in Lincoln when Lincoln “put both sides in the Civil War beneath the righteous judgment of God.” Bratt squares up and swats down the nationalistic idolatry he believes is a besetting temptation for conservative Christians while whistling right past the idolatry of statism that many have observed is a besetting temptation for progressive Christians. Bratt is quick to point out how those with nationalistic tendencies misappropriate Scripture to apply passages directly to the U.S., but blithely overlooks the standard practice of progressives who rip Old Testament civil instructions out of the Bible to be shoehorned into U.S. immigration policy and the like. Examples abound, particularly in the academic and bureaucratic wing of the CRC.

I think Bratt’s article would have been even more effective and enlightening if he had shown the willingness to take aim at the idolatries of both sides of the aisle.

» Eric Van Dyken // online comment

As one whose citizenship straddles the 49th parallel and (who) has had the opportunity to teach history in Canada and the United States, I have long been interested in the differences between the

cousins in their expressions of civil religion or, simply, patriotism (“The Christian Religion and Civil Religion”). I’m not aware of a Canadian John Winthrop or a corresponding “city on a hill.” Canadian patriotism of late seems very much tied to a celebration of diversity, and maybe even of being un-American. American patriotism is of a much different tenor, rooted in its sense of national purpose from times even well before 1776. This sense of destiny has been connected to innumerable good, noble, and world-changing events, but it has also been used to excuse much wickedness and has often caused us to forget our first and primary citizenship. It is for this latter reason that I get very uncomfortable with displays of a national flag on church grounds or in the sanctuary itself.

In keeping with the examples Bratt offers in his article, I would highly encourage readers to find Abraham Lincoln’s Thanksgiving Proclamation of October 1863. Notice how he describes the relationship between the American people and God. Ask yourself if you could imagine any modern president issuing such a proclamation.

» Christian Altena // online comment

Bivocational Pastors

An additional advantage of bivocational pastoring is that it can lead to less dependence on the pastor (“Becoming a Denomination of Support for Bivocational Pastors,” July/August 2019) and perhaps offer more opportunity for lay ministry—not a church of people coming to hear a good sermon for their own sake, or of bystanders watching as the pastor does the work of ministry, but a pastor/shepherd equipping the church to do ministry together among the community and in the wider community where the church is located.

» Bonnie Nicholas // online comment

Revisionism

Response to the July/August Issue

The July/August 2019 *Banner* arrived two nights ago. This may be the issue I most look forward to each year, the one reporting on your annual synod. I have had a healthy interest in the issues and decisions of the past synods. One of particular interest is your endeavor to express a biblical view of human sexuality. That is an issue of great importance in prison. I, myself, have had to counsel inmates who are transgender, identify as female, and are dealing with either past or present same-sex relationships. ... Thank you for sharing your fine periodical with me. May the Lord bless you and the CRC as you endeavor to be faithful to him.

» James Doyle // Grand Rapids, Mich.

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REVISIONISM HAS BEEN DEFINED as the advocacy of revision of some political theory, religious doctrine, or historical or critical interpretation.

I recently attended a public talk on what the New Testament says about same-sex activity. Two points from *Acts of Synod 1973* resonated with me: first, sexual orientation is unlikely to change, and second, the Christian Reformed Church has done (and continues to do) a lousy job of engaging with and meeting the needs of LGBT congregants. I'm troubled by the fruits of our current approach to these issues (depression, alienation, loneliness, suicide, rejection of or by the church).

The talk focused on contrasting traditional and revisionist arguments about the New Testament interpretations of passages that seem to address homosexuality. I reflected afterward that the comparison gave a negative connotation to the term *revisionism* when it comes to interpreting Scripture.

When I researched the term, I learned that historical revisionism sometimes brings to mind such faulty notions as denying the Holocaust. Yet some historians consider revision to be basic to historical scholarship, which continuously integrates new discoveries and interpretations of events. Consider, for example, events we might prefer to brush off, such as our past and current treatment of Indigenous peoples.


Similarly, with respect to Scripture, revisionism can be helpful or harmful. Recall some examples in Reformed thinking when revisionism was an important aspect of being Reformed. Without revisionism, wouldn't we still be stuck with traditional views of a flat earth and slavery? Or what would life today be like without John Calvin's revised understanding of usury and

We should be
always reforming,
allowing the Spirit
to give us new
vision and insight.

interest in the economic context of his day?

Revision and reform are closely linked. We call ourselves the Reformed church as if it were past tense and complete. But we should be always reforming, allowing the Spirit to give us new vision and insight to re-vision what the Spirit says to us through Scripture.

Many people see the need for a closer look at the careful revisionist research into the Scriptural, historical, and contexts context of arguments favoring reinterpreting the passages about same-sex relationships. Most, if not all, of these references relate to violent or exploitative relationships. Exploring these important details casts doubt on traditional conclusions when it comes to questions of same-sex activity.

I suggest we as a denomination take a closer look at the revisionist viewpoint. Listening to the stories of gay Christians who love Jesus but feel bruised and alienated by his church is also instructive. I'm ready to embrace the "revisionist" label in the positive sense. 



Rick Krus is a retired emergency room physician in Gallup, N.M. Rick and his wife, Mary Poel, are members of Bethany CRC, Gallup.



Gambling with Your Faith

By John Van Sloten

Warning: The following doctrinal statement may ruin your next gaming experience. Read at your own risk.

According to the Christian Reformed Church of North America, “Pastors and church councils are urged to expose all destructive influences on people’s lives that seek to trivialize or render irrelevant the providence of God. They must also caution against the impact of materialism, take decisive action to combat the evil of gambling, and minister compassionately to persons addicted to or victimized by lotteries”. (bit.ly/349VGod, 2019)

Destructive? Evil?

This is the official position of the church.

When you gamble—to whatever degree and via whatever form—you risk hurting yourself and others by trivializing or rendering irrelevant the providence of God.

This hardline position should be no surprise to a denomination that holds such a high view of God’s providence. If an all-powerful God is watching over us in such a way that not a hair can fall from our heads apart from his will—intimately and graciously attending to our every need—then any attempt to

needlessly supplement his care should be suspect.

Why would a Christian need to win a lottery when they’ve already been given everything?

We tell ourselves that we’re not playing for the money, and this might be true for a friendly game of no-stakes poker, but lotteries are always about the money, aren’t they? Why else would you play? The truth is, even if we see a night at the casino as a \$50 or \$100 night of entertainment, what is really driving us is winning.

So if winning money is the true reason why we are gambling, then it might be wise to unpack our motivations.

What drives us to want more?

Is it greed (wanting more for more's sake), envy (wanting more of what others have), sloth (wanting more but not wanting to work for it), or pride (wanting more in order to be more)?

Or maybe it's a fear of not having enough, and the hope that a big win will enable you to finally retire in comfort.

Perhaps you're just addicted to the adrenaline rush, real or imagined.

French philosopher Jean Baudrillard writes, "Consumerism is not kindled when needs for specific objects are created and consumed, but rather when the need to need, the desire to desire is manifested." We live in a culture that constantly kindles our desire to desire. This makes it easier to justify a gambling habit. In a world where everyone wants to want all the time, endlessly feeding quarters into a slot machine makes sense.

For many, this habit can be addictive.

Theologian Lesslie Newbigin said, "Because man is so made that only God can satisfy him, his desires are unlimited." What lotteries take advantage of is arguably the strongest force in human nature: our desire to engage the richness of God. Human beings are made to experience the adrenaline rush of knowing God's infinite and eternal glory. This is what our insatiable desires are made for. Newbigin goes on to say, "When [man] tries to satisfy unlimited desires by means of natural goods, he ruins himself."

Years ago (wisely or not) I preached a sermon on the topic of seven-card Texas Hold'em. At the time, this card game was all the rage, and I wondered why. I came to the conclusion that it was trading on a God-given desire. Human beings are made for the exhilaration that can come from making an 'all-in' bet that yields an inestimable and unmerited prize. God made us for this risk/reward moment. And, in Christ, God graciously gives us all we need when we put our trust in him.

"Everything that exists and all that we possess is a gift and proof that God knows what we need, right down to the last detail."

This is where we should be placing our bets. When we don't, we take an experience that is meant to play out before God and spend it on something that can never be God. The lottery can never give the way God gives (on time, in just the right way, and personally).

So why ask it to? Why put your trust into its hands? Why take the risk?

If gambling is just entertainment, then it should be easy to walk away. But it isn't, and doesn't that tell us something?

God's already given us a good means by which he can sustain us: work. And gambling is a bit of an affront to that gift. As the proverb says, "Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty" (Prov. 28:19). In many ways, work regulates what we receive by keeping us from having too much. But when we circumvent work's regulating influence, we risk having more than we can handle.

But what about all of the good causes that casinos and lotteries support? I have to admit that, of all the lottery ads that get pushed on me, these are the most tempting. Where I live, there is an annual lottery that offers free homes, cars, and cash, all for the very good cause of supporting a crucial air ambulance service. How can I not


buy a ticket for this? There's nothing like a good cause to move an ethical line. Yet I choose not to and instead find another, more stewardly way to support the cause.

And if I'm spiritually awake, I'll even turn that moment of temptation into a spiritual practice. Staring at the photo of that beautiful new home or car, I'll recognize the desire I'm feeling and then say to God, "But you're my home, and traveling with you, Lord, is more than I could ever want. All of my riches are in you, and I'm going to give all that I can, all that I am, to you!"

As I commit to that wager, the peace of Christ surrounds me, and I am reminded that the one who holds the cosmos together holds me and my family and our finances together.

God holds our future in his hands. Everything that exists and all that we possess is a gift and proof that God knows what we need, right down to the last detail.

If living a Christian life is all about becoming more like Jesus, then we should need what he needed, desire what he desired, and want what he wanted.

"What I'm trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with *getting* so you can respond to God's *giving*," Jesus says in the gospel of Luke. "People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don't be afraid of missing out. You're my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself" (Luke 12:29-32, The Message). 



John Van Sloten is a Calgary-based CRC pastor, teacher, and writer. His latest book is *Every Job a Parable: What Walmart Greeters, Nurses, and Astronauts Tell Us about God* (Navpress USA, Hodder & Stoughton UK).

BIG QUESTIONS

Stewardship

I spent a day shopping, and when I got home I realized we didn't need any of the items I'd bought and most of them would end up in storage or discarded. Why do we do this?

Living our way of life is not an exact science, so there is always some messiness. We don't always calculate correctly, or our plans change and what we thought was necessary no longer is. Over time, these things accumulate. My wife and I have lived in our current house for 17 years, and a visit to the basement invariably prompts the thought "Where did all this stuff come from?"

But saying "That's just the way life goes" is not the full story. Human weaknesses come into play as well. One of the quickest and easiest ways to fill a void in our lives is to buy something, and our mind convinces us for a moment that this will cure our ills. In a college seminar I teach we talk about consumption patterns, and I asked students if they had ever bought something they didn't need just to make themselves feel better. I expected a number to say 'yes.' What surprised me was how many began to talk animatedly about how empty they felt before and after. The sense of satisfaction was fleeting. They knew firsthand, as Jesus said, that life does not consist of material goods.

There's also the challenge that, when purchasing something, we only see it for what it is when we bought it and while we are using it. We don't



Illustration for *The Banner* by Laurie Sienkowski

think about the product's life cycle—what went into making it and what it will take to dispose of it safely. If we thought about such things, we would be much more judicious about what and how much we buy.

Rolf Bouma is interim pastor at Dearborn Christian Fellowship, Dearborn, Mich., and teaches in the University of Michigan's Program in the Environment in Ann Arbor.

Church/Bible/Doctrine

What is the CRC's official position on the creation account in Genesis? Why even discuss it when we could just keep to a literal six-day creation?

The CRC's official positions on a great many issues can be viewed by going to crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements. (For this topic, click on "Creation and Science" in the sidebar.) Five declarations adopted in 1991 point to our belief that general and special revelation "address us with full divine authority," but then "each in its own unique way," just as we are taught in Article 2 of the Belgic Confession. They speak of wanting to honor our commitment to the freedom of exegesis, not "imposing ... an authorized interpretation of specific passages in Scripture." They acknowledge the church respects the "freedom of science by not canonizing certain hypotheses, models, or paradigms proposed by the science"

but also insist that all "such theorizing be subject to the teaching of Scripture and the confessions." They uphold the biblical teaching of creation, sin, and redemption. And they confess that "humanity is uniquely created in the image of God," rejecting "atheistic and naturalistic evolutionism," which "reduces humanity to being ... the end product of a natural process."

Denominational wrestling with this issue has a long and complex history that can't be simply summarized in the brief space available. For a well-written modern explanation of our doctrine of creation, read the second chapter of Cornelius Plantinga Jr.'s *Engaging God's World*.

So why not just stick with a literal six-day creation account? Because the author of Genesis had no intention of giving us a 21st-century, scientifically precise account of how God created all things. The intention instead was to spell out a creation account that would serve as a polemic against all other creation stories or metanarratives floating around in the Middle East. It is for the author, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whose stories will now be told) who is the mighty one who created all things, the only one worthy of our praise and obedience.

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

Vocation/Calling

How does calling relate to Christian hope?

Paul assures us that “in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” What is labor in the Lord? It includes what we do to strengthen the body of Christ and its mission. It also includes all Christian work outside the church, whether it be one’s career or paid work or one’s non-paid work in the home and community. If this work is done “as unto the Lord,” it is “not in vain.” It has significance and purpose not only for this life, but for that of the world to come.

Work is a crucial part of God’s purpose for human beings in the pre-fall creation. Through the “work” of being fruitful and having dominion (Gen. 1:26) and of tilling and tending the garden (Gen. 2:15), human beings express the image of God. Work was intended to be full of significance, an avenue of service to God and others, and a way of developing our potential as image-bearers of God.

The fall into sin radically altered human work. Under the conditions of sin, work becomes meaningless toil (Gen. 2:17-19). Work now stands under the shadow of death. Exploitation, slavery, unemployment, monotonous and meaningless labor, and every other feature of work that contradicts God’s original purpose have their origin in sin and its penalty.

Grace extends “far as the curse is found,” even into our work. Because Christian hope is for a new creation, Christian labor in all spheres of life is not in vain. Everything Christians do for the Lord has significance not only for this life, but for the life to come. Vital hope for the new creation expands the scope of what has

eschatological significance. Not only the work of pastors and evangelists, but also the work of mothers and fathers, artists, musicians, business-people, farmers, builders, politicians, and all the rest has importance for the life of the world to come.

Whatever is beautiful, true, and good in human cultures will be cleansed from impurity, perfected, and transfigured to become a part of God’s new creation. Those transfigured things will form the building material from which the glorified world will be made.

But if sown in Christ, prayerfully and patiently devoted to the glory of God, Christian work will participate in the resurrection life of the world to come. “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58, NRSV).

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

Digital Life


My kid threw a fit when she saw the photos I had posted of her online. I think she’s overreacting—everyone knows she was a child at the time. What do you think?

“Sharenting” is when parents share news and pictures of their kids online. The practice isn’t entirely new, of course. Parents have been embarrassing their kids with their pictures for a long time. Social media just allows us to show more pictures to more people more often. These online chronicles of our lives can be great—but they can also be a problem.

What might have been a one-time showing to family and friends is now available to anyone with an evening to kill scrolling through Facebook. Instead of laughing at bare-bottomed little Jimmy getting a bath in the kitchen sink years later at his wedding reception, social media allows those images to be available immediately and for all time.

By social media account registration rules, your beloved would need to be 13 years old to see what you’ve been doing behind her back—an age that’s a critical identity-forming time in a child’s development. What seems cute and innocent to you could be devastating when viewed or commented on in other settings by friends, less-than-friends, or possibly by bullies.

A healthy relationship requires trust and respect. If your kid or grandkid asks you to pull their picture, I suggest you do so immediately. And next time, *before* posting, take the opportunity to ask first. This could be the start of a great conversation. You get a chance to tell each other what you like or don’t like about the picture and why you may or may not want to share it. And when you honor her wishes to post or not to post, she will learn something about the power she has over her own image and perhaps how to wield that power appropriately as she journeys forth online.

Dean Heetderks is codirector of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of The Banner. Wondering about any part of the digital side of your life? Tell him about it at dean.heetderks@gmail.com. 

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

Church Creates Inclusive Profession of Faith

NEWS

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

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At **Life in Christ CRC in Salt Lake City, Utah**, ministry coordinator Monica Mulder challenges the church's young people with a **different service project each month**. In June, colorfully painted rocks were a blessing to church members. “Through service to others, I am trying to teach our youth that simple acts of kindness can make someone's moment, day, week, year, or life,” Mulder said.

Does your church have a small story like this to tell? It's the kind of thing we love to share on *The Banner's* Facebook page. Send your photos and news tip to news@thebanner.org.

Covenant Life Church in Grand Haven, Mich., celebrated a special profession of faith service this past spring. Seven students from the church's first Inclusive Profession of Faith class used sign language to publicly profess their faith through an adapted Apostles' Creed. Meaningful to families and the Christian Reformed congregation as a whole, the milestone was reached by a long pattern of intentional inclusion.

Special Treasures, a Sunday program, partners with families to welcome children with special needs to church, meeting each one in their ability, and encouraging them to grow in faith. The church also offers Regatta, an after-school social space for youth with various abilities to mingle with their peers.

Dj Hornik's daughter Elizabeth, who made profession of faith May 12, started attending Special Treasures three years ago. “I was blown away. This was a first. Never had I found or been members of a church that actually had an organized plan for special needs,” Hornik said. “Elizabeth ... LOVED it.”

Nancy Ferrarini said her family also found this to be a place of belonging. They moved from Illinois to Grand Haven to find a community more inclusive of people with Down syndrome. Isabella Ferrarini's spiritual growth has been evident at Covenant Life, and now she has become a member, publicly claiming this faith as her own.

Shannon Mulder, a professional speech therapist who serves as special needs coordinator at Covenant Life, was behind



Members of the Inclusive Profession of Faith class signed an adapted version of the Apostles' Creed as they made their public profession of faith May 12.

creating the inclusive class. Noticing that few students as they reached high school or beyond in the Treasures program had professed their faith, she wondered if an adapted preparation might be needed.

“I wanted to be intentional about making sure students and parents knew that their students, regardless of academic or verbal ability, could share in this journey and express their faith in a way that was appropriate for them,” Mulder said.

The six-week class included memorizing Scripture and the adapted Apostles' Creed in sign language. Many church members walked alongside the students as they prepared. A mentor was paired with each one. One church worship leader, Jill Warners, led the students in a worship dance that was shared as part of the celebration service.

— *Maia VanderMeer*

Washington Youth Group Connects With Campus Ministry

Bellevue (Wash.) Christian Reformed Church is about a 20-minute drive from the campus of the University of Washington and the CRC church plant Church on the Ave. This summer, seven youth and leaders from Bellevue CRC spent a weekend engaging with different ministries in and around the campus and the startup church. From July 11 to 13, the group interacted with graduate students who make up part of the university's Graduate Christian Fellowship, did projects around the church, and helped with meal service at ROOTS Young Adult Shelter.

Kendra Bengelink, one of the church's youth leaders, said planning something close to home was an intentional choice over a mission trip that could risk being a "Christian vacation."

"We wanted to engage in a project that was potentially one to continue in, to have a more stewardly and economical service project, and to see that there are



Youth group participants from Bellevue (Wash.) CRC helped to prepare the Friday Feast at ROOTS Young Adult Shelter.

very real needs in our own community," Bengelink said.

The youth were taken on a tour of the university campus by two members of Graduate Christian Fellowship, a group brought together by campus ministers and Church on the Ave pastors Geoff and Ashley Van Dragt. GCF member Ping-Ping Nearenpitak, a graduate student in the

atmospheric science program, was able to show the students some of his work in the field of climate change research and then explain to the students how he sees his current studies and future career as a "vocation within God's kingdom."

Besides spending time on campus, the youth also pitched in with all sorts of cleaning, painting, and organizing at Church on the Ave.

—Dan Veeneman

Ontario Church Welcomes Thanksgiving Dinner Guests

Each October on Canadian Thanksgiving Day, Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Belleville, Ont., welcomes community members to Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings. It's a tradition that includes transportation, with a school bus picking up guests at three stops throughout the city.

Maranatha's first city-wide Thanksgiving dinner in 2011 drew 150 guests; it has grown each year. About 320 people enjoyed the meal in 2018. Planners of this year's dinner expect a similar number—but they'll serve roast beef instead of turkey.

Hosting such events is possible since the church moved more than 10 years ago to a large new building near downtown Belleville. "Our building has a

full commercial kitchen and a kitchen manager," said Felix Boer, who chairs the congregation's benevolence team. "My vision was to do more to reach out to the people of this city. Other churches host Christmas dinners, so I thought about Thanksgiving. There are lots of people here who really have no family, nowhere to go on Thanksgiving Day."

Local media outlets and churches help to publicize the event, and the town allows posters advertising the free Thanksgiving dinner in public buildings. A team of 40 volunteers handles setup duties, hosting, serving, preparation, and cleanup.

The cost of the meal is covered by the church through offerings to its benevolence fund and donations from suppliers.

—Ron Rupke



Photo by Ron Rupke

Connection Is Key in *Renegotiating Faith*

“Young adults are roughly three times more likely to connect with a new church after moving out of their parents’ home if someone from their home congregation tries to make a connection for them” (*Renegotiating Faith*, p. 12). This is just one of the statistics found in *Renegotiating Faith*, a research report by five Christian organizations in Canada. Published in the fall of 2018, the report looks at the growing delay in young-adult identity formation and what this means for churches in Canada.

Learning from the Report

Filled with research findings and analysis on topics including identity-forming, mentorship, and youth ministries, *Renegotiating Faith* has been made available as a free resource for churches seeking to engage young adults in this life stage.

Faith Formation Ministries, a ministry of the Christian Reformed Church that is focused on helping churches grow faith for life, has made use of the report. In March, along with Redeemer University College, Faith Formation Ministries hosted an event with lead researcher Rick Hiemstra.

Hiemstra explained a young person’s need for differentiation—separating from his or her family of origin—when forming his or her own identity. Because traditional markers such as marriage or leaving the parental home are occurring later, some youth are differentiating themselves through religion. What can churches do about that?

New Westminster CRC in Burnaby, B.C., also wanted to know. The congregation invited Hiemstra to speak about *Renegotiating Faith* during a youth service in March.

51% of young adults
who had been
regular youth group
participants become
weekly service
attenders as adults.

“We felt we would do well as a congregation to understand the dynamics young adults are experiencing and how, as a congregation, we can recognize and support them,” said Andrew Beunk, pastor of New Westminster CRC.

Emerging Adulthood

Renegotiating Faith reports that identity formation—understanding one’s unique personality, values, and purpose in a community—is taking place five to seven years later than in previous generations. This new life stage is called *emerging adulthood*, a term coined by psychology professor Jeffrey Arnett. It is a time, typically between ages 18 and 29, when young adults are forming their adult identities and renegotiating relationships with their families and communities. Shifts such as reaching higher levels of education, marrying later, and the rising cost of housing are some of the factors that have contributed to the development of emerging adulthood.

“For me, [the information evening] was a reality check that the rules have changed and identity formation has been pushed later,” said Rita Klein-Geltink, pastor at Ancaster (Ont.) CRC.

The report cites recent literature on the limitations of church programs but also shows that youth programs do create spaces for young adults to negotiate their own faith beliefs. The research findings indicated that 51% of young adults who

regularly attended a church youth group said they attend religious services weekly as an adult; if they’d only attended youth group one to three times a month, only 18% were weekly service participants as adults (*Renegotiating Faith*, p. 63). While youth groups, mission trips, and Christian camps are all great places to facilitate relationships with other Christians and build mentoring opportunities, a concern comes when programs end.

“That was important for me to hear,” said Klein-Geltink. She was glad to know programs are helpful, but she and church leadership are stymied over what to do when they end. “If youth don’t feel connected, they won’t stick around.”

Mentorship

Mentorship, the report states, can have significant impact on faith maturation. Mentors can provide youth with “tailored and enduring support” that grows with them (*Renegotiating Faith*, p. 55). Hiemstra acknowledged that mentoring can be intimidating because of generational differences but stressed the importance of this connection.

“There needs to be a relational glue to the church,” said Hiemstra. “The younger generation needs to learn from the older ones. They are looking to learn how to live life—so talk about your faith journey.”

Attendees at both Redeemer and New Westminster were grateful to have Hiemstra speak about this report and found the information presented enlightening and relevant.

The five partners behind *Renegotiating Faith* are Youth for Christ, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, Power to Change, and Truth Matters Ministries. Visit p2c.com/renegotiating-faith to download the full report.

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

Pastor Issues Challenge: Bring Your Bible to Church



"It is imperative to the life of the church that everything that I say from the pulpit is weighed and measured against the holy words of Scripture," said Gateway Community Christian Reformed Church pastor Jason Carruthers. "And it just so happens that this is a lot easier to do if you have your Bible in your hands."

To encourage his congregation members and specifically the youth and young adults to bring their Bibles to the Sunday service with them every week, Carruthers issued a challenge: in five weeks' time, if 60% of the congregation has a Bible with them, the pastor agreed to let a member of the youth group shave his head at the end of the service. Only about six people had a Bible with them when he issued the challenge.

When asked about the unusual tactic, Carruthers said, "When research is showing that less than one in five Christians is opening their Bible and interacting with it at least once a week, we have a problem."

Barna's 2018 "State of the Bible" Report indicates 14% of American adults read the Bible daily. In a Lifeway Research study, 39% of Americans who attend church at

Children and young people watch as several take turns clipping pastor Justin Carruthers' hair after a successful challenge.

least once a month read their Bible daily. "These numbers are alarming, to say the least, Carruthers said, and we cannot act as if they are acceptable. I have to do everything within my grasp to help change that."

On the appointed date, June 16, about 70% of the Gateway Community congregation brought their Bibles or Bible apps to the service. Afterward, three young people whose names were drawn from a hat took turns with electric clippers to trim the pastor's hair to a buzz cut.

—Dan Veeneman

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Theodore (Ted)
L. Brouwer*

1933-2019

Ted Brouwer not only faithfully served in ministry but also faithfully served his family. He is remembered as having a gift for visiting the sick. One church member recalls Brouwer visiting her in the hospital prior to cancer surgery. "I remember he prayed and read Psalm 121. I vividly recall how he told me, 'You will be sleeping and unaware during your surgery, but the Lord never slumbers or sleeps.' I remember the comfort and peace that gave me. And that was 32 years ago!" Brouwer died May 12 from pancreatic cancer.

After graduating from Calvin College and Seminary, Brouwer was ordained in 1956 and went on to pastor the following congregations: Sibley (Iowa) Christian Reformed Church; Calvary Community, Dayton, Ohio; Prairie City (Iowa) CRC; Borculo CRC, Zeeland, Mich.; and Delavan (Wisc.) CRC. He retired in 1995.

Brouwer enjoyed being outdoors and especially liked camping, fishing and playing golf.

Predeceased in 2013 by Lucille, his beloved wife of 57 years, Brouwer is survived by three children and spouses, eight grandchildren and spouses, and seven great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Fire Damage, Uncertainty in Days Following Arson

Fires that an FBI media alert referred to as arson destroyed three unoccupied buildings and caused damage to the current church sanctuary of Naschitti (N.M.) Christian Reformed Church in late August. At the time of writing the congregation was being supported by a World Renew campaign and beginning to assess immediate and future needs while addressing a feeling of unease.

“One of the main things that the community was worried about was the (safety of the) building,” said elder Jerome Sandoval, who noted that having the buildings inspected for the possible presence of asbestos was a priority.



Former main parsonage of Naschitti CRC, destroyed by fire Aug. 20, 2019.



Photos by Videna Silvers

The church hosted community update meetings Friday, Aug. 23, and after worship Sunday, Aug. 25. Sandoval said the service went as planned that first Sunday except the 35-40 attendees met under shade tents in the church parking lot. They shared a potluck meal afterward.

Those gathered were able to survey the damage together.

Congregation members in front of the damaged but still-standing Naschitti Christian Reformed Church, Aug. 25.

“People got a chance to look at the building and see what things looked like, so that kind of helped the congregation a little,” Sandoval said.

On Aug. 28 World Renew, the CRC’s relief and development agency, launched a campaign to support the church. Staff traveled to New Mexico to meet with the church council and World Renew’s website had a page to collect “financial

gifts to purchase building materials for reconstruction and (to) support volunteers who help make repairs.”

Sandoval said Classis Red Mesa, a regional group of churches, also was discussing how it could support Naschitti CRC. Expecting to meet Sept. 14, classis changed its planned location from Naschitti CRC to Bethel CRC in Shiprock, N.M.

Videna Silvers, another member on the church council, sent *The Banner* photos from the site. She wrote that she wanted people to know that “we as a small community, as members and congregants of a church on the Navajo reservation, are RESILIENT and will not be defeated. The Lord continues to be our leader. Where he leads, we shall follow.”

—Alissa Vernon

Sharing in Nashville Helps Churches to Serve



Family Fun Day took place May 25 at Faith CRC.

The congregations of Faith Christian Reformed Church, Rehoboth Eritrean Church, and Grace Village of the Presbyterian Church of America, who share building space in Nashville, Tenn., met for a Family Fun Day in May.

"It was a fine day together," said pastor Neil Jasperse, who is serving Faith CRC as a specialized transitional minister.

The three churches aren't the only ones sharing the building. A Spanish-language preschool has filled Faith's classroom spaces during the week since 2015. "I was looking for a church to open its door to our program," said Ana Cardona, director of Parents' Day Out. "I searched and called so many churches. It has been an amazing blessing to the community having our program located at Faith."

For Faith CRC, which rents the space to the other congregations and the preschool, the arrangement is both a practical, budget-meeting blessing and a spiritual one. "It has been a blessing to forge relationships with Grace Village, their pastor, their leadership, and their people as we overlap a bit on Sunday mornings," said Jasperse.

"I believe the differences that separate us from others in Christ can sometimes be exaggerated and may prevent us from exploring more fully the blessings we share in the gospel," said Gene Bratt, a member of Faith CRC who served as an elder for many years after the congregation joined the CRC in 1983.

—Maia VanderMeer

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Victor William
VanderMolen*

1948-2019

During the past 15 years as Vic VanderMolen endured treatments for cancer, he was grateful for the times of remission and trusted God to help him finish his earthly journey. He died May 23 at the age of 70.

Born in the Netherlands, VanderMolen emigrated with his family to Canada when he was 3 years old. He worked in sales most of his life but in 1999 was ordained in the Christian Reformed Church. He became known as "Pastor Vic" to three Christian Reformed congregations in Ontario: Hope Community CRC in Mt. Brydges, The Junction CRC in St. Thomas, and Stratford CRC, where he was interim pastor. He retired in 2014.

"Granddad was kind," said VanderMolen's 12-year-old grandson. He loved being with people and enjoyed driving and traveling. He was always up for a game of cards, pool, or golf, or for playing a game of dice with grandkids. He liked wine, both in his food and in a glass. He is also remembered for dramatic swimming pool entrances.

VanderMolen will be missed by Nancy, his wife for over 51 years, their four children and spouses, and nine grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Ryan
Walter Veeneman*

1953-2019

Missionary, pastor, and social worker Ryan Veeneman was a quiet man with a sense of humor and a heart for the Lord. He was a good listener and enabled people to feel comfortable around him. Veeneman was diagnosed with leukemia on March 15, 2019, and died just 10 weeks later on May 30. He was 65.

Veeneman studied at Calvin College and Seminary, graduating in 1983. He was ordained in 1983 while serving as a missionary in the Dominican Republic with Christian Reformed World Missions (now Resonate Global Mission). After six years there, he worked for a decade as a social worker at Addiction Outpatient Services-PROST in Newaygo, Mich. He then pastored two Christian Reformed congregations in Michigan: New Hope Church in Grand Rapids and Newman Christian Community Church in Hesperia. In 2003, while at New Hope, Veeneman earned a master's degree in social work from Grand Valley State University. He retired in 2013.

A cyclist, Veeneman did many long-distance bike trips around Michigan, including a tandem bike ride with his wife around the "thumb" of the state.

Veeneman is survived by Julie, his wife of 45 years, their two children and their spouses, and two granddaughters.

—Janet A. Greidanus

CRC Leadership Calls Members to be Proactively Anti-Racist in Aftermath of Shootings

On Aug. 8, the Christian Reformed Church released a statement in response to public mass shootings that occurred in three different states in the U.S. between July 28 and Aug. 3.

“As Christian Reformed people, we grieve this loss of life. We grieve the hatred and extremism behind these acts of violence. We, as God’s church and society, grieve that we’ve been unable to put a stop to mass shootings,” the statement reads.

It goes on to specifically denounce the ideology of white supremacy, reported as a motivation behind at least the most deadly of the three events, the murder of 22 people in El Paso, Texas on Aug. 3.

“White supremacist acts of terror have been committed in the United States from its earliest days, at the hands of those most often radicalized on the margins or in secret. Today, these ideas have come into the mainstream and have been espoused and amplified by people in leadership, even in the highest elected offices,” reads the Aug. 8 CRC statement signed by nine senior denominational leaders.

“This is something that the Church should take very seriously. We know that words can fuel and affirm violent actions. Yet, all too often, we sit by and allow harmful words to be spoken, tweeted, and expressed without challenging them.”

The statement calls for CRC members to “take active stance against false narratives, ... stand up against racism and acts of white supremacy, ... speak up against words of misogyny and of hatred toward immigrants, ... be proactively anti-racist, proactively anti-sexist, and to proactively promote the dignity of all people.”

Posted on crcna.org and distributed via social media channels, the statement received responses ranging from expressions of appreciation to dismay or disappointment at the statement’s perceived partisan bias.

The Christian Reformed Church has a congregation in El Paso, Texas, Missio Dei Church, which hosted a prayer service Aug. 7. About 70 people came together to pray for healing, strength, and unity and against the spirit of fear.

“The spirit of fear, whether it exhibits itself in a mass shooting in public places or whether it exhibits itself in our marriages and how we raise our children—it’s a tool of the enemy,” said Charissa Lara, director of ministries at Missio Dei. “But perfect love casts out fear. ... We celebrated over and over that we do have a God who chooses to reveal himself to us and to be present in the midst of pain.”

Lara, who ministers at the church alongside her husband, Pastor Tony Lara, said they held the prayer service “realizing that this is not primarily a racist activity. This is not a problem of people coming from the outside in. This is a sin problem, and we are all guilty of that, and how do we bend our knee before our heavenly Father, and how do we help others see that this is a sin issue? And we all have sin, but there is a loving Savior.”

Visit bit.ly/CRCStatement to find the full statement from CRC leadership.

—Alissa Vernon

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. John Gerald Klomps
1934-2019

Energetic, humble, and approachable, John Klomps lived life as an adventure. He passed away June 12 at the age of 85.

After immigrating to Canada alone at the age of 18, Klomps worked his way through seven years of studies at Calvin College and Seminary, graduating in 1962. He then completed a two-year doctoral program at the Free University of Amsterdam. After ordination in 1964 he served four Christian Reformed churches in Ontario: Jennings Creek CRC in Lindsay, Bethel CRC in Brockville, First CRC in Hamilton, and Clearview CRC in Oakville. He then worked for Christian Horizons. From 1985 until he retired in 1997, he served as executive director of The Bible League of Canada, where he was instrumental in developing the Bibles for Missions Thrift Store program across Canada.

Klomps traveled extensively. He had a particular passion for the Palestinian Christians in Israel, traveling there more than 50 times. With his wife he led tour groups to many parts of the world. Until failing health prevented him, he continued to preach in area churches.

He is survived by Rita, his wife of 59 years, four daughters and spouses, eight grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

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**God's Call
into the Unknown**

By Scott Meekhof and Brian Clark

One hundred years ago, Johanna Veenstra took a giant leap of faith. In 1919, when she stepped onto the ocean liner R.M.S. *Mauretania* and crossed the Atlantic, she became the first Christian Reformed missionary to serve outside North America. She became our first female missionary. She became a symbol for the Christian Reformed Church's exploding passion for mission.

And she was terrified.

When she arrived in Nigeria months later, Veenstra had no idea what challenges awaited her. Neither did she know how monumental her work would be, nurturing the Nigerian church and igniting a movement in our denomination. Veenstra was just obeying God's call on her heart.

Strong and Courageous

As missionaries do today, Veenstra regularly communicated with her supporters and churches in North America. We know from her letters, books, and other documents that her ministry was not always easy. For the first three years at her mission station, Veenstra and one other young woman were the only missionaries. Veenstra's formidable leadership skills helped them accomplish an astonishing amount of work. They built buildings, treated disease, started a school, led the church, and found time to trek far and wide to evangelize.

Veenstra had a zeal for everyone to listen for God's call on their heart. She brought that message to people hearing the gospel for the first time, and she also brought it home with her when she visited her supporting churches.

Despite her public image as a trailblazer, leader, and courageous evangelist, Veenstra wrestled with her call. In her book *Pioneering for Christ in the Sudan*, she described moments of doubt and fear.

As she began preparing to go to Nigeria, she wrote, "Then billows of doubt seemed to roll over my soul. ... I was feeling my utter unworthiness to be a messenger of the King." She also described frightening moments from the journey to Nigeria, such as riding the stormy seas during the ocean passage or wondering if she would be killed as she went deep into the country.

Johanna Veenstra set out for Nigeria in 1919, becoming the first international missionary of the CRCNA.

But throughout Veenstra's work in Nigeria, her confidence in the Holy Spirit overcame her doubts. From the beginning, she tackled challenges one at a time, adopting Joshua 1:9 as her life's motto: "Be strong and courageous ... for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

Building upon the Rock

Veenstra forged ahead where others didn't dare to go. She considered herself and her missionary co-workers to be pioneers, not only because they worked in such a remote location, but also because they had a vision for a self-sustaining church.

"Our mission has for its ideal a self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating African Church," she insisted in her book and in the reports she sent home. She placed leadership, finances, discipline, and other elements of church life into the hands of the church's elders.

"At the present time, we are laying the foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ," she wrote. "If the structure is to be permanent, the foundation must be strong and carefully planned. ... May the Lord help us to build upon the rock."

Legacy of Faith and Leadership

Veenstra became known for her relentlessness both at home and on the field. She championed the urgency of mission work, telling her supporters of the millions who needed Jesus Christ. She continually asked her supporters to consider this great need in letters, reports, and presentations. "Is it nothing to you?" she asked.

Veenstra's mentor, Dr. Henry Beets, recognized her monumental work and saw how important her legacy would be. "Miss Veenstra saw but a small beginning," Beets wrote in his book about her life, *Johanna of Nigeria*. "The Lord is definitely showing where we are to carry the line of advance."

Certainly the long-lived legacy of faith and leadership Veenstra left is remarkable, especially considering that her life was cut short. In 1933, just 13 years after arriving, Veenstra died on the field from complications of appendicitis. But thanks to the capable Nigerian leaders she trained and the team of young women God called to join her, Veenstra's work—God's work—continued, and Christian Reformed involvement in God's mission expanded around the world.


Following in Johanna's Footsteps

Resonate Global Mission director Zachary King said the agency still sees Johanna Veenstra's legacy as a valuable example.

"Johanna continues to inspire and encourage us as we seek to answer God's call in our own lives," King said. "As your mission agency, Resonate Global Mission is committed to equipping the Christian Reformed Church to continue to follow God wherever he places us.

"Johanna was an advocate for all Christians, especially young people, to consider the calling God has for them. What's more, Johanna worked to raise up female leaders in ministry—not only the young women she recruited to Nigeria from her own church, but also in the villages and towns of Nigeria."

Perhaps the most important lesson Veenstra's life teaches is that she was always confident in God, especially when she wasn't confident in herself. Living out her exhortations to others to follow God's leading, she wrestled with his will through prayer, devotions, and listening carefully to the words of her pastors, teachers, and counselors.

Like Veenstra, we can be confident that God has a role for us to play in his mission. Where is God calling you? Are you hearing God's call to join him at home or somewhere far away? Wherever you may be on your mission to answer that call, the ministries of your church—Resonate Global Mission, Back to God Ministries International, World Renew, and others—are available to equip you and support you for whatever God has called you to do, whether he's called you into the known or the unknown. 

A Letter from Johanna

Today I would introduce you to the first woman baptized in this district. ... Her name is Pa'ana. ... Upon first hearing, the Word of the Lord was "sweet to her taste," and very soon the Savior became her personal Lord and she broke away from the old life of darkness.

...One day I went to her hut, and enquiring whether she was in, I was told "She is at prayer in her hut." Then I saw the grass mat (door) let down, and I heard an

audible voice in prayer. Evidently she always prays aloud. ... The native Christians said, "[Daughter of Prayer] is the name we have given to Pa'ana." ... Is it not a lovely name!

—February 1926

80 Years of Media Ministry

IN 1939—20 YEARS AFTER

Johanna Veenstra left to become the CRC's first international missionary—the CRC expanded into mission work through media with the launch of a single radio program that since has become Back to God Ministries International.



From the beginning, people responded to this radio broadcast and media ministry with stories of how God worked through the messages they heard.

Unfilling Ourselves

Emily Vandonk says she "turned her back on God" as a teenager. After university, her 70-hour work weeks as an accountant didn't leave time for spiritual reflection.

"I thought I didn't need God," remembers Vandonk. "I was very successful in the corporate world, and I just kept going each day until I fell over from exhaustion."

Although Vandonk's parents were concerned, they didn't say a lot. Instead they simply slipped her the newest issue of the same devotional the family read throughout her childhood: *Today*, BTGMI's English devotional.

Most of these *Today* booklets ended up in Vandonk's recycling pile—but not the one she needed most. One sleepless night, stressed from the lifestyle she was living, Vandonk remembered the *Today*. The words in that day's prayer made a lasting impact on her:

"Father, since Jesus will not fill those who are full of themselves, I want to accept any experience you may allow in my life to empty me of my self-interest."

Miraculous Healing

Shortly after praying, things took a turn for the worse. Doctors diagnosed Vandonk with chronic fatigue syndrome, a complicated disorder that can't be explained by underlying medical conditions.

"Sometimes I would sleep 24 hours a day, and sometimes I couldn't sleep at all," Vandonk said. "I really encountered

Leading Prisoners with Singing

Jesus during that time because there was finally room for him.”

While the causes for chronic fatigue syndrome are unknown, it can be triggered by a variety of factors including viral infections, stress, and hormone imbalances. Because it is such a complicated illness to diagnose and understand, doctors told Vandonk she would likely live with this condition for the rest of her life. But she didn't accept that.

“I decided, after trying everything else, that I was going to try Jesus,” Vandonk said. “I prayed, ‘Jesus, if you heal me, I’ll serve you the rest of my life. After that, he came and he touched me.”

Vandonk’s symptoms of extreme fatigue went away.

God’s Bigger World

Vandonk cut out the prayer from her *Today* booklet and still keeps it with her. She believes reading it played a crucial role in re-establishing her relationship with God. Vandonk began taking part in international mission trips and eventually became a pastor at the Journey Church in Kitchener, Ont.

“Serving internationally gave me more of an understanding of the worldwide family of God and [an] understanding of Scripture when he calls us to the nations,” said Vandonk.

Just as Vandonk responded to God’s call through the *Today* devotional prayer, members of the CRC help Back to God Ministries respond to God’s call to reach the nations through media ministry in 10 major world languages. **B**

WHERE ARE Timothy Leadership Training Program manuals used? They can follow Jesus, the light in the darkness, to the most unlikely places.

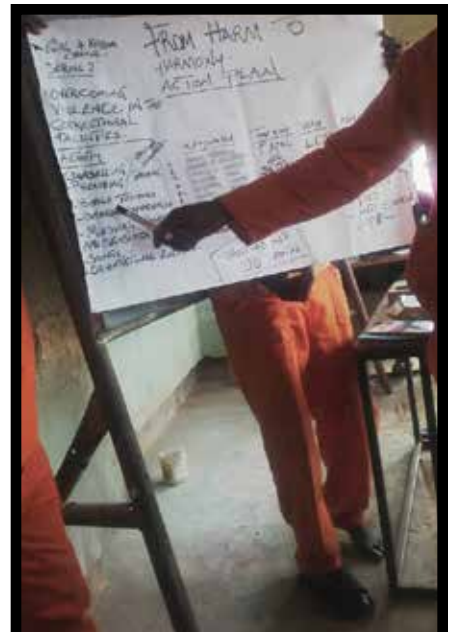
TLT is a curriculum offered by Raise Up Global Ministries and used by Resonate Global Mission and other partners to provide affordable, biblical, and effective leadership training around the world. One Raise Up Global Ministries partner has been working in an African prison using three TLT manuals: *Caring for God’s People*, *Harm to Harmony: Overcoming Violence in the Family*, and *God’s Plan for Sustainable Development*.

When participants finished their study of each manual, they created an action plan in which they defined exactly how they planned to implement something they had learned into their own lives or ministries. The prisoners were encouraged to be creative with their action plans. Some even included the formation of a choir and instrumentalists in the prison.

Following the creation of these action plans, the prisoners took steps to achieve their goals. Several formed singing groups and made additional plans to start recording music to support this ministry.

Recently, three participants were recognized for the leadership they developed through the TLT Action Plan process. As a result of their hard work, they have been granted the privilege of distance education at the country’s university to earn their bachelor’s degrees while in prison.

A total of 71 students graduated this year from their ten months of TLT study and of carrying out their action plans in a difficult place. Their hope for and confidence in a life



After completing leadership training, prisoners created plans to put their learning into action.

transformed were evident as they were honored for their hard work and growth in faith. The prisoners also sang the songs they had composed as part of their process. As certificates were handed out and hands were shaken, a sense of honor and accomplishment could be felt.

“The ripples of faith, learning, accountability, perseverance, and action plans will spread to many communities and families as these men and women re-enter society,” said Sam Huizenga, director of Raise Up Global Ministries. “Over 438 people have been trained in TLT through this one partner in one year alone.” **B**

— Gillian Ferwerda,
Raise Up Global Ministries

The View from Here

Milestones for the Journey

“ARE WE THERE YET?” If you’ve ever ridden in a car with youngsters in the back seat, you’ve heard the question—sometimes over and over!

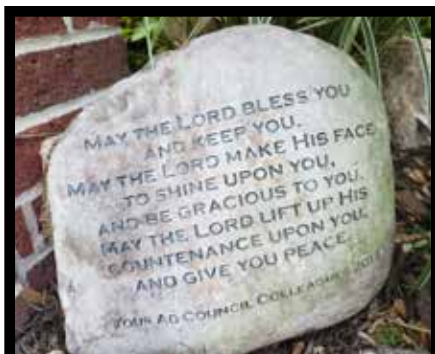
Some inventive parents have used that question to help direct their children’s gaze to signs along the highway, helping them answer their own question by paying attention to the information available.

Milestones were an ancient version of those road signs: stones along the road that indicated how far it was to a specific place. But the term “milestone” has taken on an additional meaning. Today, the word can also be used to indicate a specific achievement.

Whether they refer to the developmental milestones of a baby’s first word or first steps or to the 50th anniversary of the moon landing we observed this past summer, milestones seek to draw our attention to something important.

We learn in the Old Testament that God’s people, despite their frequent disobedience and striving to live apart from God, were given marked places and times to similarly help them keep their attention focused on the right thing.

In 1 Samuel 7:12, for example, we read that after the Israelites defeated the Philistines, Samuel “took a stone and ... named it Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far has the LORD helped us.’” And, after wandering for 40 years and then finally crossing the Jordan, Joshua arranged for 12 stones to be placed as “a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do



This rock was a gift from Trinity Christian College and reminds me of God’s faithfulness.

these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD” (Josh. 4:6-7).

When I left my job at Trinity Christian College, my co-workers gave me a stone with these biblical words etched into it: “May the LORD bless you and keep you. may the LORD make his face to shine upon you. and be gracious to you; may the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (adapted from Num. 6:24-26).

I await the day when my grandchildren see the stone at our home and ask me, “Why did your Trinity colleagues send you off with that verse?” I will be able to tell them about God’s faithfulness during that period of our lives.

As a denomination, the Christian Reformed Church in North America also has milestones to which we should pay attention. In July, for example, I had the opportunity to travel to Holland, Mich., to present a plaque to East Saugatuck CRC in commemoration of their 150th anniversary of ministry.

This fall, Resonate Global Mission is helping us acknowledge the CRC’s history of mission from the time Johanna Veenstra traveled to Nigeria 100 years ago to today. And Back to God Ministries International is reminding us that it has been 80 years since our denomination made its first radio broadcast.

When we observe important anniversaries like these, we give witness to God’s faithfulness. What’s more, when we place a plaque on a wall or print a timeline of key events, we provide ourselves and future generations with a reminder of God’s hand in our lives at a particular point in time. It enables our children, grandchildren, neighbors, and co-workers to ask, “What do these stones mean?” And it gives us the chance to provide testimony of God’s faithfulness.

May we “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have” (1 Pet. 3:15). And may our homes and churches be places filled with items and events that invite the questions!



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.

Building God's Kingdom

THIS PAST SPRING, Ken Herfst and students from Redeemer University College in Ontario walked the narrow streets of a slum settled on the outskirts of Guatemala City's main dump.

Thousands of people hustled in the sun's early-morning rays to scavenge through mounds of garbage, filling bags with food, glass, aluminum, and other commodities they could use or sell.

Herfst and his students were on a mission trip with Resonate Global Mission—but they didn't build any houses, paint any church buildings, or facilitate any trainings or programs.

"Those projects have their place," said Herfst, "but our purpose was to listen, observe, reflect together."

What does it look like to join God in mission and build his kingdom?

Mission Is Contextual

"Mission is contextual, and so the same approaches don't work everywhere," said Rachel Beveridge, a Resonate missionary serving in Guatemala. "God is at work in the world in different ways. As Christians joining God's mission, we have to take into account both the history and current realities of any given place in order to discern how God might be calling us to respond."

Herfst, who served in Guatemala for many years and now teaches urban and intercultural ministry at Redeemer, brought students from his classroom to Guatemala. After studying and discussing theories, theology, and practices while sitting in desks, Herfst's students were able to see ministry in action.

Students were invited into communities, homes, and churches. They visited a slum, joined a family for a traditional



Ken Herfst partnered with Resonate Global Mission to bring students from Redeemer University College to Guatemala to learn what it looks like to join God in mission and build his kingdom.

meal, and crowded into a church office to hear stories of Guatemala's history. In every conversation, students were encouraged to think about ministry not just in terms of talking about the gospel, but in practicing what Jesus did and said.

"[It's] often presented as the question between evangelism and church planting versus social action," said Herfst. "Instead of seeing both belonging together, there's often a tension between the two."

In the Bible, Jesus preaches both. Scripture is full of verses about faith in Christ and encouraging one another spiritually—but Jesus also asks his people to care for one another by providing water, food, clothing, and shelter.

Resonate partners with ministry leaders like Herfst who want to bridge the divide in mission between addressing people's spiritual needs and caring for their physical needs.

Thinking about Mission

"It helped grow the way I think about mission," said Adrian Faber, a student

who participated in the vision trip. "Going on the trip to Guatemala opened my eyes to how mission work is rooted in and for the individuals in the culture. ... It's about working with people, knowing people ... sharing the gospel with actual, individual people."

Faber graduated from Redeemer this past year and is returning to Central America as part of Resonate's Cohort—a year-long mission experience designed specifically for young adults to explore their callings while gaining experience working with local mission organizations at the grassroots level.

Herfst and Resonate plan to organize more vision trips for students to better understand what it looks like to join God in mission and build his kingdom. These trips might be just a few days long, but they help equip students to live out the gospel for the rest of their lives.

"[The students] are still responding," said Herfst. "They're not done. They're still trying to work through it all. ... You need to live within the questions often."

—Cassie Westrate,
Resonate Global Mission

Seeing God through the Spectacles of Scripture

DESPITE ongoing scientific advances in the understanding of the universe, there remains—and likely will remain—a great deal of mystery in this life between how we consider what science is telling us and how we understand Scripture, said Mary Vanden Berg, professor of systematic theology at Calvin Seminary.

She's skeptical that there might someday be a concordance, or detailed list, that ties the two together and offers a full explanation of God's creation—probably because the science and Scripture have two different purposes.

"The job of science is not to teach us about God," Vanden Berg said. "It is to help us understand the natural world. Scripture's sole purpose is to teach us about God and the relationship of God and humans in this world, questions that science is not equipped to address."

Vanden Berg explored creation doctrine in 2018 as a research grant recipient of the Creation Project, part of the Henry Center at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago, Ill.



Mary Vanden Berg is professor of systematic theology at Calvin Seminary.

The Creation Project, as its website says, aims to "catalyze a field of study around the doctrine of creation that is faithful to Scripture and informed by contemporary scientific research."

Among Vanden Berg's interests as part of the Creation Project was theological anthropology, or exploring humans as the image of God, from a Reformed perspective.

As she began to read widely on the topic, she found herself drawn to Thomas Aquinas' "Treatise on Man" from his *Summa Theologica*.

As she studied the 13th-century theologian, Vanden Berg realized Aquinas had a holistic understanding of what humans are, how they operate, and what they are made for.

And while he does deal with the image of God, as do most theologians, she said, "Aquinas understands humans in terms of the big package rather than this one little piece."

As a result of studying Aquinas, Vanden Berg shifted from looking

rather narrowly at the image of God to exploring the broader question of what makes humans unique.

Working from what she thinks is a basic and instinctive premise—that humans are unique—Vanden Berg set out to see if and how humans actually are unique by looking at Scripture, theology, and modern science.

In the process, Vanden Berg examined the connection between the two "books" of revelation: God's creation as we know and can experience it, and Scripture.

The key word, she said, is "revelation."

"The idea behind revelation," Vanden Berg said, "is that apart from God making himself known to us, we cannot know God."

So when such theologians as John Calvin discuss the two revelatory "books," he is not talking about how we come to know the structure of a cell or some other scientific knowledge. He is instead referring to how we come to know God.

Understanding God's revelation in two ways or "books" reminds us that while we can come to know something about God from the creation, we will inevitably, because of sin, distort that knowledge and worship the creature in place of the Creator. That's why we need the second book, Scripture, which Calvin describes as "spectacles."

Through these spectacles, said Vanden Berg, we can come to properly see and ponder "the invisible things of God" in creation.

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

Volunteers Sustain and Grow Community Development

EARLIER THIS YEAR, Barbara Kayanja made a field visit to the village of Akokma on the southern shores of Lake Kyoga in Uganda.

About 660 square miles in area, Lake Kyoga is a shallow body of water through which the Victoria Nile flows on its way from Lake Victoria to Lake Albert.

Along this lake are landing sites, the centers of the Ugandan fish trade, where boats depart from and return to with their catches every day.

World Renew had been to this Akampala landing site before, said Kayanja, a World Renew team leader, when the agency and its Ugandan partner, the Pentecostal Assemblies of God West Teso, began an Embrace AIDS and HIV Innovation Fund project there.

"I was returning exactly one year after the close of the project, curious to see if the community had been able to sustain the work that had begun years ago," Kayanja said.

As she and others walked through the community, observing life on the landing site, project volunteers there told the story of a man who became a local hero after he killed a crocodile that had threatened many lives along the lake.

"Our hosts were grateful to God that humans and crocodiles have lived in relative peace since then, as God intended," she said.

Hearing this reminded her of World Renew's hope for all communities: to "receive and express justice and mercy and peace as evidenced by healthy relationships with God, neighbor, self, and creation."



"I celebrated their detente with the local crocodiles as evidence of healthy relationship with creation," Kayanja said, "but could see that was a mere sliver of the shalom this community had been experiencing as a result of their efforts to continue the work begun in the project."

On the visit, Kayanja saw that project volunteers have stayed and are continuing their work. Today the community is proud to have 161 volunteers championing development in the community.

"As a team," she said, "they have been able to negotiate with local government for financial support for four self-help groups."

Volunteers have constructed roads and installed boreholes to drill for water.

"We visited a number of individual enterprises and village savings and loan groups, listening with joy to what they have accomplished even after the project's official closure," said Kayanja.

Especially heartening are the health advances that have been sustained. The local HIV infection rate is just 2.2%, down from 34.7% at the program's inception.

More volunteers have joined the local church, too, and congregations continue to grow.

Playing a key role in all of this are volunteers who "continue to be good role models of what transformation on an individual basis looks like," Kayanja said.

Volunteers such as these in the village of Akokma are making progress possible even after an official program has ended.

"Well-trained and motivated volunteers ensure sustained transformation," Kayanja said, "and World Renew and our partners can replicate this success by continuing to build our capacity to recruit, manage, and motivate volunteers."

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

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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 \(crcna.org/network\)](http://TheNetwork(crcna.org/network)).

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

Just in the past few weeks, your peers:

SHARED

- Training Videos for Sound Technicians
- Disability Awareness Slides

ASKED

- Does Contemporary Christian Music Imply Sin No Longer Matters?
- What Copyright Licenses Do I Need?

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

network

All About Bread

ROUND COTTAGE LOAVES and long, skinny baguettes. Whole wheat bread, rye bread, rice bread, and corn tortillas. Flat chapati and fluffy challah. Savory sourdough and sweet panettone. Whatever it looks like and however it is made, bread is a part of many celebrations and everyday meals all around the world.

While there are many different kinds of bread, the best kind of bread is homemade bread. After you read this, find an adult and look up a recipe to try!

Bread Balloons

Simple flatbreads may be made with just flour, water, and salt. Other types of bread have another important ingredient: baking soda or yeast. Both of these are used to make bread dough rise instead of staying flat. When baking soda reacts with other ingredients, a gas called carbon dioxide is made. The little gas bubbles then get trapped in the dough causing it to inflate—sort of like a balloon!

Yeast makes little carbon dioxide gas bubbles, too, but in a different way. Yeast is alive and so tiny that it is only one cell! It “eats” the sugars in the flour and turns them into carbon dioxide. As the dough rises, the yeast cells divide, making more yeast cells. As long as there is air and food in the dough for them, they will keep working until the bread goes into the oven to bake.

Unlike “quick breads” that use baking soda and can be baked right away, dough with yeast has to sit and rise before going into the oven. The yeast needs time to work—at least a few hours. When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, they had to eat bread without yeast because they left quickly and there wasn’t time to let dough rise.

Bread in the Bible

Bread is mentioned often in the Bible, from God providing for the Israelites in the wilderness to Jesus feeding the 5,000 and the Last Supper. Bread was a big part of what people ate back then, and it still is for many today.

But the Bible also tells us that “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3). Just like we need to eat every day, we also need to feed our hearts and minds by reading our Bibles and taking in God’s Word. **B**



Rachel Lancashire is a freelance writer with an educational background in wildlife. She grew up in the Christian Reformed Church and currently attends Gilmour Memorial Baptist Church in Selwyn, Ont.

A Depression Story

By Mary Hulst

There is a significant rise in mental health problems among emerging young adults. This short story is a glimpse into what this might look like on our Christian college campuses. (All characters are fictional.)

It was the third snooze. She was going to be late. Again. She didn't care. But she cared that she didn't care. Why didn't she care anymore? In high school she kept a tight schedule, up early for AP History, at school late for practice. Home to study, eat, and talk with her parents. Back to bed to do it all over again. She had been disciplined. She cared. She cared a lot—about grades, sports, friends, church. But now?

Megan took a deep breath and willed herself to sit up. She felt the tears welling up before her feet hit the floor. What was wrong with her? She had never felt this ... sad? Tired?

Her roommate was in the shower. Esther's bible was open on her desk. Megan felt even worse. She used to read Scripture. She used to pray. A tear made its way down her cheek. She brushed it away and pulled on some yoga pants that had been on the floor, a big sweatshirt and a baseball cap. She left the room before Esther even knew she was up.

Esther came out of the bathroom quietly. She glanced at the bunk and was surprised to see it empty. Megan hadn't told her that anything was wrong, but her desk was messy, her bed was never made, and she spent a lot of time sleeping. This was not the girl who had moved in back in August. Esther and Megan had laughed and pasted glow-in-the-dark stars on their ceiling as they sang along to Beyoncé.

As she remembered their first few days together, Esther grew concerned. Megan was avoiding her, avoiding class—avoiding any group events at all. Esther wanted to honor Megan's privacy, but she was beginning to think she should talk to someone.

...

Esther slung her backpack into a booth and set down her plate. She slid in and, just as she did, her resident assistant, Rachel, slid in across from her.

"May I eat with you?"

"Of course!"

Rachel grabbed the ketchup for her fries and asked, "What was the best thing that happened to you today?" Esther thought through her day.

"Oh!" she said.

"That good?" Rachel said.

"No, it's not that. I remembered what I needed to talk with you about."

"What?"

Esther swallowed.

"Um. I'm worried about Megan."

"Megan your roommate?" There were three Megans on the floor.

"Yeah."

"What's up?"

"She's ... not going to class. She seems ... tired? But more than tired?" Esther suddenly felt uncertain about sharing. "I don't mean to tattle."

"It's not tattling," Rachel said. "You're concerned. She's skipping class. Is she eating?"

"I think so, just not with people."

"Is she sleeping a lot?"

Megan had a moment of clarity: She needed help. This wasn't going away on its own.

"All the time."

Rachel nodded. Esther watched her, wondering what she was thinking. Should she have told her?

"I'm glad you told me. Let me see what I can do."

...

Rachel spotted Megan walking back to the dorm from the dining hall and fell in step next to her. She commented on the weather and then asked, "Are you and Esther getting along?"

"Oh, yes. She's great."

"Good. She really likes you, too." Rachel was glad to see the hint of a smile when she said this. She took a breath and continued. "I think she's worried about you."

Megan dropped the smile. "Why?"

"Why do you think?"

"I'm not ..." Megan stopped walking.

Rachel waited.

"I don't know what's wrong. I don't want to talk about it."

They started walking again.

Rachel spoke gently.

"I understand that you don't want to talk about it. That's fine. Sometimes it's hard to put our feelings into words."

They walked a few more steps in silence before Rachel said, "I had a hard season of depression my sophomore year. It was awful. I didn't know what was going on. It is hard sometimes. And sometimes you don't want to talk. But if you do," Rachel stopped walking and looked at Megan, "I'm here. I'm going to text you tomorrow to check in, OK?"

Megan nodded and walked in to the dorm.

She went right into her room and climbed into bed fully dressed. She was embarrassed. She didn't want anyone to worry about her. But she was worried about herself. The tears slid down her cheeks. She wiped her face on her pillow and fell asleep.

...

Her phone said 3:07 a.m. She lay in the dark, holding her phone. She wasn't well. There was a part of her that was trying to tell her that, but she wasn't listening, like when she started to sneeze but insisted she wasn't catching a cold.

Megan had a moment of clarity: She needed help. This wasn't going away on its own. She lifted her phone and squinted at it in the dark. She texted Rachel: "I need to talk. I need your help." She dropped her hands to her side and fell asleep.

The response was there when Megan woke at 7:15 a.m.: "Of course. When?" Megan didn't want to leave her bed, but she texted back, "Now?"

Moments later, there was a knock.

"Want to go to breakfast? Coffee?" Rachel was in sweats, so Megan knew she was good to go in the clothes she'd slept in. She texted Esther, "Out with Rachel."

...

"I couldn't believe how she just got it." Megan was sitting across from Carl, one of the college's counselors. She was telling him how she arrived at his

door. "She was describing everything I was feeling. She said she got help, and it worked, so I'm here. Fix me."

Carl laughed. "I appreciate your confidence in me. But it doesn't work like that. We'll see where this takes us, OK?"

...

Her bed was made. Esther noticed it right away when she entered their room. And her clothes were picked up. Megan was at her desk, chemistry book open.

"Hey! How are you?" Megan knew Esther's question wasn't merely polite.

Megan pulled out her the earbuds. "I'm OK." Megan drew in a breath. "I'm not great, but I'm better."

"Good, good," said Esther. "I have been praying for you."

"Thank you. Prayers, counseling, and maybe some medication will get me through this."

"Medication?" Esther looked at her. "For your soul?"

"Well, for my brain, actually," said Megan.

"Your brain? Isn't it your heart that is sad?"

"Well, yes, but ..." Megan didn't know how to answer.

"Won't prayers and praying with your counselor be enough?"

"I don't really pray with my counselor," Megan was unsure of what to say. "We talk about my life and the pressure I put on myself and small steps to take each day." That sounded so hollow compared to what the counseling sessions had actually been.

"Well, I will keep praying," Esther said. "I prefer that to medicine."

...

"Did you go on meds?" Megan didn't even greet Rachel before she blurted out the question. Rachel finished

filling her water bottle and turned to look at Megan.

"What?"

"For your depression. Did you go on meds?"

"Um, yeah. They really helped."

"What about prayer?"

Rachel laughed. "Oh, I prayed a LOT."

"No, I mean, do you need meds if you have prayer? Esther seems to think prayer should be enough. I don't know what to think."

"Has anyone prescribed you meds?"

"No. I have an appointment with Dr. Schyler tomorrow." Dr. Schyler was the contracted psychiatrist for the campus.

"Well, see what he says first."

"Sure. But is depression a physical thing or more of a spiritual thing?"

Rachel slipped her water bottle into the side pocket of her backpack.

"It's both. Do you have a few minutes?"

"Sure, I don't have class till 2:30."

"Let's go to the coffee shop."

...

The girls found a quiet booth in a back corner.

"So," Megan began, "you said it's both? Medical and spiritual?"

"Yeah. Your brain may not be producing the right chemicals in the right amounts at the right times, and meds can really help with that. That's one way in which God heals us—through medicine and great doctors and counselors."

Megan nodded. Her appointments with Cliff had helped more than she thought they would. She'd also been going to a mindfulness group. She had rolled her eyes when Cliff suggested it, but was surprised it was actually useful.

Rachel continued. "Illness can also be a time when we really doubt God, and the enemy can use our low feelings as an opportunity to mess with us."

Rachel didn't usually talk this way, so Megan leaned in.

"We get stuck in our thoughts and feelings, and the enemy tells us things will never get better, or that God doesn't care, or that prayer doesn't work."

Rachel paused.

"What I found is the meds raised my emotional bottom; when I got down, I didn't get as down as I used to. I felt more stable, and that allowed me to really engage with the counseling, get on a better sleep schedule, and it helped me to hear the difference between the voice of God and the voice of the enemy."

"Wow," Megan said.

Rachel smiled.

"I have to thank Pastor Brian. He really helped me pull apart the physical and the spiritual and see how one influenced the other. He said having depression or anxiety doesn't mean your faith is weak. God invites us to trust him and not worry, but God also knows how our brains work. He knows the sorrows of our hearts."

Megan hadn't thought about seeing one of the college chaplains, but it made a lot of sense.

"So Esther is right, and your psychiatrist will be right. You do need to keep praying, and your doctor may put you on medication. You need both. At least, I sure did."

Rachel watched Megan take this all in.

"You know Roberto?"

Roberto was the RA of their brother floor. He was a pole vaulter, spoke three languages fluently, and sang on a worship team. He was one of those people who did everything and did it well.

"Roberto is on medication."

"What?!" Megan was stunned. "Why?"

"He had a really bad first year. Culture shock, classes, trying to stay eligible for track. He started having panic attacks."

Megan's eyes widened. "Roberto?"

"Yes. In our early RA meetings, he was very transparent about all of it, and said we could use his story to help people. He would wake up in the middle of the night not able to breathe, or he would go to the gym and be afraid to vault. Things he used to do without thinking became impossible. He was really scared."

"I'll bet."

"So, he did all the things you're doing—counseling, meds, and he quit a few activities. He only sings on the worship team in the fall, so he has time for track in the spring. He dropped his double major. He stopped trying to be all things to all people. And he taught us to choose people over screens."

"People over screens?"

"Yeah, one of the things we'll do when we are stressed is pick up our phones and start scrolling. But studies show that actually makes us feel worse. What helps is to be with people. Roberto challenged us to use our phones as tools, not as comforts. We made a pact as an RA staff to choose people over screens. There's actually a sociologist who says one reason for all of our mental health issues is because of screens and our overstimulated brains" (bit.ly/2u3JDX6).

Megan looked at her friend suspiciously. Rachel laughed.

"Yeah, I wrote a paper on it."

They both laughed.

"So," Megan said, "meds, prayer, counseling, people over screens."

"Absolutely. Plus exercise and sleep are vital. Sleep six hours every night, preferably seven or eight. Chantal has all of us keep a sleep diary. She doesn't want us sick because we aren't getting enough sleep." Chantal was the resident director.

"I had no idea."

"You had no idea you needed that much sleep, or that Chantal made us keep sleep diaries?"

"Either."

"Yeah. I also sleep with my phone in the bathroom. Only if I'm on call do I have my phone on and near my bed."

Megan thought about how often she fell asleep holding her phone.

It was time for class.

"This has been so helpful. Thank you."

"No problem! Let me know how it goes with Dr. Schyler."

"I will!"

...


Megan shoved her phone into her backpack and headed to class. She walked into the room, sat down, and began to make a list:

"Make appt w/ Pastor Brian."

"Ask Chantal about sleep diaries?"

"Talk with Esther about praying together."

Megan took in a deep breath and let it out, just as she had learned in her mindfulness class. "*Help me,*" she prayed. "*Help me to hear you and not the voice of the enemy.*"

The professor walked in. Megan pulled out her books. And for the first time in a long time, she felt hope. 



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

1. How would you recognize if someone, especially a young person, is facing depression or a mental health issue? What are some of the signs?
2. How can we help someone going through depression without them feeling they are being judged?
3. Discuss further how depression can be both a spiritual and ...

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Remembering Valentina

Valentina lived
for two years,
not two weeks.
She wore her red
coat for almost
two winters.



Janet Greidanus is a freelance news correspondent for The Banner. She lives in Edmonton, Alberta.

THE FALLEN LEAVES swirling along the avenue remind me that although it is warm enough to sit outdoors with my coffee on this October afternoon, winter is just around the corner. Looking up, I notice one leaf on an otherwise bare tree. One red leaf holding on, refusing to surrender to the expectations of the season. That leaf reminds me of Valentina.

Valentina came to Pilgrims Hospice after she was told she had about two weeks to live. It was not rational for her to think she would live long enough to see her sister's baby due in several months or to celebrate her 30th birthday. But here's what she did. She bought a new winter coat. Red. Expensive.

I remember wondering what I would do in that situation. I probably wouldn't even bother getting one. Valentina's new coat had a profound impact on me. It was a symbol of Valentina's faith in a future when everything looked so bleak. A sign of hope that she would live long enough to wear it during the approaching winter.

Poet Emily Dickinson described hope as "the thing with feathers—That perches in the soul—And sings the tune without the words—And never stops—At all." I think Valentina might have described hope as the thing that lives in the soul and empowers you to buy a new winter coat even when you've been told you're going to die before the first frost. But Valentina's is more than a story of hope. It's also a story about choice.

Valentina chose to live fully. Facing imminent death, she continued to learn new things, taking painting lessons from a hospice volunteer. She enjoyed her simple meals. The beauty, smell, and taste of a single tomato gave her much pleasure. On

days when her strength permitted, Valentina, the most seriously ill of the patients, would rise from her seat, greet the others attending the hospice day program, and welcome them with an encouraging word and often an embrace.

Viktor Frankl, a psychoanalyst and a Holocaust survivor, has described how some individuals, even in the horror of a concentration camp, held on to a sense of choice. Although suffering and starving themselves, they walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. Frankl writes, "They offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man (or woman) but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Valentina could have become embittered, self-centered, and apathetic. She chose otherwise. She chose to bear her particular suffering with hope and courage and dignity. Her choice to buy a new red winter coat even when she had been told she would die before winter was a way of acting heroically within a narrative of her own choosing. To rephrase Frankl, "The way Valentina bore her suffering was a genuine inner achievement. It is this spiritual freedom, which cannot be taken away, that makes life meaningful and purposeful."

Valentina lived for two years, not two weeks. She wore her red coat for almost two winters. Her death, when it came, was grievous for all of us at the hospice, but especially for her young husband. As I finish my coffee, I'm aware that today it's only gratitude I feel. Gratitude for having had the opportunity to bear witness to the life of such an incredible young woman. I will never forget her. **B**

Practicing the Ministry of Reconciliation

The “beauty” of conflict around complex issues like sexuality, climate change, political ideology, or even hermeneutics is that we’re not going to solve them any time soon.



Michael Gulker is president of The Colossian Forum, sharing the good news that conflict need not be a threat. He attends Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Wyoming, Mich.

FEAR AND CONFLICT—and fear of conflict—dominate many of the headlines in our news feeds these days. These conflicts (and conflict avoidance) are ripping apart our nations, denominations, congregations, and even our families. According to a study by the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership, “The top reasons why people leave a church have to do with not being connected in the church and/or being revolted by gossip and turned away by conflict and strife.” Not being connected. Being revolted. These responses are likely the result of our refusal to engage the many conflicts separating us, or our tendency to engage them badly. We’re tired of it—*really* tired of it. So how can we do better?

Given the formative power of the media we consume almost constantly, it’s no wonder we lack the theological imagination to engage each other constructively. We lack the tools and know-how to welcome conflict precisely as the place where discipleship and ministry meet.

In her study on “Preaching about Controversial Justice Issues,” which surveyed over 1,200 pastors, Leah Schade, a professor at Lexington Theological Seminary, concluded that the main reasons pastors hesitate to address issues of public concern include fear of hurting or dividing their congregation; fear of risking their ability to effectively minister in their church; fear of receiving negative pushback for being “too political”; and fear of loss—loss of members, loss of money, and loss of their own jobs.

No surprises there. Common sense, even, to let sleeping dogs lie.

So how is that working? By 2050, if current trends continue, according

to the Pinetops Foundation, 30 million people will have left the church forever.

Fortunately, the church has been given something more interesting than common sense. We’ve been given, in Paul’s words, “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). In a culture drowning in conflict, there is simply nothing more beautiful, needful, or relevant than the reconciling power of the gospel and a people willing to live in light of it. What if, instead of mimicking the fear, confusion, and vitriol so prevalent in our culture, we welcomed conflict as the place to discover how in Christ, for whom and through whom all things were created, “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17)? What if, by eagerly exploring how in Christ, in the church, and in our practices of worship and confession, we’ve already been given everything we need to be faithful?

Yet as disciples, we face a unique challenge. Spiritual practices are meant to shape us and our desires into a particular form—into the image of Christ, of what it means to be truly human. But in our postmodern age, when claims to “truth” can only be understood as assertions of power, how do we articulate a meaningful vision of what is truly human that doesn’t automatically violate one’s personal authenticity?

If Christ has broken down the dividing wall of hostility (Eph. 2:14) between heaven and earth, between Jew and Gentile, surely he has overcome the wall between left and right. Do we not have before us the possibility of witnessing to something the wider culture can no longer imagine—hope that all things do hold together in Christ? Can we imagine it? More importantly, can we embody it for

the world to see? Perhaps not without practice.

As director of The Colossian Forum, I have had the opportunity to practice with churches all over the country how these gospel possibilities can be lived out on the ground. By leaning into conflict as an act of worship, we have seen the embodied truth of Colossians 1:17 lived out in powerful, undeniable ways. We have seen the Holy Spirit create new possibilities, new relationships, and new ways forward. When we practice “the Colossian way” faithfully, intentionally, and over time, God shows up. Repeatedly. Reliably. Or we become aware of the fact that God has been there all along. We discover God in the most unexpected places—in the faces and hearts of people we disagree with. Perhaps even in those we have called our enemies. When we make ourselves vulnerable by loving God and our neighbor, who may also be our enemy, God does new things right before our eyes.

Because I can’t readily explain it, I find myself reaching for the words of the Christian tradition—our confessions and doctrines and beliefs—not to shove them down the throat of my opponent, but rather to make sense of the encounter with the true and living God in the face of the other.

The “beauty” of conflict, especially conflict around complex issues like sexuality, climate change, political ideology, or even hermeneutics is that we’re not going to solve them any time soon. Why is this beautiful? Because it forces us to acknowledge that the primary problem underlying our brokenness and fragmentation isn’t just a lack of information but a lack of formation. We’re not yet the kind of people we need to be to live together

well. Thankfully, formation into the image of Christ is exactly what the church and its worship are all about.

In the midst of all the conflict and fear, we feel our need. Perhaps we might just be desperate enough to put ourselves at God’s mercy, engaging conflict not as people “in the right” who absolutely must “win,” but through explicitly Christian practices of self-giving love and reconciliation. Taking up the ministry of reconciliation has the potential to show Jesus to a world that so desperately needs to see him.

What might such formation practices look like?

First, we must engage conflict itself as an act of worship. This means that as we engage our differences, we must do so with a shared acknowledgment that we are doing it in God’s presence and for God’s glory. We must ask ourselves and our brothers and sisters on the opposite side of the issues whether our exchange glorified God. If not, how must we together lament? Confess? Repent?

Second, we must give up our desperate desire to win at all costs and testify instead that Christ has already won. Thus we’re uniquely free, as followers of Christ, to love each other as Christ loved us. Does this mean we’ve given up on the truth? By no means! Instead, because Christ has already won, we can give up our need to win the argument as a way of displaying

that victory. Instead, as image-bearers of the God who laid down his life for us, we can show how the truths of the faith we hold so dear actually make possible a way of being that the world can no longer imagine.

To practice engaging conflict as followers of Christ gives us the perfect opportunity to lay down, if not our lives, at least our arguments for those “others” God has so graciously given us for our own sanctification. Through that sanctification, perhaps we’ll come to see that person we so vehemently disagree with as the very face of God, and learn that difference, desire, and delight were meant to hang together—just like Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **B**

1. Talk about a time you experienced conflict. Did reconciliation or resolution take place?
2. How does engaging conflict as “an act of worship” change your perceptions of conflict?
3. What are ways we can begin to let go of the “winning” mentality and ...

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

How Redemption Runs Through the Marvel Cinematic Universe

NOTE: SPOILERS AHEAD!

As a Christian who relishes movies, I often look for biblical themes that shine through, no matter what I am watching. Since I believe all truth is God's (thank you, Reformed theology), I witness a redemptive theme in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Redemption is a journey toward becoming authentic and fulfilling your purpose. In Christian terms, that means bringing glory to God in all you do and being a blessing to others because God has redeemed us from sin. It means being transformed. In the Marvel movies, redemption is the linchpin theme. Everything hinges on redemption.

Many Marvel characters experience their own mini-arc of change in their movies. You can see the before/after transformations as they are redeemed into the heroes/heroines they portray. Tony Stark starts out in 2012's *The Avengers* as a genius, billionaire, play-boy philanthropist with major selfish ego issues. Undergoing perhaps the biggest redemptive arc in the Marvel franchise, Stark sacrifices himself for half the universe in *Avengers: Endgame*, the final film. His journey is replete with mistakes and flaws, but that's the beauty of redemption: it doesn't give up on you until you are changed. And you can't get there alone: the man in the cave, Pepper Potts, and even Spider-Man help forge the redemption in Stark's character.

Black Widow/Natasha Romanoff's character is a trained spy and assassin with red on her ledger, having committed countless violent acts. But in *Endgame*, she fights Hawkeye to sacrifice herself so the team can get the Soul Stone they need to reverse Thanos' curse on the universe.

Doctor Strange starts out as a prideful surgeon who can't get past his own big ego. When a car accident takes his hands and his identity, Doctor Strange accesses new powers and must learn a new way to live. By the end of his movie (2016's *Doctor Strange*), he grasps what the Ancient One has been teaching him: "It's not about you." Doc puts himself in harm's way to stop the evil Dormammu from destroying the planet. (It's funny to see Doctor Strange and Tony Stark argue in *Endgame* because both have had their bouts with arrogance.)

Other characters—Loki, Bucky Barnes the Winter Soldier, King T'Challa the Black Panther, Wanda the Scarlet Witch, Bruce Banner's Hulk, Nebula, Drax, and more—undertake their own journeys of redemption.

I appreciate these abundant stories of redemption, journeys in which characters such as Stark, Strange, and the rest change, finally walking into the true potential of who they can be. These characters might be fictional, but they give us hope and even serve as a kind of parable for us as moviegoers. They leave us wondering: can redemption happen even for little ol' me? Can I change and be made new? These questions change everything. They are why I frequently use movies as illustrations in my sermons. God can use anything—even movies—to teach us something. As the Marvel movies teach us, even superheroes need redemption and the hope it brings. 



Darrell L. Delaney lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., and is pastor of Madison Church, Square Campus. He and his wife of 15 years, Kia, have three children.



Reading Genesis and Modern Science: A Study Guide

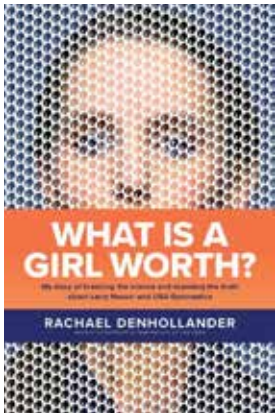
by Franklin P. and David O. De Haan

Reviewed by George Kroeze

How does a 21st-century Christian face the facts of scientific inquiry and also take the Bible seriously?

In this study guide, the De Haans, father and son professors of chemistry, walk us through geological, chemical, and astronomical evidence for the earth's ancient past and how these topics intersect with biblical teaching.

The De Haans show there are faithful interpretations of Genesis 1 that are compatible with their scientific conclusions. The authority of Scripture and the belief that one creator God brought into existence this material world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) are consistent with the insights of modern science. Highly recommended for Bible study groups and discussion groups and for spurring thoughtful conversations between the generations. (Credo)



What Is a Girl Worth? My Story of Breaking the Silence and Exposing the Truth About Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics

by *Rachael
DenHollander*

Reviewed by Ann Byle

Rachael DenHollander dreamed of being a gymnast, but when injuries led her into the office of renowned sports doctor Larry Nassar, her dreams turned into a nightmare. From the first visit, Nassar sexually assaulted her under the guise of treatment. She lived for years with the results—shame, fear, depression, panic.

In 2016, DenHollander decided to speak up about Nassar's abuse. This timely memoir is DenHollander's account of the sexual abuse she experienced, its aftermath, and the arrest and trial of Nassar. It shines a spotlight on the physical and emotional impact of abuse, why so many survivors are reluctant to speak out, and the supernatural power of faith and forgiveness. (Tyndale)



The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek

by *Kim Michele
Richardson*

Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

Set in the hills of Kentucky in 1936, this poignant novel relates the fictional tale of Cussy Mary Carter, nicknamed Bluet by the folk of Troublesome Creek who despise her because of her blue skin. As one of the Kentucky Blues—real, historical people with blue skin who lived in that Appalachian region—Bluet is attacked and isolated.

But when Bluet secures a position on the Pack Horse Library Project, established in 1935 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, her life changes. Kim Michele Richardson offers readers a gut-wrenching tale that sheds a compassionate light on the persecuted Kentucky Blues and the courage, resiliency, and life-changing role of the librarians known as the Book Women. (HarperCollins)



Biggest Little Farm

Reviewed by Otto Selles

John and Molly Chester dreamed of a place their dog could roam freely—and where they could pursue their vision of farming. With funding from friends and family, they bought a property 40 miles north of Los Angeles. This documentary film traces the many challenges the Chesters faced over eight years in establishing what would become Apricot Lane Farms. John Chester worked as a documentary filmmaker, and his skills are showcased here. With beautiful time-lapse sequences displaying the plants and animals and the stars above the farm, the film does witness to the intricate glory and beauty of creation, just as evident on a farm as in a wilderness park. (Neon)

The Lowdown

Fascinated by Foxes: In *The Hidden World of the Fox*, Adele Brand shares her fascination with the red fox, from her childhood to her adult work as a mammal ecologist. (Morrow)

Church and State: *The Family* docuseries dives into The Fellowship Foundation, the secretive evangelical group behind the National Prayer Breakfast. (Netflix)

Batty for Batwoman: Kate Kane, Bruce Wayne's cousin, must overcome her demons in order to protect the streets as Batwoman in the new TV series set in the *Arrow* universe. (Oct. 6, CW)

Hungry No More: The director of the Texas Hunger Initiative calls Christians to work together to end hunger in *I Was Hungry*. (Brazos)

Has Christianity Done More Harm Than Good?

To be sure, Christians and the church have been guilty of harm and evil in the past. But neither should we forget the good that Christians and the church, driven by faith, have accomplished.



Shiao Chong is editor of *The Banner*.

THERE IS A POPULAR NARRATIVE that religion in general and Christianity in particular have done more harm than good for human society. This narrative is often espoused by militant atheists trying to show why the world would be better off without religion. It is a debatable claim disputed even by some thoughtful atheists as evidenced in Bruce Sheiman's book *An Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity is Better Off with Religion than without It* (2009).

So has Christianity done more harm than good? It's impossible to answer this with any precision. It is not always easy, for starters, to determine if Christianity and not some other factor is the cause or source of a specific harm. It is not easy to measure harm, either, especially if we intend to count harms beyond physical harm, such as emotional, social, or even spiritual harm. All these difficulties apply equally to trying to measure "good."

If we think more deeply, we also run into the conundrum of unintended consequences. What if something good in the short term turned out to cause unintended harm in the long run? How do you tally that? Is it a tie?

Furthermore, we do not choose our beliefs based simply on how good or useful they are. Truthfulness is as important a criterion as goodness. Neither of those is exclusive to the other.

To be sure, Christians and the church have been guilty of harm and evil in the past. We cannot ignore that. But neither should we forget the good that Christians and the church, driven by faith, have accomplished.

For example, there were widespread practices of abortion, infanticide, child abandonment and gladiatorial fight-to-the-death shows in the ancient

Roman Empire. It was Christianity that condemned and resisted those practices, from boycotting gladiatorial games to rescuing abandoned children. The early Christians did so because they believed in the sanctity of human life, created in the image of God.

This same regard for human life coupled with love for neighbor also drove Christians to care for those who are sick and poor. The ecumenical Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 directed bishops to establish hospices in every city with a cathedral. These hospices not only nursed and healed sick people but also provided shelter for pilgrims and poor people. From these eventually developed the Christian hospitals dedicated to healing—the prototypes of our modern-day medical hospitals.

Our modern Western universities trace their roots back to medieval Christian monasteries. Our state-supported schools providing education for all children can be traced back to Germany and the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther. In China, Christian missionaries led the crusade to abolish the cruel custom of binding women's feet, a practice eventually banned in 1912. You can read many more examples of the good that historic Christianity has done in books such as *How Christianity Changed the World* (2004) and *What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us?* (2005).

Such good definitely enhances Christianity's witness to the gospel's truth. Good fruits prove a good tree. But our Christian witness cannot rest on past glory. The question now is, "Is Christianity doing more good than harm today?" Only the Christians of this generation can answer that by our obedience in word and deed, expressing God's love and justice for the common good. **B**

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

Down:

- 1. The week of Oct. 13-20
- 2. The Ministry of _____
- 4. A main reason pastors hesitate to address issues of public concern
- 7. Apostles' _____
- 9. It's all about winning the money.
- 10. The first CRC missionary to serve outside North America
- 12. Grace extends "far as the _____ is found."
- 13. *Reading _____ and Modern Science: A Study Guide*
- 15. The FBI is investigating fires set at this church

Across:

- 3. John Calvin described the Scriptures as these
- 5. Graduate _____ Fellowship
- 6. Lead researcher for *Renegotiating Faith* report
- 8. The skin color of the titular character in *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*
- 11. An ancient version of road signs
- 12. This is the last of the human freedoms
- 14. The biblical theme found in Marvel movies
- 16. People over _____
- 17. What a B.C. pastor wants worshipers to bring to church

Answers to the September 2019 puzzle

Think you can change the world one neighbourhood at a time?
We do.

CHANGE can be big, like eradicating poverty big. Or it can be small, like doing dishes after a potluck 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.

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Denominational Announcements

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CANDIDACY

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

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

Congregational Announcements

100TH CHURCH ANNIVERSARY

FAITH COMMUNITY CRC, originally Wyoming Park CRC, invites former members and others interested to join in the celebration of 100 years of God's faithfulness on October 20, 2019. Services are 9:30 am and 5:30 pm.

WORSHIP SERVICES

WINTER WORSHIP IN BRADENTON FL Bradenton Chapel invites you to join us for Sunday Worship and Wed. Bible Study. Visit our website at bradentonchapel.com

TIME OF WORSHIP SERVICE

WINTER VISITORS You are invited to worship with us at Maranatha Community Church beginning Dec 1. Our service starts at 10 am at Farnsworth Hall, 6159 E University, Mesa, AZ 85205.

Church Positions Available

INCREASINGLY DIVERSE TORONTO CHURCH SEEKING PASTOR Willowdale CRC in Toronto, Ontario, is seeking a full-time pastor to lead us into the future that God has begun to show us. For further information check out our position posting and church profile at <https://network.crcna.org/church-positions/increasingly-diverse-toronto-church-seeking-full-time-pastor> or our own website <http://willowdalecrrc.com>. If you are interested please send your resume to pastorcallingcommittee@willowdalecrrc.com.

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 Come do Ministry with us! We are Mountainview Christian Reformed Church in

Grimsby, ON, Canada. If you would like to explore whether this is a good fit for you, please contact our Search Committee Secretary, Karen Antonides at searchcmt@mountainview-crc.org. All inquiries are confidential.

PASTOR Emo CRC, located in Northwestern Ontario, is searching and praying for a full-time pastor who is willing to get to know us, who preaches a solid Biblical message that applies to our daily walk with God, and who loves encouraging people of all ages in their faith. Contact Harold Kelly at 807-482-1431 or email emocrc18@gmail.com for more information.

Birthday

95TH BIRTHDAY

ANGENETTE KORRINGA of 6297 Misty Pines Court Unit 1, Tinley Park, IL 60477, will celebrate her 95th birthday on October 11. Her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren love her faithfulness to God and her positive attitude. God is good!

90TH BIRTHDAY

JENNIE VANDERWOUE (nee DeBoer), 755 E 16th Street, Apt. 104, Holland, MI 49423, will be celebrating her 90th birthday on October 18th. Her children, Karen & Bob Steenwyk and Marianne & Ken Gritter, along with 3 grandsons and 5 great-grandchildren, praise God for her and wish her a happy birthday. We are thankful for her faithfulness.

Anniversary

70TH ANNIVERSARY

DEPPE Frank and Bernice (TerVeen) of 2198 N. Thrush Ct. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 will celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary on October 22. Their children, Dean and Julie Deppe, Tim Deppe, Ross and Mary Post, and Bob and Patti Harris, along with their 11 grandchildren and spouses, and 15 great-grandchildren will celebrate with them at a special family dinner. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

65TH ANNIVERSARY

WILTJER, PHIL AND AUDREY (HEEREN) celebrated their 65th Anniversary on September 9. They, along with their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, give thanks for God's Love, Faithfulness and Blessings!

60TH ANNIVERSARY

DYKSTRA Rich & Shirley (Drenth) celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on Septem-

ber 18, with their children Rick & Joellen, Mark & Tami Mulder, and Steve & Deanne; Grandchildren Rich & Amy Mulder (Ethan, Emma, Elise), Andy & Alli Mulder (Paxton & Grayson), Mitch & Dana Corry (Will), Craig & LaRae Walker (Reagan & Griffin), Sam, Jesslyn, Luke, Ben & Becca, Tony and Matthew. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

KAMERMAN Cor and Agnes (Ellens) 7910 McLaughlin Rd S. Apt. H705, Brampton, Ont. L6Y 5V5. With thankfulness to God, our parents will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on October 24, 2019. "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain" (Psalm 127:1a)

VANDER SLOOT Jack of 3756 Ravine Vista Dr. SE Grand Rapids, MI 49508 and Joyce (Dykstra) of Raybrook Manor, 2121 Raybrook SE, Lendick Hall, Grand Rapids, MI 49546, celebrate 60 years of marriage on October 16th. Children: Jeff and Patty Vander Sloot, Joni and Todd Quist, and Joel (deceased) and Amy Vander Sloot. Grandchildren: Lisa and Kristen VanderSloot, Jennifer and Travis Madere, Bradley, Brandon (Shannon), Mitchell (Shelby), and Ashley Quist, Alec, Jacob, and Ryan Vander Sloot, and a great grandchild born in September. Great is thy faithfulness, Strength for today, Bright hope for tomorrow, Because He lives we can face tomorrow.

Obituaries

MEEKMA, Pauline, age 93, of Evergreen Park, IL passed away peacefully on August 13, 2019. She was the wife of John P (deceased 2013), and loving mother of Beverly (David) Baar, Larry (Pat) Meekma, Bonnie (John) Kats, and Glenn (June) Meekma, 10 grandchildren and spouses, and 9 great grandchildren. We thank God for her faithful life of service.

PLEKKER, Robert J., DDS, Hudsonville MI, died peacefully in his sleep hours after celebrating his 90th birthday. Predeceased by first wife, Jane; survived by wife Eleanor, 3 daughters; 5 step-children; 10 grandchildren; 9 step-grandchildren; 26 great-grandchildren. Details at obits.mlive.com.

POEL, Lucile N. (De Stigter), of Grand Rapids, MI, died peacefully August 17, 2019. Lu is survived by her husband Norman and children: Sue (Bill) Lemkuil, Mary (Rick) Kruis, Barb (Jeff) Anderson, Rick (Nancy) Poel, Lisa (Mike) Broekhuis, son-in-law Mark Kauk, and

15 grandchildren and 17 great grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her son Randy Poel and his wife JoEllen (Visser) Kauk, and 11 brothers and sisters.

SPORTEL, Louise (Yonkman) of Kalamazoo, MI went to be with her Lord at age 95 on August 20, 2019. She is survived by her children Linda (John) VanderBilt, Marcia (Robert) Duffin, 6 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren. Her husband, Henry G Sportel preceded her in death

TALSMA, Kathryn Jean, of Grand Rapids, MI, died on Thursday, August 22, 2019. Kay was preceded in death by her husband Carroll (Bud) Talsma; brother Allan VanderLaan; sisters Evelyn and Louise VanderLaan; brothers- and sisters-in-law Peter and Evelyn Knott, Geneva VanSolkema, Marvin Talsma, and Marilyn Talsma; and son-in-law George Meilof. She leaves son Marc Talsma and wife Annette Walen; daughter Anne Meilof and husband Adam Bell; daughter Jenny Talsma Oostendorp and husband Mike Oostendorp; sisters-in-law Marcia Talsma and Barbara VanderLaan; brother-in-law Ted Talsma; grandchildren Chris and Sara Talsma, Stephanie and Andy Bruno, and Jim Meilof; and great grandchildren Cooper and Haddon Talsma and Max and Penelope Bruno.

VAN'T LAND, Theodore, age 88, of Grand Rapids, MI, formerly of Midland Park, NJ. Ted passed away on July 27, 2019. He is survived by wife Irene (Hogan); children, Donna (Rick) Snoeyink, Linda (Frank) Bylsma, John (Faith) Van't Land); twelve grandchildren, and ten great grandchildren.

VANDER WEELE, Elizabeth (Berghuis), age 92, of Chicago, IL (formerly of South Haven, MI) passed away June 14, 2019. She is survived by her children, Sue Vander Wey, Aileen(Dale) Meyer, Laura(Ken)MacQueen, Colleen(Monte) McMartin, Maribeth Vander Weele, and Joel Vander Weele, twelve grandchildren and ten great grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her beloved husband of 57 years, Dr. Harold Vander Weele, son Bruce Vander Weele, son-in-law Joe Vander Wey, daughter-

in-law Tami Elifson Vander Weele, brother Dr. Jacob Berghuis, and sister Grace Verkade.

VER BEEK Arlene (Vanden Bosch), age 79, of Cedar Lake, IN, went home to her Lord on Tuesday, July 16, 2019. She will be sorely missed by her husband, Harley Ver Beek, her children, Kurt (Jo Ann) Ver Beek, Keith (Jayne) Ver Beek, Kathy (Bryan) Vander Tuig, Karen (Dennis) Olthof, and Kevin (Kristin) Ver Beek, her siblings, Thelma (Ed) Vlietstra, Jerry (Ruth) Vanden Bosch, Calvin Vanden Bosch, and Jim Vanden Bosch and her 17 grandchildren and many nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, Gerald and Tena Vanden Bosch.

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WESSELING, Elizabeth "Betty", of Downers Grove went to be with her LORD on August 21st, 2019. 1746 Good Avenue, Park Ridge, IL 60068. Fond sister of the late Wilma (the late Philipp) Schuringa, the late John Wesseling, the late James (Grace) Wesseling, the late Hilda (Frank) DeBoer, the late Florence (Esteban) Paulin, and the late Pieter (Bernice) Wesseling; aunt of many nieces and nephews. Member of The Christian Reformed Church of Western Springs. Memorials to Back to God Ministries International, 1700 28th St SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508, are appreciated.

WIERENGA, Berton Foster, age 84, Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on Tuesday, August 20, 2019. He is survived by his wife, Jeanne; his

children and grandchildren, Bruce and Marcia Wierenga (Matthew, Alecia, Christopher), June and Robert Courtright (Jason and LeeLa, Roberta), Carl and Mary Wierenga (Lee and Kim, Brett and Lauren), Dale Wierenga (Paris, Zone); and 4 great grandchildren.



WINGEIER, Anton "Tony", age 91, of Middleville, went home to be with the Lord on Sunday, August 25, 2019. He was preceded in death by their daughter, Lucinda Jo and his sister, Dorothy Graham. He will be lovingly remembered

by his wife of 69 years, Helen; his children, Laura and Ron Dettmann, Lisa and Donald Johnson, Anton Lee and Angel Wingeier, Darcy and Clayton Weesie, Christian and Lynnette Wingeier; 14 grandchildren; 8 1/2 great grandchildren. He proudly served our country in the U.S. Navy. Tony taught Science, Math, and Drivers Ed for many years at Thornapple Kelloggs. Funeral services were held at 11 am on Saturday, August 31 at Peace Church, 6950 Cherry Valley, Middleville, with Rev. Adam Barr officiating. Interment Mt. Hope Cemetery. Those who wish may make memorial contributions to Peace Church where he was a charter member. Condolences may be sent online at www.mkdfuneralhome.com.

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- » Videos should be no more than five minutes in length. Use the form at TheBanner.org/OpenMic to submit your entry, your contact information, and a brief biographic note.
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Getting Registered

We sat in the parking lot a long time. He begged me to pray. Shaking like a leaf, he pled with God for mercy. "I deserve what I get. Please spare me."



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

HE WAS A SMALL MAN, a proud member of the Tohono O'odham Nation. He'd worked as a jockey in his youth, and though he had a hard life on the streets, he was still in amazing physical condition. He had run 60 miles through the Arizona desert to Nogales to visit cousins.

He often worked as a truck stop lumper or hung around Home Depot hoping for day labor. A skilled roofer, he occasionally scored a job with a roofing company. The jobs never lasted long. With his record, truth always came to light.

He'd been in prison. Nobody wanted registered sex offenders on their payroll. His awful sins were posted online for all to see. Mostly he panhandled to survive.

In prison he'd been tossed around like a rag doll, mistreated, abused. There's no mercy for sex offenders in prison. He was terrified to return. Just the sight of a police car would send him into panic. His life consisted mostly of avoiding any contact with law enforcement.

It had been several years since he'd updated his sex offender registration. To get caught meant a quick return to prison. To register, he had to have a permanent address to give, but he lived in a cardboard lean-to he'd built against a dumpster wall in a weedy, rock-strewn field behind a convenience store. No one would rent to him. He'd used his brother's address previously, but they'd had a falling out and he wasn't sure he could still use it.

Deputies were supposed to be able to contact him at any time at his permanent address, but he was never there. He lived behind the Circle K. Not being properly registered was anxiety

producing, but so was walking into the sheriff's office to fill out forms.

He confessed it all to me. What he'd done. The fear, the shame, the pain. All of it. As part of the church, he wanted to do right.

I offered to go with him to register. Terror filled his eyes. He blurted out what might happen. I didn't know how to respond. Eventually, he chose to go. I offered to drive.

We sat in the parking lot a long time. He begged me to pray. Shaking like a leaf, he pled with God for mercy. "I deserve what I get. Please spare me."

Finally screwing up his courage, he stumbled to the door. The Pima County Sex Offender Registration desk is a wretched place in an abysmal room surrounded by bulletproof glass and abject hopelessness.

He couldn't speak. I introduced myself, telling the deputy the issue and the truth about his permanent address. "No problem," the officer said, smiling kindly. "Happens all the time. We'll take care of it."

My friend stuttered his name and other pertinent information. He shakily signed the forms. The deputy shook his hand, thanked him, and said, "You're free to go." Relief flooded my friend's face. He ran for the door.

I asked the officer if there were employers who hire sex offenders.

The kind deputy grimaced. "Sorry, pastor," he said. "Being a registered sex offender is a life sentence."

A couple in Bethlehem once registered with officials long ago. Their child was born there. He took on the sins of others. Even those of registered sex offenders. **B**



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