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BANNER

The Banner is the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church

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Classified Advertising 616-224-0725 classifieds@TheBanner.org

Display Advertising 616-224-5882 ads@TheBanner.org

Editorial 616-224-0824 editorial@TheBanner.org

News news@TheBanner.org

Published monthly (except August). Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Mich. Postmaster, send address changes to: *The Banner*, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407. Canadian publications mail agreement #40063614. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: *The Banner*, 3475 Mainway, PO Box 5070, STN LCD 1, Burlington ON L7R 3Y8. Copyright 2019, Christian Reformed Church in North America. Printed in U.S.A. *The Banner* (ISSN0005-5557). Vol. 155, No. 4, 2020.

Member of Associated Church Press and Evangelical Press Association.

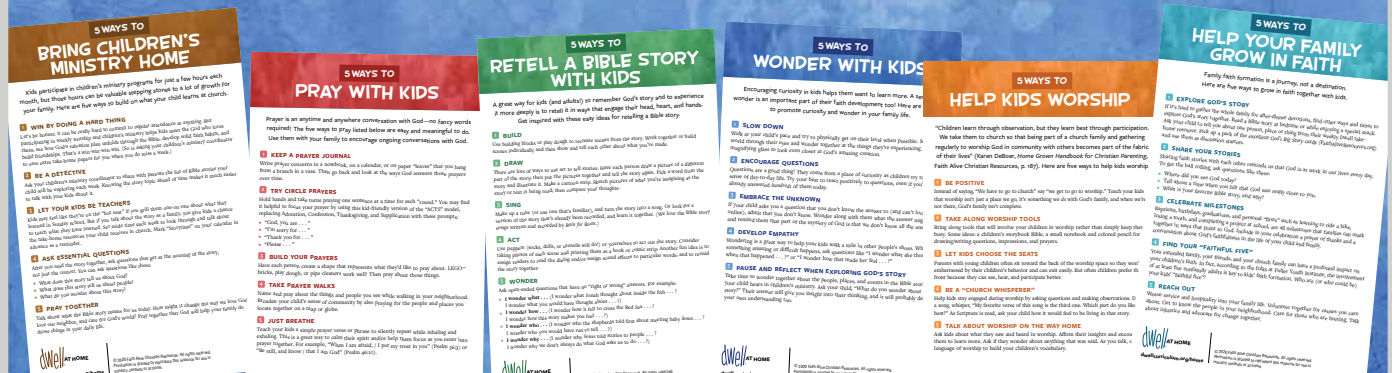
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Change Is Not Easy

I am confident of God's providence through these changes.



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

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

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

I AM WRITING only days after Steven Timmermans' sudden resignation as the Christian Reformed Church in North America's executive director (p. 14). Timmermans sped up his pending retirement to Feb. 20, 2020. I thank him for his faithful and able leadership. Even when we occasionally disagreed, we have always respected each other. I admired his singular dedication to getting everyone to pull in the same direction toward our ministry goals. The grief many staff felt over his departure testifies to his leadership and character. We shared a common bond as fathers of children with Down syndrome and exchanged notes about our children. I pray for God's blessings for him, his wife, and his children in this next phase of his life.

However, the abruptness of his resignation due to governance restructuring (p. 18) and a change in the executive director's job description has alarmed many and given rise to speculation. But as he told *The Banner*, Timmermans chose to resign now so as "not to be in the way of needed change." Having served for over three years with Timmermans, it is no surprise to me that he chose to act out of a desire for what's best for the CRCNA.

I do not see this restructuring done with the intention of splitting the denomination along national boundaries. I believe Canadian legislation made this restructuring necessary, not optional. It was done to protect Canadian CRC members who may not even realize they were potentially at risk.

The pending restructuring was not secretly sprung on people. Letters about it were sent to congregations in both the U.S. and Canada in early February. The Council of Delegates' executive committee, comprising delegates from both countries, agreed it was needed. Steven Timmermans

knew about it. Both Canadian and US staff members had been briefed..

From where I sit, I see due diligence done and good-faith attempts to communicate. Nevertheless, there was tension and hurt, especially among U.S. staff. Change is rarely ever easy or painless. However, I am certain there was never any ill intent on anyone's part.

In the midst of these changes, I am thankful for Colin Watson Sr. stepping in as acting executive director until synod in June. Watson is the first person of color in this executive role for the denomination.

I am confident of God's providence through these changes. People in the pews will probably not feel any effects. Denominational staff will bear the brunt of change. That's how good leadership should work.

I am hopeful that these structural changes will help us as one denomination to better join God's mission in its specific Canadian and U.S. contexts. This is God's church, and God's mission will prevail. Change is not easy. But it brings opportunities.

We must remember that God's mission is the church's priority. Our governance structure must suit the holistic mission work God has set before us. If this structural change fosters greater missional flexibility to adapt to the different cultural contexts of the two countries, then God's mission is all the better for it. **B**

Watch for our annual appeal in your mailbox or inbox. Please consider a donation to *The Banner* so we can keep the conversation going. Thank you!

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REPLY ALL

Shunned

I want to commend you for publishing this man's courageous submission ("Shunned: A Call to Restorative Grace," Dec. 2019). It is a much-needed topic and hopefully it will stimulate a needed discussion as we wrestle with the question "How does the family of God respond to such an issue?" That is (each church's) challenge as they wrestle with the question "What is God calling us to do?" But know God also gives us some assurances as well as his guidance. "I am with you" (Matt. 28:8) comes to mind. So do splinters and planks (Matt. 7:1-5). My sense is that somewhere in the wrestling, the topic of forgiveness will come up. And maybe grace. But know also that at the end of any such process, to experience healing, either individually or as a church, is to stand on holy ground.

» Ron Straayer // South Windsor, Conn.

Christian Zionism

I appreciate the clarity and depth of this article ("Why I'm Not A Christian Zionist," Jan. 2020). Gary Burge has done a masterful job of describing the biblical trajectory of God's promise through Adam, Abraham, and Moses and its fulfillment in Jesus the Christ. His attention to the dangers of subsuming faith into partisan politics is excellent! We're called to discern as citizens of the kingdom, a place where God doesn't play favorites.

» William Delleman // online comment

Christmas Celebrations

Perhaps one way to properly celebrate Christmas ("Pagans, Puritans, and Putting Christ Back in Christmas," Dec. 2019) is to become more traditional. The Spanish tradition is to celebrate gift giving on Epiphany, Jan. 6. Christmas trees are free on Dec. 26, and there are great discounts

on wrapping paper. But more importantly, Christmas returns to a Christian holy day. Or we could take up the traditional Dutch tradition of St. Nicholas Day and give gifts on Dec. 6. After all the Black Friday sales and Cyber Monday, gifts would be cheap and the Christmas tree would be fresh. Either way, we could celebrate on Dec. 6 or Jan. 6 and worship on Dec. 25.

» Glenn Palmers // Norfolk, Va.

Trusting the Bible

There is a lost-ness in the church today that is demonstrated by what was left out in Mary Hulst's article, "How Can We Trust the Bible?" (Jan. 2020). I fear we place our trust on what we value and the various things and experiences we read into or about the Bible. However, the Bible and Christianity stand out not only because they are historically reliable and testable, but because they stand on Christ's resurrection. As 1 Cor. 15 declares, if Christ has not risen, we believe in vain. The tomb is empty! Furthermore, they are God-breathed, uniting the texts, authors, and millennia under the authorship of God. The Reformation happened as Christians read the Bible for themselves and were convicted by the truth in its pages. Are we reading our Bibles?

» Christina Schipper // Waterloo, Ont.

Preaching About the Environment

Thanks, Rolf (Bouma) for your insights into preaching on contemporary issues such as the environment ("Big Questions," Jan. 2020). To preach occasionally on the environment and its general care is one thing. But if ministers get too specific as to a course of action, they may be overstepping their bounds and into territory where they have little expertise. It would be like telling a congregation which political candidate to vote for, which would

be wrong too. But at the same time this inquirer seems a little narrow in his understanding of the Bible. Certainly the Bible addresses more than the "saving grace of Jesus," as he suggests.

» Roger Gelwicks // online comment

Pulling TULIPs

Many years ago when I was elected as an elder, my father, who served many terms as an elder, gave me five pamphlets written by Rev. Peter Eldersveld, minister of "The Back to God Hour." Each one was an explanation of the five points of Calvinism: TULIP. I used and made reference to them for many years. I also have difficulty abandoning this acronym that has served us so well for decades in our teaching of biblical truths. When I read words to describe TULIP such as "problematic," "poorly summarized," "misunderstood," "misleading," "a distorted impression," "unhelpful," and "misused," as written by Prof. McDonald, it saddens me. I, for one, am not ready to join Prof. McDonald in pulling up TULIPs from our theological garden. Let us all instead spend our time and energy to uproot the sin and evil that tend to creep into our lives and the life of the church rather than uprooting the faith of our fathers.

» Bob Van Soelen // Sully, Iowa

Membership Matters

I liked the answer given regarding why church membership is important in the February 2020 "Big Questions" section but wanted to add one more reason: Membership helps keep people from falling through the cracks. When I was a deacon, having names on paper helped us gauge whom we served as a church, and standard information given along with membership (phone, address, email, etc.) assists both congregants and leadership in connecting easily so that we can support one another. Finally, when members on a list stop coming to services, the church is more likely to notice. When guests come

A Shirt Story

and go, it's harder to tell and even more difficult to come alongside them when they need it. To some, membership may sound like fetters preventing God's Spirit from moving freely, but I'd argue it's more akin to the stem of a vine that we connect ourselves to, just as abundant life and freedom comes from our connection to Christ, the true vine.

» Darrin Matter // Blaine, Wash.

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As I Was Saying

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- » Seeing the Unseen: The church can find opportunity in augmented reality
- » The Hands of God: The lightning behind "How Great Thou Art"
- » LGBTQ-Incompatible Means Gracious Separation Is the Church's Best Option

MEET JILL. She's a dedicated Christian with a gift for organization who loves service projects. She's planning a mission trip, and a friend suggests buying matching T-shirts for everyone. Jill finds some inexpensive shirts online, picks a bright color, and adds a snazzy logo. She and the team wear the shirts on the trip; everyone loves them. A few weeks later, Jill's shirt is in the back of her closet. The next time she prunes her wardrobe, she tosses it in a pile to be donated to a thrift shop.

But here's what Jill doesn't see.

That shirt is made of conventional cotton. This cotton comes from India, where poor farmers are under intense pressure to produce more crops for less money. In 15 years, over a quarter of a million workers on Indian cotton farms have committed suicide. Additionally, conventional cotton needs a lot of fresh water. Growing the cotton needed for just one shirt can take 2,700 liters of water—about two and a half years' worth of drinking water for one person. And that's only the cotton. Next, the fabric is spun and colored. Textile dyeing is the second-largest polluter of clean water worldwide. And then there's the sewing. Garment factories are notorious for human rights abuses, including forced overtime, unsafe conditions, and child labor.

After the shirt is donated, it might not get used by a needy person as Jill intended. Thrift stores receive more donations than they can handle, and garments with obscure logos are undesirable. Instead Jill's shirt gets sent to Africa. The surplus of North American garments resold (or dumped) in developing countries drives down the value of clothing, making it difficult for local markets to succeed. Uganda, Kenya,

Rwanda, and Tanzania have all made efforts in the past five years to impede the import of used clothing because it's harmful to economic development and the environment. Eventually Jill's shirt ends up in a landfill, where it emits methane into the atmosphere.

In spite of Jill's good intentions, her shirt ended up doing harm. Unfortunately, it's nearly impossible to live in our society without participating in systems that exploit other people and the planet. But that doesn't mean we can't try. The Bible repeatedly calls us to seek justice for people who are poor and oppressed and to honor creation. We can begin by identifying oppression and minimizing our involvement in it.

If we really want matching items for our church group, we can thrift shirts of the same color or find a fair-trade company that uses organic cotton that needs much less water. We might choose shirts made from a sustainable fabric like hemp or bamboo. It will take more time and money, but kingdom building was never going to be fast or cheap. Stewardship doesn't mean saving money; it means using money purposefully. It means making a better choice. **B**



Janice Vis-Gitzel is a graduate student at the University of Alberta. She is involved in campus ministry and is a teaching assistant in classes exploring theology and popular culture. Previously she was administrative assistant at First Christian Reformed Church in Red Deer, Alta.



Saturday of the Harrowed Hearts

By Debra Rienstra

Holy Week invites us to dwell in between. From Palm Sunday to Easter, we move between our daily lives and the devotional immersions of the week, placing ourselves briefly into each scene of the Passion drama. All along, we remain aware of what's next: the palm branches will lead to the upper room, then to the Good Friday tenebrae candles, then to the processions of Easter Sunday. Even amid our devotional immersion, we know what's coming.

Holy Saturday is the most in-between place of all because here the scriptural drama holds its breath. There is no scene in which to place ourselves, only silence. The disciples and the women "rested in obedience to the commandment," says Luke 23:56, and that's all we know. Jesus is in between

too, between the burial and the rising, silent in the grave. Some recent theologians have wondered whether to imagine the second person of the Trinity, from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning, as dead, dead, dead.

How could one possibly ritualize this day, then? The church in its traditions has not directed us to imagine ourselves with the disciples on Holy Saturday, perhaps because one can only imagine them in a state of bewilderment and despair. They had experienced the horrific crucifixion of their Lord, and they could not begin to imagine what was coming next. Instead, the church has filled that silent place by inviting us to reflect on the harrowing of hell.

The notion that Jesus was busy on Holy Saturday goes back to ancient sources, some as early as the second century. True, getting to the harrowing of hell from the whisper-thin

scriptural warrant requires some imaginative speculation. But Tertullian, Hippolytus, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and other early theologians took the idea seriously, and it was a standard topic of reflection in the European Middle Ages, including in Anglo-Saxon Britain, where the English term "harrowing" originated.

The word "harrow" is derived from Old English and has two related meanings dating back to at least A.D. 1000. One comes from farming. To harrow is to break up clods of dirt in preparation for planting. One might plow to turn over the soil, but to really churn it up, you need to drag a harrow over it. Modern farm harrows are vicious-looking contraptions that churn soil with toothed spiral blades. Violence is inherent to the other meaning, too: to plunder, rob, or spoil. To harrow is to tear a place to pieces, to really wreck it up.

So the harrowing of hell gives us an energetic, even threatening Jesus who does not rest in the tomb but steps down from the cross and strides right on to the next task, this one requiring some real farmhand muscle. This is the same Jesus we saw combating the Pharisees with deft scriptural maneuvers, the Jesus who tore up the temple in a righteous rage. Descending into hell, this Jesus is ready to wreck the place up.

One can see why this idea has appealed to the devout over the centuries. For the more literal-minded, it explains where Jesus' spirit was while his body lay in the tomb—helpful to preserve the idea that God cannot die in any sense we understand. It also explains how Old Testament saints can be saved into blessedness—they waited in Sheol until Jesus rescued them. For the more literary-minded, Jesus' descent into hell corresponds to the epic archetype of the hero, who must at some point descend into the underworld.

In that greatest underworld epic of all, Dante's "Inferno," the shade of Virgil describes the harrowing of hell from the point of view of a condemned soul. He explains to our pilgrim protagonist that when he (Virgil) first arrived in Limbo, it wasn't long before a Great Lord (Italian: *possente*, mighty one) came crashing down there and carried off the shades of Old Testament heroes. Virgil, however, along with his compatriots among the noble pagans, is stuck in Limbo forever, where, he says, "we have no hope and yet we live in longing."

You would think the Reformers would appreciate a Jesus so industrious he doesn't even rest on the Sabbath after his crucifixion, but Calvinists have tended to tone down the harrowing and focus on Jesus' suffering on our behalf. Thus the Heidelberg Catechism glosses over the "he descended to hell" clause in the Apostle's Creed as a way of describing the utter desolation of Jesus on the cross, thus assuring us that Jesus can redeem us from

Why has this
Holy Saturday
doctrine
persisted?
I think because
we need it.

our own places of "deepest dread and temptation."

Perhaps Calvin and his followers were worried about how the harrowing of hell might make Jesus out to be some warrior-style conqueror, and there are good reasons for caution there. But I have learned to consider seriously the psychological and spiritual wisdom of the ancient church, especially when that wisdom persists in the devotion of Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians today.

Why has this Holy Saturday doctrine persisted? I think because we need it. However poetic and allegorical you want to make Jesus' Saturday adventures, we need to know the theological truth beneath: Jesus conquers death and hell. We need to see Jesus as Orthodox icons depict him: standing there astride the abyss, dragging Adam and Eve up by the wrists, "radiant, in spotless white, standing straight, but leaning back against the weight of lifting them," as poet Scott Cairns writes. We need to see him defying hell as it exhales a last filthy breath.

We need this because here we are, in between. In between suffering and redemption, pain and hope. I doubt the disciples had much hope on that first Holy Saturday. Unlike them, we know what's supposed to happen on Easter Sunday. We, at least, have a wobbly hope. But is it real? Are we fools? In

this Limbo, are we doomed to have no real hope, only to live in longing?

Isn't what we fear most that God is silent, doing nothing? We fear, in our Saturday moments, that God is too weak to act on our behalf or is indifferent to our pain. That we are completely and utterly on our own. That no one cares and our suffering is meaningless and inescapable. That our Easter hope is ridiculous. That God is dead, dead, dead.

I think of those who, even after Easter Sunday, will still be in this in-between, Saturday place: friends whose bodies have been harrowed by cancer. Elderly folk in the nursing home, some of them every day sliding deeper into a living oblivion. And all of us, whose troubles and sorrows will not suddenly disappear because the liturgical calendar turns and the lilies appear on the chancel.

It's a great mystery, the reality of the Trinity during the time between "It is finished" and the risen Christ's appearance in the garden. I choose to meditate this Holy Saturday on the busy Jesus, who crashes into hell and tears the place up, dragging the saints out by the wrist. I'm going to believe that when Jesus takes a harrow to our hearts and our teeth jitter and we feel churned up, the end result is that things will grow better there, and the seed that falls to the ground will rise up, imperishable. **B**

Editor's Note: A version of this article was previously published on the author's blog at debrarienstra.com.



Debra Rienstra is a professor of English at Calvin University.

BIG QUESTIONS

Stewardship

Restaurant meals are too large. When you take leftovers home, they're almost always given in Styrofoam containers that can't be recycled. What's the most stewardly option?

Life is messy, and the options aren't always perfect. This might be one of those situations. Many of us were raised to think that leaving food on our plates was a violation of a commandment. Couple that with the average North American restaurant's insistence on not being outdone in portion size and you have a prescription for overeating and waste.

It makes a difference, of course, how many options you have. In a larger community, you'll have more options, which might include splitting dinner plates between you and your dinner companion (assuming you have similar tastes). You might also find that some restaurants offer half portions, sometimes marketed as lunch portions.

Restaurants also have options as to the containers for leftovers or take-out orders. Many no longer use Styrofoam containers, though you should be wary of cardboard or paper products too. While these seem to be recyclable, if they have too much oil or foodstuff on them, they are no longer recyclable and end up in the landfill. It's best if you can find a restaurant that offers compostable food containers. These are slightly more expensive but can be composted along with other food waste.

Two concluding thoughts: First, there's no rule saying you can't bring your own



Illustration for The Banner by Laurie Sienkowski

take-home container along. A couple of sealable containers needn't take up much room and could be kept with your reusable shopping bags in your car. Second, while there was a virtue in encouraging children to eat everything on their plates, it isn't wise to make a fetish of it. A similar virtue is to keep uneaten food items out of landfills by composting them and returning them to the soil. The soil needs to be fed too.

Rolf Bouma is an ordained pastor in the Christian Reformed Church who teaches religion, ethics, and ecology in the Program in the Environment at the University of Michigan.

Vocation/Calling

How am I supposed to figure out what to do with my life?

Working at a university, I get this question a lot, from the visiting high school student to the college sophomore beginning to realize that the major they entered college for won't be the one they graduate with. "What am I going to do for a job with my degree?"

While it's overly simplistic to quickly quip, "You were created a human being, not a human doing," it's also imperative that somehow that message gets (tactfully) conveyed. Ours is a call to being before it is ever a call to doing. In fact, our primary identity, before

anything else in life, is that we are the object of God's affection. And as followers of Jesus, our calling is not first and foremost about how we get financially compensated for what we do.

Tragically, we live in a world today that often values people primarily for what they produce. Worse, we mistake identity for vocation: "I am a lawyer," or "I am a teacher." While the identification itself isn't untrue, it is woefully incomplete. You may very well teach, and even be great at it, but you are so much more than only a teacher.

Jobs, even careers, come and go. But they are not the primary means by which our influence is gained. Nor are they platforms from which to legislate the gospel. They are places where our identities, passions, skills, and character—the unique ways we are put together—find their place in what God is already at work doing in his world.

Perhaps this is exactly what the prophet Jeremiah had in mind when he wrote long ago:

This is what the LORD says:

"Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this:

that they have the understanding
to know me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises
kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight,”
declares the LORD (Jer. 9:23-24).

Maybe we should start asking our children not “What do you want to be when you grow up?” but “Who do you want to be?”

Aaron Baart lives in Sioux Center, Iowa, with his family of seven. He serves as the dean of chapel at Dordt University and is the co-founder and president of One Body One Hope, a church-planting and community development ministry in Liberia. He and his family attend First Reformed Church in Sioux Center. He co-authored *Vivid: Deepening Your Colors* with Syd Hielema.

Digital Life

When it comes to technology, why do people assume older folks like me don't get it?

Some years ago, I joined a group of people seated around a large table waiting for a meeting to start. Next to me was an older guy who was obviously and vocally having some trouble with his laptop computer. Without thinking, I immediately reached over, grabbed his laptop, and said something like, “Let me see what I can do.”

“Oh, no,” he replied, pulling his machine out of my hands. “I don't want you to fix anything. I want to figure it out. All you have to do is listen to my frustration.” I slid back into my seat.

In a split second, I had made an age-based assumption—an entirely wrong one. Bias comes in many flavors, but technology seems to bring out the age bias in everyone.

I read recently that a human's desire for novelty peaks around age 28. If that's true, it's no wonder we become less interested in shiny, blinking things as we age. Young people interpret older folk's lack of interest as ignorance; older people see these new

things like all the older new things that didn't live up to their promises. Judgments abound.

I'd like to believe that with this changing dynamic comes healthy discernment, but alas, I see technology behaving badly in the hands of young and old alike. What's a person to do?

It'll take work, but I suggest we start by getting to know the technology we're using, even when technologists would have us think it is a deep mystery understandable by only a precious few. Take time to read the manual. Organize a class at your church or local library. Listen to the old as you listen to the young. Whatever you do, don't let someone else—a colleague, your mom or dad, your spouse, your grandkid, a salesperson—take the machine out of your hands.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of *The Banner*. What are you doing to stay current with new technologies? Tell him about it at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.

Church, Bible, Doctrine

Our council wants to meet without the pastor. Is that OK?

The first question I would ask in response is, “Why would they want to meet without the pastor?” After all, the pastor is a member of the council, which includes all the office-bearers of a congregation—its minister(s), elders, deacons, and sometimes commissioned pastors, too. So then the question is whether it is appropriate for the council to intentionally meet without one of the members present, and especially when it's a member in the key role of pastor.

It's possible that the agenda includes a matter with which the pastor has a conflict of interest, such as his or her salary. But it's not likely that a whole meeting is called for just that item (during the discussion of which the minister could easily step out).

Maybe the meeting is to discuss a difficult issue, even one that is about the pastor. If that's the case, it would be even more important to meet with the pastor. Usually it is better to have a direct conversation than one that reinforces whatever tensions exist by avoiding the needed discussion.

One of the underlying principles of Reformed polity is mutual accountability—that church members and leaders are accountable to each other. Councils should regularly assess their own effectiveness, both individually and as a group. All council members, including the pastor, should be open to discussion of their performance.

This last point brings up a problem I've encountered: councils who have sincerely tried to have difficult conversations with their pastor present, but failed because the pastor was domineering and manipulative, using his or her “spiritual authority” to shut down all honest conversation. My advice to always meet with the pastor present cannot be used by such pastors to effectively shut down honest conversation. Councils in this situation should bring in resources like church visitors or an outside facilitator.

The authors of *Crucial Conversations*, a book I highly recommend, argue that a critical mark of a healthy organization is its ability to have difficult conversations. If meeting without the pastor is a way to avoid difficult conversations, I would strongly advise against it.

Rev. Kathy Smith is senior associate director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, adjunct professor of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary, and adjunct professor of congregational and ministry studies at Calvin University. She is a member of First Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



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

Timmermans Resigns As Executive Director

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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A wedding fashion-themed event at Grace CRC in Chatham, Ont., drew a sold-out crowd and raised 3,500 Canadian dollars (about \$2,600) for the Joint Refugee Sponsorship Committee, a shared ministry of four area CRCs. Taking place the weekend before Valentine’s Day, the event featured wedding and bridesmaid dresses from various decades from 1900 to 2020. One woman, now in her 70s, modeled her own wedding dress from years ago.

Has your church got 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.

Steven Timmermans, executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, resigned his post effective Feb. 20.

The CRC’s Council of Delegates was rocked to receive Timmermans’ resignation at a meeting that was already disrupted by major and immediate governance restructuring that increased operational differentiation between the U.S. and Canada (see p. 18). The COD acts on behalf of the CRC’s annual synod between its meetings.

Council president Paul De Vries said the resignation was accepted by the Council with “deep regret.” Staff met the announcement with stunned silence, with some people in tears.

A week after his surprising resignation, Timmermans spoke to *The Banner*, expanding on his reasons for his abrupt departure and sharing reflections on his time as executive director.

Timmermans said it became clear to him that the current structure of having one executive director for the entire denomination needs to change so that ministry leadership in Canada and in the U.S. are clearly under the direction and control

of boards specific to each country. He said, “Being in the position to which I was hired and exercising my vision/voice from that position served only to accentuate the old way when we all knew that a new structure for leadership was needed. I thought it was better to speed up my retirement so as not to be in the way of needed change.”

Timmermans was appointed to his role in July 2014. At the time, the CRC was reviewing its structure and culture following the resignation of its previous executive director. “I had hoped to help shape a culture among denominational staff that pointed them to supporting local congregations more and more,” he said. He is happy the ministry plan of the past five years brought together the resources of denominational ministries and offices to address the priorities congregations expressed.

He also expressed joy at what he calls the slow but steady evolution of the ways in which various ethnic minority groups in the CRC are being included at the table. And he particularly enjoyed his work in ecumenical relations, including beyond North America. “The world of ecumenism is changing, and the CRC, with our

Congregation Hosts Reconciliation Workshops in Alberta

rich history of helping develop indigenous churches, is now poised to partner in new ways around the world, bringing with our partners a Reformed perspective in the life and ministry of these churches, their communities, and their regions/nations," he said.

Timmermans is in his early 60s and doesn't know yet what lies ahead.

"Retirement," he said, "but retirement that allows service to the church—my local congregation, the CRC, and brothers and sisters around the world." Timmermans and his wife are members of First CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Colin Watson Sr., CRC director of denominational ministries and administration since 2015, will serve as acting executive director until the CRC's annual synod convenes in June (See "The View From Here," p.26.). Following his appointment, Watson noted that the new governance structure gives the COD and synod "a rare opportunity to make decisions about how we are going to live into the vision we have as a denomination."

De Vries said it is expected that Synod 2020 will be asked to approve a job description for the next executive director position that will be different from the role Timmermans has filled.

Timmermans' advice for his successor? Care deeply for the CRC; act wisely since there's some tenderness arising out of these present issues of differentiation; and rely upon the Spirit's power to serve the CRC in a way that brings a needed Reformed witness in the formation of each CRC generation, in the life and ministry of each congregation, in each community and country where they are located.

—Gayla R. Postma, Banner news editor

Parry Stelter, an Indigenous man and a member of Hope Christian Reformed Church in Stony Plain, Alta., is leading a series of workshops aimed to aid reconciliation between Indigenous people and the settler community. Stelter is the founder of Word of Hope Ministries, focused on "spreading the word of God to his own Aboriginal people."

At a Feb. 8 workshop at Hope CRC, Stelter led a group of 25 people through a discussion-based presentation titled "How to Reconcile Indigenous People to the Church and Christ." In November a group of about 20 attended "Understanding Indigenous People More." At that session, Stelter reviewed myths and misconceptions about Indigenous people, historical information, facts about residential schools, and current action from the Canadian government.

Natasha Specht, a member of Hope CRC who works as the church administrator with some pastoral duties, reported positive feedback from the November event. People mentioned "how it was held in a very healing and comfortable way where people could ask personal and relevant questions with no fear," she said.

Stelter said, "My hope is to break down misunderstandings so that people come to the workshop and leave better



Parry Stelter, Feb. 8, at Hope CRC.

informed about issues that are happening in the Indigenous community and with Indigenous people as individuals."

The workshops have been an educational opportunity for the congregation and those outside of it. Stelter said some attendees of the February workshop "came all the way from High Level, which is seven to eight hours from Stony Plain."

The first in the series of workshops took place in 2018 and focused on the experience of trauma. Stelter planned to continue that theme at a March 2020 workshop, "Learning about Grief Loss and Intergenerational Trauma."

—Kristen Parker

February 2020 Council of Delegates Actions

The Council of Delegates met Feb. 18-21 in Grand Rapids, Mich. The Council acts on behalf of synod, the annual leadership meeting of the Christian Reformed Church, between the meetings of synod. It took action on several issues, including the following:

Organizational Structure Changes

The Council dealt with changes in organizational and governance structures, which were implemented to give the Canadian side of the denomination more direction and control over ministry and resources in Canada (see p. 18).

Leadership Transitions

The Council accepted “with deep regret” the sudden resignation of CRC Executive Director Steven Timmemans. Coming changes to governance structure and job descriptions were given as the reason. A week after his resignation, Timmermans spoke with *The Banner*, expanding on his reasons for resigning and reflecting on his time in that role (see p. 14).

In light of Timmermans’ resignation, the Council appointed Colin Watson acting executive director until Synod 2020. It received notice that Watson, until now the director of ministries and administration, planned to retire in January 2021. It also received notice that John Bolt, director of finance and operations, will retire in June 2021.

A group of 10 people has been formed to develop ecclesiastical, structural, and legal proposals to guide changes for the denominational leadership of Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Back To God Ministries International Name Change

The Council accepted a name change for the CRC’s media ministry. The new name, subject to the approval of Synod 2020, will be “ReFrame Ministries: God’s Story. Today’s Media.”

25th Anniversary of Women’s Ordination

The Council endorsed a proposal for recognizing the 25th anniversary of women’s ordination in the CRC in 2021. Some delegates advised caution that the celebrations and recognition remain balanced in light of the CRC’s official position on women in ecclesiastical office, which holds that there are two different perspectives and convictions on this issue, both of which honor the Scriptures.

Canadian Legislation on Assisted Dying

The Canada Corporation of the Council heard that its Centre for Public Dialogue is monitoring changes to Canada’s legislation regarding what is known as Medical Assistance in Dying. It is encouraging advocacy for protection of vulnerable communities and increased support for palliative care as an alternative to MAID. (See “CRC in Canada to Monitor Assisted Dying Legislation,” on *TheBanner.org*.)

Office of Social Justice to Focus on Equipping Congregations

The Council received reports noting that on the U.S. side of the denomination, the Office of Social Justice and Race Relations will focus more on equipping congregations. The director of ministries and administration and the director of Race Relations and the Office of Social Justice are working to sharpen the focus of the OSJ ministry to include a heightened emphasis on helping, teaching, and supporting congregations more than primarily promoting the advocacy role.

Free *Dwell* Curriculum

The Council heard that Faith Formation Ministries will offer a free digital subscription for its popular *Dwell* curriculum to Christian Reformed congregations starting July 1. It asked synod to encourage CRC congregations to consider or reconsider using the curriculum “as

a vibrant, Reformed resource for faith formation among children.”

Abuse of Power

The Council noted further progress on work to prevent the abuse of power by leaders at all levels of the church, as assigned by Synod 2019. Council adopted a code of conduct for personnel in Christian Reformed churches, to recommend to Synod 2020; it noted available resources for training office bearers; it encouraged classes to include in their budgets counseling services for victims of abuse; and it encouraged Safe Church Ministries to continue to explore the use of restorative practices in the church. The Council is also asking for more work on Safe Church recordkeeping policies.

(See “Synod Takes Steps to See, End, and Prevent Abuse of Power,” July/August 2019.)

Defining Heresy

Synod 2019 directed the Council to “address the proper and ongoing definition and application of the word ‘heresy’” (Acts of Synod 2019, p.819). The Council received a paper authored by Ronald Feenstra of Calvin Theological Seminary, which was then reviewed by William Koopmans, Kathy Smith, and Karin Maag. Koopmans will integrate the reviewers’ comments into Feenstra’s paper and forward the final version to Synod 2020. (See “Synod Declares Kinism a Heresy,” July/August 2019.)

Syncretism and Contextualization

The Council sent a theological paper about syncretism and contextualization back to a committee to incorporate broader cultural input, including more voices of Indigenous people (see p. 20).

The Council meets again in May 2020 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

—Gayla R. Postma, *Banner news editor*

'A Different Face on Homelessness'



Ed Schans serves as transportation coordinator for First CRC's Family Promise team.

First Christian Reformed Church in Denver, Colo., hosted its fifth week as a Family Promise church in February. Family Promise invites faith communities to share their space with homeless families a week at a time on a rotational schedule. "We are able to use our building and our hospitality to provide basic needs of housing, food, and safety to people who are in need," said Bret Lamsma, director of faith formation at First CRC.

Between 80 and 100 congregation members participate in hosting duties, signing up to prepare hot meals, serve as evening or overnight hosts, transport guests, set up accommodations, and other tasks.

Ed Schans serves as transportation coordinator. His 14 volunteer drivers bring the families from First CRC to Family Promise's day site and move families to the next host church at the end of the week.

"Most of these folks that come want to better their life," said Schans, "and we're pretty happy to be part of that program."

"(Hosting) has put a different face on homelessness for many in our congregation," said Lamsma.

Family Promise is a national organization with over 200 local affiliates operating in 43 states. Churches considering participating should have four to five private or semi-private rooms and a large number of people willing to volunteer, said Courtney Jensen, a manager with the Family Promise Denver affiliate. Willingness to make a continuous commitment and an attitude of welcome, hospitality, and understanding is also important, she said.

—Maia VanderMeer

New Mexico Church Spreads Gospel Through Radio

More than 10 years after Benjamin Hogue initiated the idea, Maranatha Fellowship CRC in Farmington, N.M., still broadcasts its pastor's weekly sermons over the airwaves of local radio station KPCL. The ministry is partially supported by yearly outreach grants from Classis Red Mesa.

Hogue was a church elder and also served on the Navajo Tribal Council. He and his wife, Lolita, were heavily involved in missions in the Navajo Nation. They "had a heart for reaching others with the gospel, especially their own Navajo people," said Dave Dykstra, pastor at Maranatha.

Both died recently, Lolita in November and Benjamin this past January. But their legacy, and the program they initiated, live on.

Sermons air Saturday afternoons.



Ben and Lolita Hogue

"This broadcast is especially helpful to those on the reservation who do not have internet capability or even good cellular service," said Dykstra. The Navajo Nation has a total population of 356,890, and many within the Navajo Nation area are in the range of the KPCL stations. The broadcast also reaches the Ute Nation, with a population of 12,995; several cities in southern Colorado; and the entire Farmington municipal area.

Purchasing airtime for the radio broadcasts costs about \$2,100 a year. Maranatha covers the cost through its own congregation's giving and with the help of \$500-\$1,000 a year in outreach grants from Classis Red Mesa. The classis home missions committee distributes the grants from a fund kept to encourage churches in ministry.

Dykstra occasionally hears back from listeners who call the church, touched by the message of comfort, "One man who's on the street and struggles with alcohol told me, 'Thanks for giving hope.'"

Dykstra said he also sees a continued impact in the congregation, from the example set by the radio ministry's initiators.

"Ben considered himself a sort of unofficial missionary all his life ... he always felt the main purpose of his life was to spread the gospel," said Ruth Benally, a former member of Maranatha who has since moved to Michigan.

—Maia VanderMeer

Restructuring Gives CRC in Canada More Ministry Control

The February 2020 meeting of the Christian Reformed Church's Council of Delegates had a whole new look as much of the agenda was divided between two legal corporations: the Canada Corporation and the U.S. Corporation (legally known as the Michigan Corporation).

The Council of Delegates acts on behalf of the CRC's annual synod between its meetings.

Why the Change?

Last year, the Council received letters from a couple of Canadian congregations expressing concern that the previous structure might not be fully living up to Canadian legislation regarding charities. As the directors of the Canada Corporation conducted research, including obtaining advice from outside legal counsel, it became clear changes indeed needed to be made.

The requirement is that direction and control of resources obtained in Canada—money and personnel—must be retained in Canada. Ceding control to a U.S. entity runs afoul of Canadian legislation. Under the previous structure, all decisions were made, or at least affirmed or endorsed, by the full Council, which is about 75% American. The same is true with the CRC's annual synod, where representation there is also about 75% American. That effectively, for legal purposes, would



define the Canadian side of the CRC as a subsidiary of an American corporation, not a charity.

Andy De Ruyter is the chair of the Canada Corporation board of directors and vice president of the Council. "We put a number of resolutions in place to be compliant with the law," he said. "It was shared with the Council executive committee, which endorsed what we did. (The result) is this reorganizing in light of what we found out about how the two countries have to be separate regarding direction and control of resources, and (we will) have to define what is ecclesiastical."

There was some advance notice of the changes when local congregations in the U.S. and Canada received a letter from the Council in early February. That letter noted that while the CRC in North America is one denomination, it is also made up of separate legal organizations that function as independent legal charities in each country. "The U.S. and Canada are two distinct countries. Our contexts are different and how we live out our callings as Christian Reformed congregations and ministries needs to reflect these different contextual realities."

The letter went on to explain that on advice of legal counsel, it was necessary to take steps to ensure that corporate structure and cross-border practices are compliant with all Canadian requirements for charitable organizations.

The steps include identifying distinct ministry leadership in each country, defining distinct budgets for each ministry in each country, and making sure that human resources activities, including staff recruitment, are managed within the relevant country.

The letter noted that the changes are only to legal and corporate structure and do not impact shared theology as the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

A Bumpy Ride

Some people, both delegates and staff, felt this was sprung on them because deliberations by the Canada Corporation took place privately—even though that was done on the advice of legal counsel and the Council's executive committee was informed. Any influence of the full Council, because it is 75% American, would have negated the required "full direction and control" of the Canada Corporation.

Paul De Vries is the chair of the U.S. Corporation and president of the full Council of Delegates. He said, "This (was) not something we (could) fix on (the) American side. It's not something we (could) address together until Canada Corporation acted first. It (the Canada Corporation) did not go off on its own."

But De Vries also acknowledged the tension when he met briefly with the Canada Corporation delegates on Feb. 19. "There have been a lot of hurts," he told them. "We have 22 (U.S.) job descriptions that we have to adjust. We're going to do our best to move forward. We want to make this work and move forward in a positive way."

The changes to job descriptions included those for several people appointed as interim directors of ministries in Canada and people who had previously been directors of ministries for the denomination and will now be the directors of those ministries only in the U.S., at least on an interim basis. (See "Denominational Staffing Changes Announced" on TheBanner.org.)

Processing the new structure was further complicated by the immediate resignation of Steven Timmermans, who held the position of executive director of the CRC until Feb. 20. The reason for his resignation, which rocked the Council and staff members, was anticipated changes to the job description for the position (see p. 14).

The Council spent several sessions of its meeting behind closed doors to help delegates process the changes.

Proceeding through the agenda meant a steep learning curve as delegates tried to sort out which items were operational, requiring action by the two separate corporations, and which items were ecclesiastical, properly addressed by the full Council.

What's Next?

De Ruyter said that as a result of the changes, the Canada Corporation will take a lot more ownership of what it is going to do in Canada. "We will look more closely at the ministries, at how we equip our churches," he said.

It means budgets for the two corporations will be established at the outset, rather than noting the division of funds after the fact. It means that when the Council's committees do their work, the reports will go separately to the two countries' corporations, except for ecclesiastical items that go to the full Council. It means, according to De Vries, figuring out "what can we put in the ecclesiastical bucket to do seamlessly together." There is still a lot of work to be done over the next year by staff and delegates to refine the restructuring.

De Ruyter and De Vries foresee that there won't be much change felt at the congregational level. As De Ruyter put it, "This does not change who we are. This is operational—corporate structures and regulations that have to be followed. Pastors are still preaching the same message, still doing communion together. We're realigning our corporate responsibilities, but (that) does not change the message of God's Word for our world."

De Vries concurred. "We're still one denomination in two countries."

—Gayla R. Postma, *Banner news editor*



Photo by Gayla R. Postma

When a meeting is tense, delegates find a way to wind down. Clockwise from left: Mark Vande Zande, Sam Sutter, Tyler Wagenmaker, and Brian Ochsner passed the time at Brookside CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., during lengthy closed-door executive sessions of the Council of Delegates executive team.

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Gerrit
(Gary) A. Bieze*
1936 - 2019

Pastor and historian Gerrit Bieze died Dec. 15 after a brief struggle with cancer. He was 83.

A graduate of Calvin College and Seminary, Bieze was ordained in 1962. Although it was rare in those days for a minister born in the U.S. to serve Dutch-speaking congregations in Canada, Bieze, who had learned Dutch when he was young and was fluent, accepted a call to Alliston (Ont.) CRC. He went on to serve Vauxhall (Alta.) CRC; First CRC, Taber, Alta.; and Athens (Ont.) CRC.

In 1989, Bieze wrote a history of the first 125 years of the Netherlands Reformed congregation in South Holland, Ill., titled *The Remnant Remains: The True Dutch Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois*.

After retirement in 1992, two of his hobbies were doing counted cross stitch needlework and studying the lives and writings of 17th-century Dutch theologians. An email acquaintance with a used bookstore in Houten, Netherlands, provided him with many volumes for his studies.

In 2007 Bieze moved to Grand Rapids to live with his sister. Predeceased by his parents and his sister-in-law, Victoria, Bieze will be lovingly remembered by his brother, Duane, and sister, Linda.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Syncretism or Contextualization?

A theological paper about “syncretism” and “contextualization” was reviewed by the Council of Delegates at its February meeting.

Requested by the Council, a team put the paper together. Working on the team were Ray Aldred, Th.D., professor at Vancouver School of Theology and director of the Indigenous Study Center; Ronald Feenstra, Ph.D., professor at Calvin Theological Seminary; and Kurt Selles, Ph.D., director of Back to God Ministries International.

After laying out the theology and historic use of the terms, the authors advised taking care in using language. They noted that use of the word “contextualization” has largely come to mean adjusting to any local situation or identity. “We should be clear about the meaning of gospel contextualization,” they wrote. “We tend to lead with assertions about local identity. For us as Christians, though, our primary identity is found in Jesus Christ.”

They also noted that the word “syncretism” has emotional weight that makes it highly problematic and divisive. “Although we should not dismiss the real danger of syncretistic tendencies,” they wrote, “before we accuse Christians in our own or in other cultures of syncretism, we should remember our own vulnerability to elevating our own culture over the truth of the gospel, whether consciously or not.”

The Council expressed its thanks for the report but questioned the lack of diversity of Indigenous authorship; lack of recognizing spiritual violence done in the past history of Indigenous people; and lack of recognition that the language of syncretism and contextualization are not understood equally across cultures.

The Council decided the report “would benefit from a broader cultural input” if the report is to be a standard for how the CRCNA understands the issue over the long term. It decided to re-strike a team including Indigenous people to enhance the report before bringing it back to the COD.

Selles believed the authors’ original mandate was to write something more abstract rather than about Indigenous issues specifically. Delegate Brian Ochsner from Classis Central Plains sought clarification about that.

Council president Paul De Vries responded that the original mandate as received by the team was to write a theological and biblical paper about syncretism. “There are some on the team who felt they did the theological work and were now expected to do all the cultural work. We’re saying, ‘(It’s a) good report, but now it needs to include greater diversity.’”

—Gayla R. Postma, Banner news editor

Winter Fun in Hudsonville



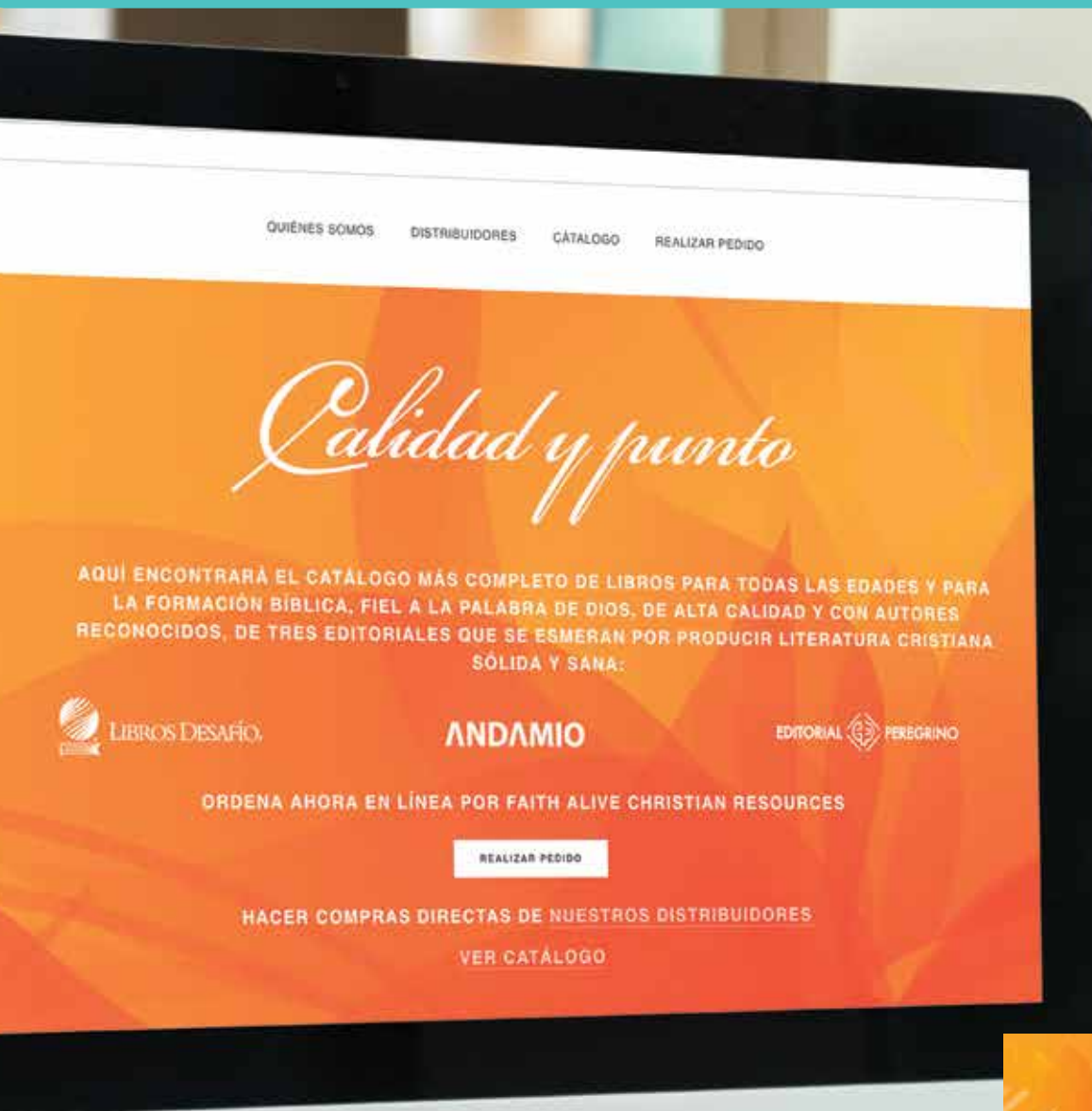
For one day in January, Georgetown Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Mich., transformed its building into an 18-hole miniature golf course.

“We wanted a family-friendly community event that would draw people together during the winter,” said Julianna Kempema, Georgetown CRC’s director of community relationships.

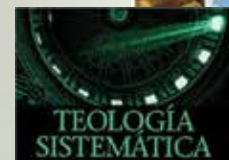
The course took up space in the church’s fellowship hall, library, and the hallways between Sunday school classrooms. Organizers used everything from children’s building blocks to old wicker baskets that had been used for collecting offerings, to pool noodles for the obstacles around each hole. About 100 people enjoyed the event.

—Greg Chandler

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Stories We Can't Tell

How You're Standing with Persecuted Christians

By Cassie Westrate, Resonate Global Mission; Gillian Ferwerda, Raise Up Global Ministries; and Brian Clark, Back to God Ministries International

When you were worshiping at church last Sunday, did you wonder if the police would come and arrest you for your faith? Have you ever needed to hide in a closet so the raging mob outside your house didn't see you through your window?

Have any of your friends or family members mysteriously disappeared after they accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior?

Christians throughout the world are risking their freedom—and even their lives—for their faith in Jesus. But they're not alone. They have you.

The Christian Reformed Church in North America is linking arms with these Christians. Through your support of global mission through ministry shares and personal donations, you're sending staff, airing Christian radio broadcasts, and training Christian leaders.

And despite the pressure and persecution Christians are facing, the church is growing. These Christians can't share their names. Many can't share their locations. But they can share their testimonies.

Two Solutions in Burkina Faso

One summer morning, Rev. Marc Nabie glanced at his phone to read a new message: *"I want to give my life to Jesus after listening to your broadcast this morning!"*

While Nabie's office and the surrounding studio is just a small building in Burkina Faso's bustling capital city of Ouagadougou, the office often fills with people such as [REDACTED] * who have heard Back to God Ministries International's French broadcasts and want to know more.

It's not always safe to ask questions about Christianity. Tensions between Christians and Muslims are mounting in parts of West Africa. If you're a Christian in Burkina Faso, you might be putting your life on the line. It depends where you live.

"The entire country, but especially the northeastern area, is experiencing an increasing level of violence against Christian churches," said Nabie, BTGMI's French ministry coordinator. "Some people have been forced to flee their homes for safer areas, and as many as 41 people were killed in one month."

BTGMI radio listeners often come to visit the offices for spiritual guidance and, when it's safe, to get connected with local churches

[REDACTED] lives near the capital and was able to visit Nabie's office after hearing the broadcast. "She told us that she had been listening to our radio program for the last three months," said Nabie. "She was living with her sister, but none of her family members are Christians."

Nabie prayed with [REDACTED] and referred her to a church in her community, not far from the offices, where she could attend discreetly since her family did not know about her faith.

About one week later, Nabie received another text: *"Thank you, pastor, for showing me the way. I'm so happy, I went to church last Sunday, I was so happy!"*

While [REDACTED]'s experience of connecting with a church community is ideal, it's not always safe in Burkina Faso. For some BTGMI listeners, their radio is their church.

[REDACTED], lives in [REDACTED], a city in northeastern Burkina Faso. Like many Christians in Burkina Faso, she can't physically attend Bible studies or church services and faces the challenge of keeping and growing her faith.

"She believes strongly in Christ," said Nabie. "The radio is her faithful partner. To feed her faith she has to listen to the radio, and our broadcast is her favorite."

Nabie said [REDACTED]'s thirst for God's Word is amazing. In addition to listening to sermons and encouragement daily, she also sends text messages to BTGMI's volunteers in her area. Usually her texts are filled with gratitude as she updates our ministry team on her life and faith.

The relational encouragement [REDACTED] receives from the broadcasts and text conversations the CRC provides through BTGMI staff has helped her continue to grow in her relationship with God in spite of the many obstacles that surround her life.

186 Teachers in [REDACTED] Equipped to Share the Gospel

Christian educators gathered in a small room in [REDACTED], [REDACTED]. It's not easy being a Christian in [REDACTED]. You might be the target of discrimination, insults and threats, or even violence—especially if you converted to Christianity from Islam. Relationships between Christians and Muslims in this part of the Middle East can be tense, and Christians can feel powerless.



It's not easy to be a Christian teacher in [REDACTED], but Raise Up is providing support and training so teachers can share the gospel with their students.

But Raise Up is providing support so they can integrate the gospel into their teaching methodologies, classroom, and community.

EC is a program of Raise Up Global Ministries, which serves the global church through developing leaders by providing accessible, biblically based materials and training. EC helps Christian educators, especially in under-resourced areas such as [REDACTED], develop a biblical worldview and integrate faith into every aspect of their teaching.

God provided an opportunity for 186 teachers in [REDACTED] to attend at least one EC training session.

In an atmosphere that can be discouraging, [REDACTED] and other Christian teachers were encouraged by EC. "The idea we learned in EC—that God created each student in his image—has changed the way I think about my students," said [REDACTED]. "I see now that school is a place of service and a place to provide hope to others."

Instead of seeing closed doors, [REDACTED] now has a vision: "I learned from EC that teaching is not just a job, it is a calling, a mission to be influential in the future of the student's life. To think that God has to use my students in the future means that I must be very careful in how I treat them."

[REDACTED] spoke about concrete plans, small changes, and daily witness to propel the Christian schools forward. "EC material is different," she said. "It gets into the small details

of real life and ideas that make change possible, measurable, and applicable. The material shows how to live out our Christian life."

Through this training, 38 teachers have also been certified to train and equip more teachers. Eager to train, many have already led sessions. By God's hand, the number of Christian leaders is multiplying in schools throughout the country. The gospel is still spreading in [REDACTED]. As teachers participate in EC training, they're educating children and raising them up as image bearers, children of God, and future servants.

10 Baptisms in [REDACTED]

You can be a Christian in [REDACTED]—but only if you don't make the government, your employer, or your family too nervous.

Christianity's gospel of truth seems to make the government anxious. In some areas, officials keep a close eye on religious activity and continue to add new rules about what types of activities churches can hold. If they hear or see something they don't like, they close the church.

Pastors are being removed from the pulpit and placed in jail. Employees might be passed over for a promotion because of their faith. Parents get nervous if their child takes an interest in Christianity. If you're a Christian, you have to be careful about what you say and how you say it.

But God is still working in [REDACTED], and the CRC is standing alongside believers by sending Resonate workers to the country.

Resonate staff member [REDACTED] mentors and discipled Christian leaders such as [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] became the pastor of her church two years ago, but she hasn't been to seminary and isn't ordained. Opportunities for pastors to train in [REDACTED] are scarce and hard to find. That's why the CRC sends Resonate staff to the country instead.

Each week, [REDACTED] talks with [REDACTED]. They read books together, pray together, and discuss the challenges of ministry together.

"Despite challenges, the church body is still growing," said [REDACTED].

Leaders such as [REDACTED] are working hard, and God is opening doors for believers to share the hope of the gospel.

Sharing Our Difficult Stories

_____’s church, for example, has started leading worship services at a nursing home.


“Nursing homes can be lonely places,” said _____. “Most of the people who live in them either have significant health issues their children can’t care for, or their children live far away ... some people started attending the services because it was something to do and offered some connection with the outside world.”

With _____’s support and guidance, _____ and her church have invested a lot of time in the worship service at the nursing home. Many of the nursing home residents and staff have no knowledge of Jesus—but as _____ and her church returned week after week, the nursing home residents and staff heard the truth of the gospel and experienced the love of Christ.

More than ten people have accepted Christ and have been baptized.

“This is why I live in _____,” said Resonate’s _____. “This is why I navigate the culture-stress days and complexities of serving here. This is what I’m excited to see God doing—encouraging stretched-thin leaders as they serve in their local context.”

She said this ministry wouldn’t be possible without the support of the CRC. “Thank you for the ways you’ve contributed to 10 people being baptized in a nursing home on the other side of the globe!”

*Names of participants, staff members, towns, and even some countries have been redacted to protect those involved. 

“I remember. So difficult to admit we are being abused. So we hid it from everyone. Because silence hides violence.”

“I felt like a plastic bag filled with water that had suddenly been punctured by a pin, emotion gushing out of the small opening. I was so overwhelmed (that) I felt I had to shut this down.”

“I met with the pastor and told him that this person had been sexually assaulting me for months. He said little and acted as though he did not believe this was what happened.”

“Why tell my story? I ask myself that question often. It would be much easier to just move on and thank God for giving me my life back. Who wants to hear about someone else’s pain and suffering, especially when it comes to abuse? Some of my story may offend some readers; I don’t apologize. It’s my story; it’s what happened to me.”


WE ARE CREATED for deep relationships with one another and with God, to be a blessed community that will bless the nations. When we keep ourselves hidden, when our stories go untold, we cannot be fully known and loved in the way God designed for us to be. This inhibits our own spiritual growth as well as our ability to build healthy communities.

In Safe Church Ministry, we are privileged to hear stories. Many are sad stories from people who no longer feel they can attend church because of their experience of abuse. Perhaps their stories were mishandled by their church communities; they feel shunned, misunderstood, or not even believed. We hear stories from people who carry false guilt and shame, and they often feel completely alone.

It can be difficult for people who have not experienced abuse to understand its deep effects. And that makes it harder for survivors to share their stories. Sometimes, even with the best intentions, our responses to stories of abuse can cause additional harm.

That’s one reason that Safe Church has created an online space called “S.O.S.: Sharing Our Stories.” (You can find the stories by typing “S.O.S.” into the search bar on The Network, network/crcna.org.) It offers a place to share stories, even anonymously. This helps those of us who have not experienced abuse to understand it better so we can respond with greater compassion. It also helps those who have experienced abuse to know they are not alone.

Safe Church’s mandate is to equip congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response so that everyone, including those who have experienced abuse, can be respected and protected. Our prayer is for churches to become places where people feel safe enough to share their stories of abuse and places where these stories are received with understanding and compassion, not judgment and shame.

We’d love for all Christian Reformed churches to be places where people walk alongside survivors during the long and difficult road toward justice, healing, and wholeness. To get to that place, difficult stories must be told, and churches need to listen. 

— Bonnie Nicholas, Safe Church Ministry

The View from Here

Remembering Who Is In Control

AT THE TIME of my writing this, it has been six days since my friend Steven Timmermans, the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, opted for early retirement and the Council of Delegates asked me to serve as acting executive director. I have accepted this interim appointment through Synod 2020, and I am humbled and honored by the privilege to serve.

Over the past five years, as director of ministries and administration for the CRCNA, I have focused on ensuring that congregations are well served. My goal is twofold: that all of our congregations are fully aware of all the resources that each of our ministries offers, and that these resources are a product of ongoing conversations between congregations and denominational ministries so that they are relevant to particular contexts and needs.

One need only look around the CRCNA to see evidence of this goal becoming a reality. For example, the digital library (crcna.org/library) makes thousands of Faith Alive titles free to all CRC members. There is now a seamless way to search for resources online (crcna.org/resources) and to contact the denomination by phone or chat to have your ministry questions answered. And there are an increasing number of regional ministry consultants from a variety of ministries available to connect with churches in their areas.

This list is far from exhaustive, and the work of connecting ministries to

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congregations continues. Yet I worry that all of this great work and all that we have accomplished together can easily fade into the background if we focus on the difficult circumstances that face us now.

Steve's resignation and the denomination's re-examination of its legal structure to ensure compliance with Canadian charitable law are challenges that we must face together. I urge us, however, to face them with the full knowledge that the God we serve continues to have everything under his control. We must face our challenges with the full knowledge that the Holy Spirit has already won the battle.

With this in mind, I hope we will continue to focus on our vision of strengthening congregations and leaders. I believe three immediate priorities will help us do that. First, denominational leaders are recommitting to an intense focus on prayer. Second, we must ensure that nothing we do operationally will influence our ability to serve congregations and leaders well. Third, we will intentionally work cross-nationally (in the U.S. and Canada) to ensure that we remain a unified denomination even as we exist in two distinct national contexts

governed by two distinct legal and regulatory systems.

To assist with all of this, the Council of Delegates has appointed a group of 10 individuals from the U.S. and Canada to address issues that are ecclesiastical, structural, and legal, and to bring recommendations to Synod 2020. As a member of the COD, I look forward to actively participating in the conversation and to making synodical recommendations that honor the richness of our binational identity while also enhancing our ability to do contextual ministry in each nation.

We have a difficult task ahead, but that task is not one that should have any effect on our ability to be the church of Jesus Christ together or on our ability to support churches and leaders.

If you would like to periodically receive a note from me regarding issues to pray for, please let me know (executivedirector@crcna.org).

Thank you for praying, thank you for caring, and thank you for being a part of this body we call the Christian Reformed Church in North America.



Colin P. Watson Sr. is the acting executive director of the CRCNA. He is a member of Madison Square Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Spanish and Korean translations of this article are available at

TheBanner.org.

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Learning About the Fulani Over Dinner in Winnipeg

MANY MISSIONARIES WORK in contexts that can be difficult for North Americans to understand. Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Winnipeg, Man., recently helped to address this reality by hosting a meal for World Renew field staff Zachary and Robin Entz and about 180 guests. During the event, attendees enjoyed a West African dinner and learned about life in that region, the Fulani people, and how World Renew is involved there.

“The most-asked question in past (visits to North America) has been ‘What is a typical day like?’ followed by ‘What food do you eat?’” Robin said. “Most churches invite us to speak for five or 10 minutes—not enough to fully engage with what people are most interested in.”

To meet this need, the Entz family set up a collection of West African artifacts in Covenant CRC’s Fellowship Hall. They also provided stories and interactive games to give attendees an idea of what life is like for the Fulani, a people group that has been particularly affected by ongoing conflict in West Africa. For dinner, attendees were treated to West African entrees: jollof rice and beef sauce served with bissap (hibiscus) juice.

“We heard from the Entzes about the conflict and how they are working to bring peace and the gospel amidst that,” said David VanderWindt, a donor relations manager for World Renew who attended the event. “They passionately want to be a part of what God is doing, even if that means significant struggles and potential safety concerns.”

One initiative that the Entzes talked about involves community library



Elijah Entz (son of Robin and Zachary) models a traditional Fulani turban as part of an evening event at Covenant CRC in Winnipeg, Man.

boxes that allow people to pursue education even when World Renew staff can’t visit due to the conflict. In fact, their work in recent years has involved a lot of peacebuilding and justice, or “PB&J.”

Zachary used the analogy of a PB&J sandwich to explain his work to the event attendees. Bread is like the provision of basic needs: World Renew has built wells and provided emergency relief supplies. The peanut butter is like glue that holds society together: World Renew’s translation of key documents into local languages has helped spread truth to community members. The jam is for justice: World Renew has helped with mediation between Fulani herders and other farmer groups over land disputes.

Ray VanderZaag is a professor at Canadian Mennonite University and

a former World Renew field staffer. He appreciated the event “because it included interactive, hands-on learning opportunities that were appropriate for diverse age groups, was church/community oriented, and had a fun way of raising financial support.”

Through admission fees, a freewill offering, and a silent auction, the event raised a total of \$7,100.

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

DWELL at Home: Passing on Faithful Tips for Children

FOR THE FIRST TIME, parents in the Christian Reformed Church have a free, downloadable resource that gives them a road map for helping build the faith of their children at home.

Called *DWELL at Home*, the resource is an outgrowth of *DWELL Digital*, the online extension of the time-tested and popular *DWELL Children's Ministry Curriculum*. *DWELL Digital* came out last summer, and *DWELL at Home* was released in late 2019.

"The major focus of *DWELL at Home* is to meet families where they are," said Jill Benson, coordinator of the *DWELL* program.

Families are busy, and this new resource gives them the room and options for faith formation to "happen in all of the little moments of life," she said.

In an overview of the program on the *DWELL at Home* website, Traci Smith, author of *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home*, says: "Faith is learned as it is woven seamlessly into the fabric of daily life."

With this idea in mind, *DWELL at Home* provides tip sheets to encourage and equip families as they nurture faith in the familiar surroundings of where they live. Rather than adding yet another to-do item to busy lives, these tip sheets can become part of the daily and weekly rhythms of any family.

"The *DWELL at Home* series of resources are designed to encourage and equip parents (or) caregivers to live into and out of their faith with children in ways that are as natural as breathing," said Karen DeBoer, creative resource developer for Faith Formation Ministries.



DWELL at Home offers tools for families with children to help form such practices as praying, worshiping, wondering about God's world, and reading the Bible.

"We hope churches will print and give them to families, post them on their church website, use them as bulletin inserts, and share them in whatever way works in their context," DeBoer said.

One of the most popular *DWELL at Home* resources so far has been *Jesse Tree: God's Big Advent Story* (bit.ly/2tUpOqe). Viewed over 4,500 times, it's been used by churches and families around the globe.

"We're thrilled at the way in which these resources are being used around the world and the opportunities that provide for churches to experience another part of the great approach to faith nurture that's found in the *DWELL* curriculum," DeBoer said.

Easily accessible and shareable, the tip sheets in *DWELL at Home* include "5 Ways to Help Your Family Grow in Faith," "5 Ways to Pray with Kids," "5 Ways to Help Kids Worship," "5 Ways to Retell a Bible Story to Kids," "5 Ways to Wonder with Kids," and "5 Ways to Bring Children's Ministry Home."

"These resources come out of what we've learned from research, family workshops, and youth leaders about how they struggle about how to pass on the faith to children," Benson said. "We believe these are wonderful ways to reach each of your children right where they are on their journey of faith."

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

International Scholars at Work at Calvin Seminary

THIRTY YEARS AGO, John Hyung Nam Chung was in a meeting with another pastor at an Arab church in Bahrain. When both were asked whether they believed theologically if the founding of Israel in 1948 and the recapture of Jerusalem in 1967 were fulfillments of biblical prophecy that some say teaches the end of world won't come until the Holy Land is united, the other pastor responded with a resounding "yes." Troubled by that belief, Hyung hesitated to answer.

"Many church members, both Palestinians and their Arab friends, were offended by the other pastor. The meeting ended coldly," Hyung writes in the introduction to a book he is writing during his time as part of the Visiting Scholars Program at Calvin Seminary.

Speaking in a phone interview from his research office in the Hekman Library, Hyung said he is grateful to the seminary for giving him the space and time to research and write a book about an issue that has been on his mind for many years. "I am writing a biblical response to this kind of (end times) prophecy," Hyung said. "It is a very dangerous kind of theology."

He hopes to title the book *A Comparative Study Between the Bible and the Quran on Death and Resurrection*.

Hyung, who does ministry work in the Middle East, is one of a handful of scholars from around the world who are part of the Visiting Scholars Program this academic year.

This year's other scholars are Rubens Muzio from Brazil, Sunghak Joo from South Korea, Freddy Lay from Indonesia, and B. Hoon Woo from South Korea.



Rubens Muzio, a missionary from Brazil, is working on his Ph.D. dissertation, titled *A Study on the Theology of Sanctification and the Semantics of Godliness in Early Modern Protestant Spirituality*.

He's visiting from the South American Theological Seminary, a missional institute "focusing on revitalization and sustainable development" and "addressing the need in theological formation, aging church, and superficial spirituality," Muzio says.

Sunghak Joo has been senior pastor for 16 years in India at Chennai Korean Presbyterian Church. "As a scholar, I have been exploring Indian religions, especially Hinduism and Jainism," he says. "I am taking a sabbatical year in CTS to deepen my understanding of Asian studies and missionary perspective to further extend my ministry."

During his time at the seminary, Joo says, he "wants to write a book on Indian religions and culture to

enhance Koreans' understanding of the Indian culture (and) religions."

Freddy Lay, a missionary from Jakarta, is at Calvin to further his academic interest in the process of mentoring. "Mentoring companionship is a relational-based mentoring in mutual trust, commitment, and humility to mentor each other and to hold each other accountable," he says.

He is working on a book titled *Mentoring Companionship: Together We Find Strength in God*.

B. Hoon Woo lists his scholarly interests as Luther's doctrine of vocation, Augustine's political theology, and the relationship between Christianity and science.

"The seminary offers many resources for these topics," Woo said, "and the Hekman Library is also helping me a lot."

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

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**Christian
Reformed
Church**

Change Is All Around

AS THE SEASONS CHANGE, we also see a lot of change in this beautiful world God created for us—and in ourselves, too. These changes might include getting taller, learning new things, welcoming a new sibling, or moving to a new place. Change is sometimes welcomed, but it can also be hard. One thing we know is that God knows exactly what's going to happen. Even when it's scary, God is with you during that change.

Other big changes we see are in nature. Winter animals come out of hibernation, flowers blossom, and insects change their shapes and sizes. One insect that goes through many changes is the butterfly.

The first step in the life cycle of a butterfly is the **egg**. The egg is a very tiny ball, smaller than a pea. Some eggs are round, some are oval, and some have ridges. Other eggs might have other features. An egg's shape depends on the type of butterfly that laid the egg. Butterfly eggs are usually laid on the leaves of plants (thebutterflysite.com/life-cycle.shtml)


The next step of the butterfly's life cycle is the **larva**. You might recognize a butterfly larva: it's a caterpillar! Maybe you've seen caterpillars chomping through leaves in your garden or in trees and bushes around your yard. Caterpillars can get pretty big from all the eating they do. This is really important because a mother butterfly needs to lay her eggs on the type of a leaf the caterpillar will eat. Each type of caterpillar likes only certain types of leaves, and because they are so tiny, the caterpillars can't easily travel to other plants.

The third step of the life cycle is the **pupa**, also known as the chrysalis.

From the outside of the pupa, it looks as if the caterpillar might just be resting, but the inside is where all of the action is. Inside, the caterpillar is rapidly changing. It's developing limbs, tissue, and organs to become the beautiful butterfly we are anxiously waiting for!

I'm sure you can guess the last step. It's the **butterfly**! The adult butterfly carefully emerges from the pupa. It doesn't just fly away quickly. The butterfly's wings are very thin and fragile, so it must wait for them to dry. Meanwhile the butterfly practices flapping its wings. Just like we had to learn to crawl and then walk, the butterfly has to learn to fly. This usually takes a few hours, but soon the butterfly will master it. It will fly away and look for a mate to begin the process again.

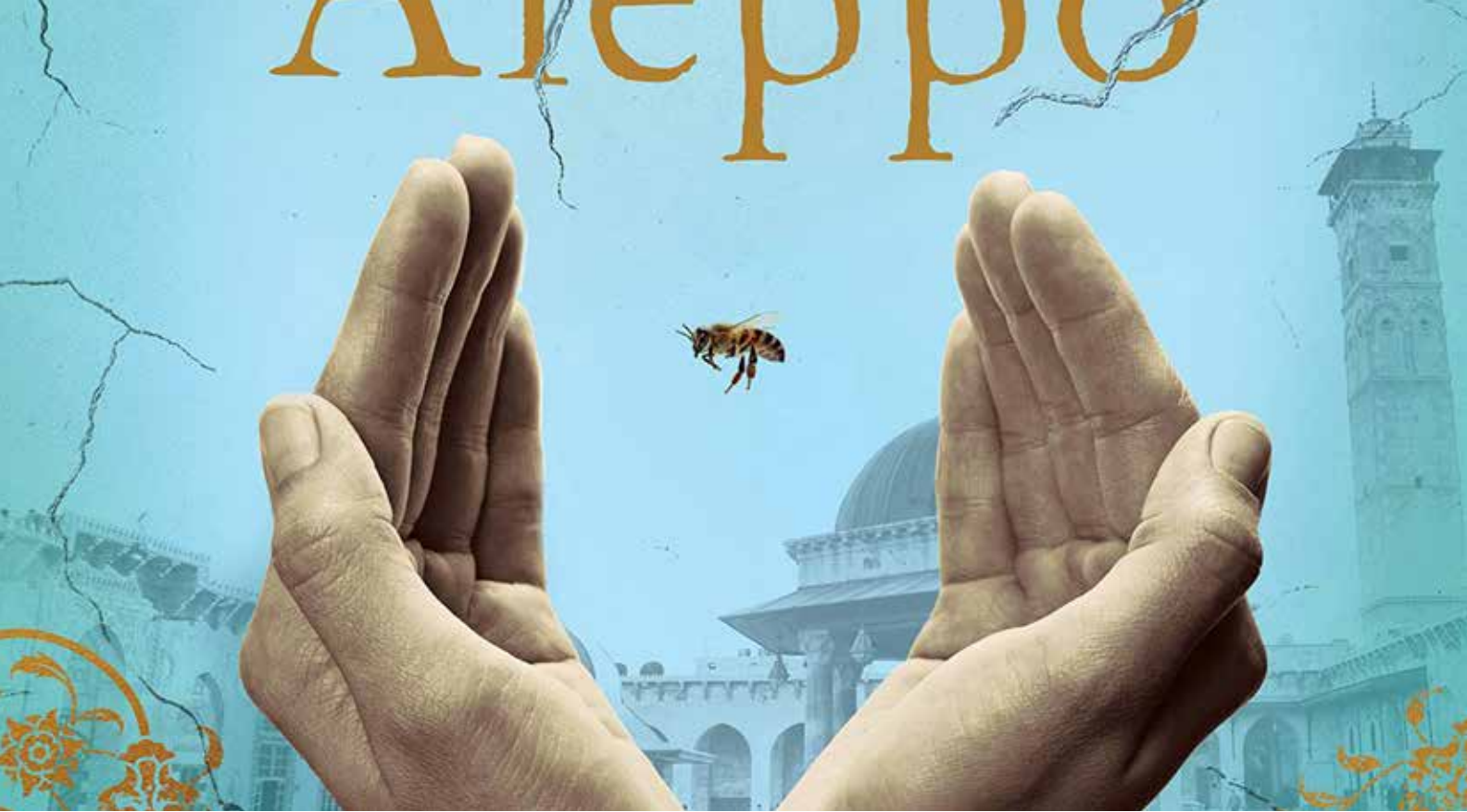
The next time you see a butterfly flying past, remember that it takes time to change into what you see today. Though the change didn't happen overnight, God knew exactly what would emerge!

Here's a link for creating your own butterfly craft at home: bit.ly/2QgX1TQ. 



Liz Brown is the assistant principal at Living Stones Academy in Grand Rapids, Mich. She has bachelor's and master's degrees from Grand Valley State University in elementary education/instruction and curriculum. She is a native of Grand Rapids, where she lives with her husband and two daughters.





Reading as an Act of Peacemaking

By Lorilee Craker

I was at an open house for my daughter's high school when I met Mustafa and his daughter, Deya. Deya, the same age as my daughter, wore a soft blue hijab that set off her brown eyes. To be honest, I was a little surprised to see this father and daughter at an open house for a Christian high school. I tried and failed to imagine myself and my daughter at an open house for a Muslim high school. I couldn't wrap my mind around it. Nonetheless, here was a fellow human being, an image-bearer of our Creator. This father and daughter were new, and at least looked out of place. Did they also feel out of place? As a long-time member of this school community, I wanted to be welcoming.

"Hello! I'm Lorilee!" I said, extending my hand to the father over the round table. The man smiled broadly and shook my hand enthusiastically. "I am Mustafa, and this is my daughter, Deya."

My husband also introduced himself, and we chatted about Deya being in

some of the same classes as our daughter, Phoebe. In fact, because classes had already begun for the year, Deya already knew Phoebe and sat with her in history class. We started to run out of things to say, but I had one more item in my conversational toolbox.

"I am reading a book right now, and one of the characters is named Mustafa," I said. "Such a beautiful name. I won't forget your name now." Mustafa was a gregarious guy—I already knew that. But his eyes lit up beyond friendliness.

I read a study once of the power of remembering names. People feel honored, seen, and even complimented when you remember. A related study revealed that when you pay someone any kind of sincere compliment, the air changes around you. Both you and the person to whom you have paid the compliment now have 30% more energy.

"Really?" He said, leaning forward. "What is the book?"

"*The Beekeeper of Aleppo*," I said. "It's about a man from Syria who has to flee his country and become a refugee."

At that point, the teacher began his presentation. Mustafa smiled warmly at me and nodded. It would be an overstatement to say we were friends after that, but the air had changed between us. There was an authentic connection established, a companionable energy. And it all started with what I was reading.

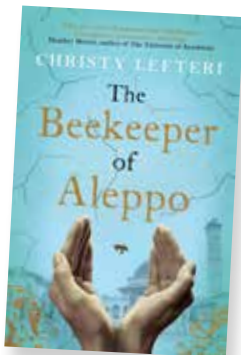
"Reading brings us unknown friends," said Honoré de Balzac. You might take that to mean that we as readers become friends with the characters in the books we read. But I believe that through reading, we can understand one another in a new way and build bridges where there were once just impassable gulches of misunderstanding—and maybe even fear.

I ordered *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* because I was interested in learning more about the experience of refugees from the Middle East, and also

because I have a soft spot for beekeeping. My Mennonite Opa had kept bees in Ukraine before Stalin's Bolsheviks drove out my family during World War II. The book's cover was superb, and the reviews were all raving.

I knew going in that this was not my kind of book. My kind of book, if I am being honest, is lighter, funnier, and more hopeful. A book such as *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* suits me perfectly: On the surface, it seems easy, breezy, and even hilarious at times, yet is studded with gems of insight into our shared human condition. It is a velvet brick of one woman's mental distress wrapped in zingy dialogue and cheeky humor. Give me hidden depths every time. I can cope with the profundities and pits much better if they are revealed in a world where flippancies and frivolities also exist. If I am laughing as well as crying, I am happy.

Without spoiling *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, there is no cheeky humor. I did not laugh, not even once. "Nuri is a beekeeper and Afra, his wife, is an artist," the editorial copy describes the book. Each



morning, "Nuri rises early to hear the call to prayer before driving to his hives in the countryside. On weekends, Afra sells her colorful landscape paintings at the open-air market. They live a simple life, rich in family and friends, in the hills of the beautiful Syrian city of Aleppo—until the unthinkable happens. ... (A)ll they love is destroyed by war."

The only lifeline Nuri and Afra (and the reader) have is the hope that Nuri's cousin Mustafa is waiting for them in England, where he has started an apiary and is teaching other refugees beekeeping. We as readers get to know Mustafa in flashbacks to the golden days when he and Nuri kept bees and

"I believe that through reading, we can understand one another in a new way and build bridges where there were once just impassable gulches of misunderstanding."

honey flowed like water. Mustafa is a ray of light in a novel where the characters are faced with unspeakable torment and loss. I often found the suffering to be overwhelming, yet I continued to turn the pages, listening to and learning from the characters.

In the end, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* was worthwhile. Its bleak narrative represented the hopeless circumstances of millions of refugees around the world. It brought faraway lands like Syria close to home. I didn't know Aleppo had been sunny and beautiful and art-filled; to me, from what I had seen on the news, it was a gray pile of rubble and despair. The book put human faces on the Syrian war and the ongoing struggles of Syrian citizens. These people were not just cold statistics to me anymore—they were Nuri, Afra, and, of course, Mustafa.

Especially Mustafa.

Because of him, the real Mustafa was made more real to me even before we met. I knew something of his religion and region of the world. I also knew—phew!—that he was not named for Mufasa, the king of the Pride Lands and the father of Simba in Disney's *The Lion King*. Yes, I probably would

have blurted out something *Lion King*-related had I not read *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*. (I'm blushing at the thought.)

Because of my reading, I was able to receive Mustafa as a human, to see him. Reading helps us see others—maybe for the first time. Books and stories can plant seeds of empathy, and to empathize with another is the beginning of peace.

Empathy moves you from "my here" to "their there," says Belinda Bauman in her book *Brave Souls: Experiencing the Audacious Power of Empathy*. We often try to live with others "on our terms, with our assumptions from our perspectives."

Reading about people very different from ourselves transports us, moving us away from our terms, assumptions, and limited worldviews. Books offer us a world where we can willingly enter in another's suffering and maybe even do something about it back in the "real world" when we finish a book.

"When we show people we understand their context, that we 'get' them," Bauman writes, "we demonstrate empathy and empower change." And we are given new tools to stand with those whom God loves.

I think of the uptick in the last few years in anti-Semitic crimes, and how a book I thoroughly enjoyed made me feel differently about anti-Semitism.

I knew the statistics. In New York alone, hate crimes against Jews jumped 21% in 2019, according to *The Washington Post*. From the same article, I learned "there were 1,879 incidents of anti-Semitism in the United States in 2018, including more than 1,000 instances of harassment." *Terrible*, I would always think when I read such numbers. *Just despicable*. But it wasn't until I entered the world of a book heroine that the needle moved as far as my emotional engagement on the subject.

The heroine is Natalie Marx, and the book is *The Inn at Lake Devine* by Elinor Lipman. Published in 1999 and set in the early 1960s, I found it at a garage

sale in recent years and parked it on my sagging “unread” shelf. The cover beguiled me with its blue lakefront bordered by red Adirondack chairs (or as we say in my Canadian homeland, Muskoka chairs). A summer book, I thought. Something to read at the lake. So last summer—on a trip to Muskoka, ironically—I grabbed it and threw it into my heaving book tote.

Natalie is 12 when the book opens, and she’s just heard that the summer resort in Vermont where her family had inquired about spending their next vacation has rebuffed them. “The Inn at Lake Devine is a family-owned resort, which has been in continuous operation since 1922,” the owner had written to Natalie’s mother. “Our guests who feel most comfortable here, and return year after year, are Gentiles.” Sweet-tart Natalie, whom I imagined as a young Nora Ephron, is infuriated—as was I. The passive-aggressive politeness with which the message was delivered seemed almost worse to me, a whitewashed sepulcher.

For the rest of the book, Lipman follows a growing Natalie’s obsession with this resort, a small citadel of discreet anti-Semitism. As she tries to enter the world that has excluded her, we as readers feel excluded too. I so invested in Natalie’s story that when vandals in my own city defaced a local synagogue, I was outraged on a new level. Reading Lipman’s book moved me out of my limited worldview as a white Protestant. I was able to take on the perspective of another—Natalie—and by extension her Jewish sisters and brothers. This anti-Semitic act felt personal to me, and not just because I had accompanied my son to that synagogue for a field trip many years before. In a Facebook post, I denounced the act, saying how sad it made me, and declared that I was standing with the Jews in my city and elsewhere.

Obviously, a Facebook post is minor. I won’t win the Nobel Peace Prize. But maybe in a small way I was working toward harmony in divisive times. And because our faith is big

on harmony—real concord, not false peace—maybe I was onto something important.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament speak of the importance of seeking peace. “Peace, peace to those far and near,” Isaiah says (Isa. 57:19). In the gospels, Jesus often uses the greeting “Peace be with you” (e.g., John 20:26).

It’s noteworthy that biblical peace is much more than the absence of conflict. Biblically, shalom is seen in reference to the well-being of others.

In the book *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, author Cornelius Plantinga describes the Old Testament concept of shalom: “Shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights.”

There are many ways to work for shalom in our world, but I submit that reading could be a start to that work. When we challenge ourselves to read in a way that wakes us up to see the world and its creatures in a different way, we grow in empathy and understanding. We can contribute better to creating, along with our Creator, more flourishing, wholeness, and delight for our fellow image-bearers.

“If you are always with people that think like you, how are you going to grow?” Pioneering Latina author Sandra Cisneros (the author of my current read, *The House on Mango Street*) posed this question to an audience gathered for a writers’ conference. Another way to say it: “If you are always reading about people that think like you, how are you going to grow?”


This doesn’t mean every book you read has to be hugely growth-spurring or devoid of the things that delight you. (Though how wonderful it is to find a book such as *The Inn at Lake Devine*, which offered me a view into the

Jewish experience *and* made me laugh and turn the pages faster and faster. The saying “You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar” is so true.)

I still relish my “gelato for the soul” reads, which are usually set in the United Kingdom and involve quirky U.K. people doing adorably U.K. things, often in bookstores and always with tankards of tea.

However, in the interest of growth and maybe even peacemaking, I choose to read at least one diverse read per month, usually more. This has opened my mind—my stubbornly white, Mennonite, Christian Reformed mind—to other worlds, cultures, and perspectives. It has brought me untold friends, both fictional and flesh-and-blood.

In writing and reading, “you don’t know it, but you’re doing an act of peace in violent times,” Cisneros said. “You are ambassadors for communication and understanding of people unlike yourselves.”

If you think about it that way, peace could be only a few pages away. A book could be one small cure for what ails us. It’s a wounded world out there; let’s start to heal it through reading, one book at a time. 



Lorilee Craker, a native of Winnipeg, Manitoba, lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., in a 1924 house full of teenagers, pets, exchange students, and houseplants. The author of 15 books, including *Anne of Green Gables*, *My Daughter and Me*,

she is the Mixed Media editor of *The Banner*. Find her at Lorileecraker.com or on Instagram @thebooksellersdaughter.

1. When you think of the word “peacemaking,” what comes to mind?
2. “Reading brings us unknown friends.” Has that been true of your own reading experiences? Why or why not?

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

Outdated Tradition or Biblical Truth?

Just because something is traditional doesn't mean it's right or sacred.

AS A CHILD I LOVED to pull my parents' wedding album from under the bookshelf that held the fiction. I would dust it off and page through, pausing at my favorites. My parents' wedding color was red. Candles lined the aisle, and everything glowed.

But paging through it now, the glow and perfection are marred by my updated perspective.

In one photo, my grandfather lowers my mother's veil over her face, shrouding her as he prepares to give her away like a gift.

It's one of many images—my parents kneeling to pray, leaning in to kiss, holding the knife to cut the cake—but it's the one that bothers me the most.

It's a moment that doesn't reflect my parents' marriage. My dad didn't ask for his father-in-law's blessing before proposing to my mom. My parents have always been equals, so it's strange to see my mother being given away, a gesture that harkens back to arranged marriages.

According to Susan Waggoner, author of *I Do, I Do! The Origins of 100 Classic Wedding Traditions*, the presence of the father with the bride at a wedding was to intimidate the groom and make sure the arranged marriage actually took place. In our current culture, where people marry for love, it seems unhelpful to perpetuate a symbol that is no longer an accurate representation of marriage.

But because this tradition has become so ingrained in our culture, we—especially we Christians—latch onto it.

For Christians, a wedding is a sacred commitment a man and a woman make to each other and to God. For that reason, it should be approached with reverence and care. My concern is that Christians confuse the importance

of weddings with the importance of outdated traditions. There seems to be a fear among Christians to let go of certain traditions, perhaps because we have let ourselves see them as integral to the Christian wedding ceremony. But just because something is traditional doesn't mean it's right or sacred.

The Bible doesn't give us detailed instructions on what a marriage ceremony should entail. We have the freedom to choose wedding traditions that suit us or to design our own. We should make sure those traditions represent us and our commitments.

My mother being given away at her wedding was a misrepresentation of my parents' relationship. They followed the tradition because it was expected, but it was out of place in their marriage.

While I am uncomfortable with certain traditions, I know there are plenty of people who feel differently. As time passes, we give traditions new connotations. For some women, walking down the aisle with their dad is meaningful and beautiful. I am not telling those women they're wrong, but I do think we should examine traditions to make sure they mean what we think they mean.

As a Christian community, it's important to support people who decide to do away with certain wedding traditions, trusting that new traditions are being formed that honor the relationship and glorify God.

I hope to get married someday, and I hope to involve my parents in the ceremony. But I won't have my dad give me away. My parents conformed to a tradition that made no sense for their relationship. I hope every part of my wedding will be a true representation of the commitment I will make. **B**



April Otto is a senior English major at George Fox University, Newberg, Ore., who grew up in the Reformed tradition.

Golden Vessels

The path to
success is laid
and layered with
morality, not
so much talent;
righteousness, not
so much
opportunities;
integrity, not so
much networking.



John Lee is the head of the Upper School at The Geneva School of Manhattan, a Christian classical school. He also serves with Ben Spalink at City Grace Church in the East Village of New York City.

ON THE UPPER EAST SIDE of Manhattan, a graceful black vessel with green and gold floral patterns sits confidently on a bedside table in the Lauzun Room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The French royal manufacturer at Sèvres produced this work. Baron Jérôme-Frédéric Pichon (1812-1896), a wealthy collector and bibliophile, may have owned it. It is a chamber pot, a receptacle for human waste in a time before plumbing or sewers were widely used. The quality of the pot and the purpose for which it was made cause mental dissonance and give new meaning to disposable wealth. Vessels should have appropriate uses. Gutted fish belong in a bucket after a long day at the dock, a fine wine in a crystal glass, a cup of Kopi Luwak coffee in a ceramic mug.

The apostle Paul writes that in a great house there are many vessels—gold, silver, wood, and clay. Some are for noble purposes, others for ignoble purposes. Greco-Roman homes possessed many types of vessels: amphorae for olive oil, glazed kraters for mixing wine for Hellenized homes, and terra-cotta cups for everyday use. Wealthier families had vessels of precious metals for special occasions. Juvenal, the Roman satirist, pokes fun at the conspicuous consumption of Rome's elites, who liked to show off their silver goblets. Archeology confirms this. A well-known example comes from a Pompeian mosaic of a skeleton holding two well-proportioned wine cups called *askoi*. All homes, not just grand ones, had vessels of all shapes, sizes, uses, and materials.

Within the Jewish context, we see much the same with an added insight. In the temple, vessels abounded, and the preciousness of the material

increased as it approached the Most Holy Place. A large bronze basin for washing rested on 12 statues of bulls at the entrance of the temple. A bronze pail held the ashes of the sacrifices, and a lamp, beaten in pure gold, contained the olive oil that illumined the Most Holy Place. Paul picks up this thread, theologizes it, and applies it to Timothy. Timothy belongs to the household of God and is a vessel; he will have to determine what kind of vessel he will be.

Bodies as Vessels

Paul's illustration of vessels maps onto two better-known analogies. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul likens the body to a tent. Paul writes with relief that our earthly tents are not permanent. Life is fraught with hardships, especially in the context of missionary labor. Paul enumerates what his earthly vessel went through: beatings, imprisonments, riots, sleepless nights, and hunger. His tent, his body, is in need of repair, but he does not lose heart because he awaits a heavenly tent. Furthermore, he has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, reminding him of the renewal that is set in motion and will come to consummation. So even if his earthly tent is wasting away, he is being renewed inwardly through the Spirit of God. He makes a similar point in the previous chapter when he likens his body to an earthen jar. The pressures of life challenge the integrity of this vessel. Cracks, fissures, and bruises are visible, but inwardly Paul experiences glory through the Holy Spirit. Paul, a jar of clay, yes; a possessor of treasure in that jar of clay, even more so; a partaker of the weight of eternal glory, most certainly.

Paul's theology of the temple lands in the same place. Paul reminds the



Corinthians that sexual immorality ultimately is a sin not because of what it does to people or to society but because it offends the Holy Spirit. Believers are temples (vessels) of the Holy Spirit. Hence, what they do with their bodies matters. Uniting with a prostitute offends and quenches the pre-existing tenant, the Holy Spirit. Paul's words cannot be clearer: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). In Paul's theology, bodies house God. As such, people possess power when they allow the Holy Spirit to lead and direct them. The challenge, of course, is that it is difficult to cultivate a life of submission. History shows that people are like bent branches, chronically inclined toward sin.

The Choice of Vessels

Paul's words to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:20-26) bypass superficial externals and pierce through joint and marrow and reach the vitals of a person. Paul's directness arises from his impending

death and his closeness to Timothy. If Timothy wishes to be a vessel of honor, then he must cleanse himself of what is dishonorable. Only a holy vessel will be used for holy purposes. And only a holy vessel will be useful to God and be ready for every good work. Such a calling demands that Timothy flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with others who are like-minded. This spiritual principle, without frills or flourishes or flattery, crashes into our modern sensibilities. The path to success is laid and layered with morality, not so much talent; righteousness, not so much opportunities; integrity, not so much networking. According to Paul, it is neither what you know nor whom you know that matters, but who you are.

I experienced this point in a bookstore in Princeton, N. J., 20 years ago. While I was attending seminary in Philadelphia, I used to drive up to northern New Jersey for Friday night services. On the way one Friday I stopped for a cup of coffee. As I sat skimming a theological book, an older gentleman struck up a conversation. He asked if I was a seminary student.

The Greek New Testament and the theological books on the table were dead giveaways. After a few minutes of small talk, he said, "Young man, purity in the hands of a holy God is a powerful instrument." What do you say to that? I nodded. He smiled and walked away. For a moment, he was Paul; I was Timothy. As I look back on my past 20 years of ministry, I see he was right.

Externals matter little for effective ministry. That goes for strategies and techniques as well. Education takes a back seat, as do resources, backing, and connections. God cares about the inner qualities of vessels. God uses people who are devoted. The more devoted people are, the more God uses them; the less devoted, the less God uses them. God's word to King Asa through the prophet Hanani offers a timely reminder: "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

If these words still apply today, then God courses through city blocks, country roads, highways, and alleys to look for men and women who are willing, faithful, and available. Who will be those golden vessels to house and mediate the power of God's spirit? The most remarkable and radical fact about grace is that God gives that choice to us. **B**

1. What are some of the most memorable vessels you have ever seen?
2. Reflect on the idea that our bodies are temples or vessels of the Holy Spirit. How does that truth make you feel?

READ MORE ONLINE

What Can the TV Show *Blue Bloods* Teach Us?

WHY IS CBS'S *Blue Bloods* my favorite TV show? Is it the thrill of detective work, the sporadic courtroom drama, or the unique glimpses of New York life? None of the above. Rather, I enjoy the family dynamic presented each week.

The Reagan family has “blue” blood, meaning police life runs in their veins. The patriarch is Grandpa Reagan (Len Cariou), a retired New York police commissioner who manages the house. His son, Frank Reagan (Tom Selleck), is the current commissioner presiding over the family. Frank’s middle son, Joe, was killed in the line of undercover duty. His daughter, Erin (Bridget Moynahan), is a district attorney and a divorced mother of a young adult daughter. The wife of Frank’s oldest son, Detective Danny Reagan (Donnie Wahlberg) was murdered in a helicopter “accident.” Danny’s two teenage sons are also in the picture. Frank’s youngest son is Jamie (Will Estes), a recently married and promoted police officer.


The Reagans gather for Sunday dinners at Frank’s house, where the primacy of family is displayed. Strong arguments and lively family exchanges happen as opinions or observations regarding a variety of topics are aired. No matter the disagreement—and there are many—each family member supports the others.

Their loyalty and commitment to one another are striking. Apologies are offered when necessary, and grace is given. They say a brief prayer at the beginning of each meal, even when disagreements aren’t yet settled. What’s touching and encouraging is the way brother and sister come together, how brother and brother

work things out, or the way father and son come to a resolution, always showing strong respect for one another, as do daughter and dad.

What often moves me to tears is the family bond of love. Frank is patient even when he does not agree. Erin, a district attorney, respects her commissioner dad. The sibling’s love surmounts even heated disagreements, and after the chairs are straightened out and the dishes are back on the table, the family enjoys a meal and each other’s presence. Disagreements and misunderstandings are worked out. Love and respect intertwine as they should. We viewers can take some of the Reagan family’s lessons about closeness to heart.

Watching *Blue Bloods*, I wonder if I’ve been a father like Frank Reagan, who’s not afraid to show toughness and tenderness. Have our sons learned to disagree while remaining committed to one another? Have we accepted personality differences while remaining intensely loyal and committed? Do we grab flowers and head over to apologize when we’ve been stubbornly wrong? How can I learn from this show as a father, a leader, and a pastor? Is our bond of family love, a commitment to each other, strong enough?

I’m wondering, what do the *Blue Bloods* have to teach us as blood families and as the family of God? 



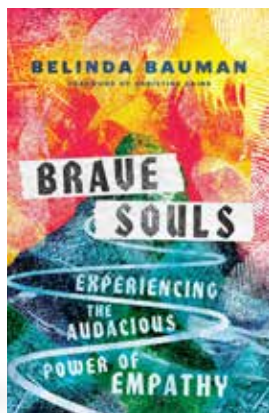
George Vink is retired after 50 years as a Christian Reformed pastor. One of his sons is an accident investigator for the Calgary (Alta.) Police Service, and his two brothers are retired from that position. He and his wife, Shirley, are members of Covenant CRC in Cutlerville, Mich.



The Antioch Podcast: Conversations About Biblical Anti-Racism

Reviewed by Micah van Dijk

The Antioch Podcast courageously confronts racism with the goal of church unity in America. Hosted by Eric Nykamp (director of worship design at Madison Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.), this podcast invites a variety of Christian voices around the table to explore historical systemic racism and ways forward. *The Antioch Podcast* is a conversation, not a product. Most episodes last more than an hour, and several book discussions last six or seven episodes each. Yet the authenticity and slower pace of *The Antioch Podcast* are refreshing and necessary. Glossing over or rushing through these conversations would do more harm than good. If you are unsure where to start, check out Episode 45, “Understanding White Supremacy Culture.” (Apple Podcasts)



Brave Souls: Experiencing the Audacious Power of Empathy

By Belinda Bauman

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

In *Brave Souls*, a journalist and humanitarian takes readers around the world to learn the crucial skill of empathy from the world's most courageous souls. With the feeling of a quest, Belinda Bauman guides readers from the top of Mount Kilimanjaro to the borders of war-torn Syria, learning empathy as she—and the reader—listen and learn from women who have suffered. Trailblazing neuroscience, Bauman's deep faith in Jesus, and absorbing stories of real heroines form a colorful mosaic and offer astonishing insights. This book calls us to exalt the humanity of others and to intentionally participate in empathy—a gritty, potent spiritual discipline with the potential to transform our homes, communities, and nations. In these polarizing times, we need that discipline more than ever. (IVP)



A Hidden Life

Reviewed by Jenny deGroot

An Austrian farmer faces the threat of execution for refusing to fight for the Nazis during World War II in Terrence Malick's film *A Hidden Life*. Franz Jägerstätter (August Diehl) is conscripted early in the war. Returning home to his wife, Fani, Franz is disillusioned by national socialism and particularly the Reich's treatment of the marginalized. As the war wears on and re-conscription looms, Franz becomes increasingly convicted that God is calling him to stand up against this evil. Malick's three-hour film studies what a depth of conviction looks like in the face of an evil empire. It is a prophetic challenge to the injustices the church might be ignoring today as we enter the 2020s. (Fox Searchlight)



Far from Home: A Story of Loss, Refuge, and Hope

*By Sarah Parker
Rubio, illustrated by
Fátima Anaya*

Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

A young boy's parents wake him up in the middle of the night and tell him they have to flee their home. The boy doesn't want to leave his cozy bedroom, toys, and stuffed animals, but he has no choice. As the three hurry away, walking endlessly and then taking a long bus ride, the boy clings to the one item he's been allowed to take along: his stuffed rabbit. Sarah Parker Rubio's age-sensitive storytelling helps children make the connection between the experiences of today's refugee children and Jesus, God's Son, who also was a refugee for a time when he was a child. Illustrator Fátima Anaya's vivid pictures convey a sense of hopefulness in a bleak situation. (Tyndale Kids)

The Lowdown

Hope for Narcissists, Victims in the Church:

We've seen the news stories and heard the rumors. Maybe we ourselves have been hurt by a narcissistic church leader. It's easy to diagnose others from afar. But what is narcissism, really? And how does it infiltrate the church? Chuck DeGroat's *When Narcissism Comes to Church* offers insight and healing. (IVP)

From Cleaning Floors to Hoops Glory: Starring Sterling K. Brown (*This Is Us*), the faith-based film *Rise* tells the true story of Willie Davis, a high school janitor who steps up to coach the failing basketball program all the way to the state championship. (April 10, Crystal City Entertainment)

Instant Bestseller, Now a Hulu Series: Based on the 2017 New York Times bestseller *Little Fires Everywhere* by Celeste Ng, this intense limited series stars Reese Witherspoon (who chose the novel for her book club) and Kerry Washington as neighbors whose lives dramatically intertwine. (Hulu)

If I Had Your Face: A riveting debut novel by Frances Cha set in contemporary Seoul, Korea, follows four young women making their way in a world defined by impossible standards of beauty, secret-room salons catering to wealthy men, ruthless social hierarchies, and K-pop mania. (Ballantine Books)

Saved From What?

Jesus' birth, death,
and resurrection
are intertwined
actions that
together reveal
Jesus' identity as
our Savior.



Chris Schoon serves as the director of Faith Formation Ministries for the Christian Reformed Church.

DO NOT BE AFRAID. *I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord (Luke 2:10-11).*

It's Lent. Good Friday and Easter are drawing near, and we're revisiting the angel's Christmas announcement: "A Savior has been born to you." Something feels out of place. Luke 2 is for December, not April. After all, how often do we sing Christmas songs in Lent? Yet recalling the story of Jesus' birth in this season is fitting and good. Doing so reminds us that Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection are intertwined actions that together reveal Jesus' identity as our Savior. The cross was already in view at Jesus' birth.

As we focus on Jesus' sacrificial death for our sins, the announcement of Jesus' birth provides a clarifying lens, helping us to see that Jesus is our Savior. In making himself nothing, "being made in human likeness," Jesus continued to humble himself, "becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus' birth and death together serve as central acts in God's revelation that Jesus is our one and only Savior.

With such a focus on who Jesus is, we are invited to acknowledge that we need saving, which leads us to ask, "What does Jesus save us from?"

The Heidelberg Catechism's opening declaration teaches that Jesus "has set me free from the tyranny of the devil" (Q&A 1). Lord's Day 11 emphasizes that Jesus "saves us from our sins." Q&A 34 also emphasizes our salvation from both the devil's tyranny and sin. In explaining Jesus' suffering, Lord's Day 15 points out that Jesus "deliver[ed] us, body and soul, from eternal

condemnation" through his "atoning sacrifice."

Later, the catechism explains that Jesus' death on the cross saves us "so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer rule us" (Q&A 43). Even when we experience trouble in this life, we receive assurance that Christ "has delivered [us] from hellish anguish and torment" (Q&A 44). Moreover, the Spirit "defends us and keeps us safe from all enemies" (Q&A 51). This salvation includes strengthening us to "firmly resist" our enemies: "the devil, the world, and our own flesh" (Q&A 127).

What we hear in the church's teaching on salvation is that, in Jesus Christ, God has released us from the grip of each and all sin, has delivered us and protects us from every enemy—even ourselves—and assures us that the tyrannical devil has no authority over us. In other words, because Jesus "has removed the whole curse from [us]" (Q&A 52), we are assured in Christ, by his Holy Spirit, "of eternal life" and are made "wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him" (Q&A 1).

As such, the gift of salvation that we celebrate in Jesus' birth and in remembering Jesus' death and resurrection saves us from the twin death grip of our sin and the devil and ushers us into the inseparable certainty and freedom of new life in Jesus Christ. **B**

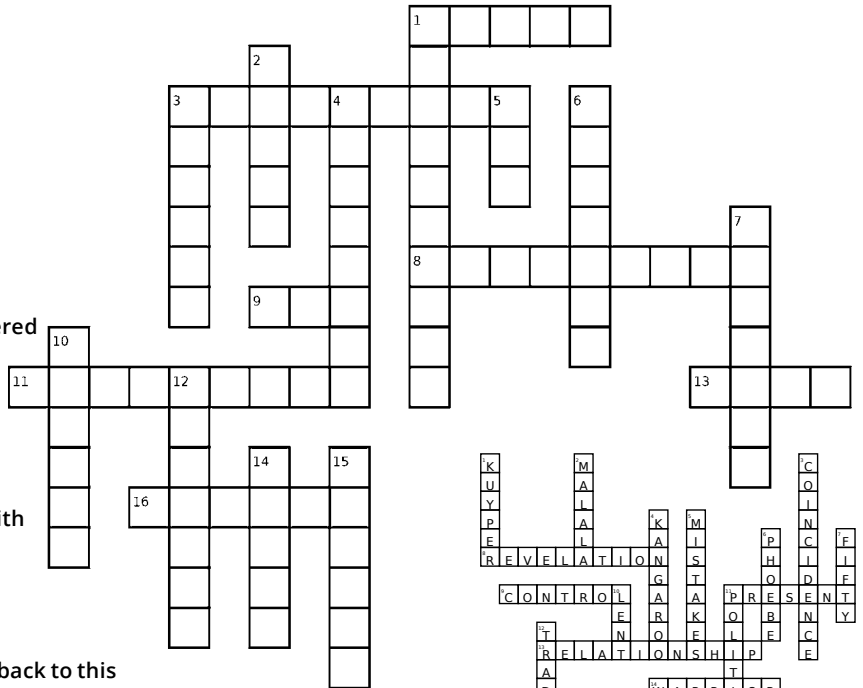
Find clues to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*. See the answers next month!

Down:

- 1. Executive director of the CRC. 2014-2020
- 2. Tom Selleck's character in *Blue Bloods*
- 3. This is not easy
- 4. An often-overlooked day when discussing Easter
- 5. An online Safe Church space for sharing stories
- 6. Name of Lorilee Craker's new friend
- 7. A ceremony with traditions that could be reconsidered
- 10. A people group in West Africa
- 12. Belinda Bauman's *Brave Souls: Experiencing the Audacious Power of* _____
- 14. A Farmington, N.M., church provides its sermons on _____
- 15. _____ Promise churches share their spaces with homeless families

Across:

- 1. The apostle Paul likens our bodies to these
- 3. As we look forward to Easter, it's also good to look back to this
- 8. A Hudsonville church created this kind of golf course
- 9. Who is in control
- 11. This creature is the perfect embodiment of change
- 13. The title of a new basketball film starring Sterling K. Brown
- 16. The CRCNA serves congregations in the U.S. and _____



Answers to the March 2020 puzzle

Think you can change the world with exercise?

We do.

CHANGE can be big, like Olympic medical team big. Or it can be small, like improving posture 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.

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DEADLINES: 4/6/20 for May; 5/4/20 for June.

Subject to availability. Details online.

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Announcement of Candidacy

We are pleased to announce that **TERENCE SCHILSTRA** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Colin P. Watson, Sr. Acting Executive Director

Church Anniversary 125 Years

WITH THANKS TO GOD, the Christian Reformed Church of Pease, MN celebrates 125 years! Former pastors and members are invited to a celebratory worship service Sunday, May 3 at 9:30 a.m.

Church Positions Available

EDUCATION DIRECTOR AND OUTREACH PASTOR NEEDED 2 Positions Available: Hope in Christ Church in Bellingham, WA seeks an Education Director and a P/T Outreach Pastor. To learn more, visit <https://www.hopein-christchurch.org/jobs>.

FULL TIME YOUTH DIRECTOR Christian Reformed Church of York, ON has an opening for a full-time Youth Director. York is located along the Grand River just 15-20 minutes south of Hamilton, ON. Maranatha is a church that will have approximately 160 youth under the age of 17 in 2021. If God is calling you to work in the Youth Ministry then we invite you to explore that with us. To learn more or request a job description, please email office@maranathayorkcrc.ca or call (289) 757 4114 or visit our website at www.maranathacrcyork.ca

INTERIM PASTOR Trinity CRC located on the shoreline of Lake Huron in Goderich, ON is seeking an Interim Pastor to inspire spiritual growth and to help us share the love and grace of Jesus to our neighbours. For more information, visit trinitychurchgoderich.com or email us at trinity.interestedapplicants@gmail.com

LEAD PASTOR - Aylmer CRC in Aylmer, Ontario, Canada is seeking an experienced Lead Pastor gifted in the areas of shepherding and teaching. We are prayerfully searching for a self motivated and compassionate Pastor who is devoted to providing Reformed preaching, passionate about nurturing our spiritual growth and equipping us for community outreach. If this is a position you may feel God's calling you to, we would love to speak with you. Please contact Lisa at 519-520-1220 or email bruceandlisavk@hotmail.com. Job description and church profile are available on the Portal.

LEAD PASTOR: Sonlight CRC of Regina, SK is recruiting for collaborative leadership that will continue to build a Christ-centered community that nurtures love for God, for themselves and their dynamic multicultural city. Please send your applications to: sonlight-search@gmail.com

PASTOR River Park CRC of Calgary, Alberta is seeking a full-time Pastor of Preaching, Care and Spiritual Formation. We are a multicultural congregation situated in the foothills of the beautiful Rocky Mountains. We are looking for a Pastor to inspire us to Reach Out, Draw In and Create Community. To find out more, please contact the search committee at RPChurch.Pastor.Search@gmail.com.

PASTOR Wolf Creek Community Church is located in beautiful Lacombe, Alberta. We are seeking a pastor who will join us in our mission to reach out and enfold people for Jesus. Visit wolfcreekchurch.ca or Email searchteamwccc@gmail.com

WORSHIP DIRECTOR POSITION River Rock Church, located in Rockford, Michigan, is currently seeking a part-time Worship Director. To learn more, visit www.riverrockcommunity.com. or email worshipsearch@riverrockcommunity.com.

WORSHIP DIRECTOR Sunnyside CRC in Sunnyside, WA is seeking a full-time Worship Director to lead and develop the worship ministry of the congregation. For a job description or more info email pastor@sunnysidecrc.org

YOUTH PASTOR Emmanuel CRC in Calgary, Alberta is seeking a full-time position of Pastor of Youth and Young Adults to support fulfilling the strategic direction of integrating the youth and young adults into the life of the church. Contact office@emmanuelcrc.org for more information.

Denominational Announcements

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER (U.S.) In May 1988 the President of the United States signed into law a bill establishing the first Thursday of May as a National Day of Prayer. This year the National Day of Prayer falls on Thursday, May 7. The synod of the CRC has urged churches in the United States "to observe faithfully any national day of prayer which the United States President publicizes to the nation" (Acts of Synod 1969). "Our churches must be open to our congregations and our fellow [citizens] on such occasions, when God in his providence leads those in

civil authority to call our citizenry to pray. We must pray for and with our country" (Acts of Synod 1958). Colin P. Watson, Sr. Acting Executive Director

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS ZEELAND will meet in regular session on Thursday, May 14, 2020, 4pm, in the Haven CRC of Zeeland. Agenda deadline is April 1. Rev. Ronald J. Meyer, S.C.

Birthday

BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS



HAL SOPER of 2121 Raybrook St, #253, DeVos Center, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 will celebrate his 100th birthday on April 16. He was married to the late Fran Rop Soper for nearly 69 years and is dad to Linda (Bob) Bosch,

Barb (Dave) VandeBunte, Gail (Doug) Elenbaas, Sarah Drenth, Hal Soper & Paul (Sue) Soper. 20 grandchildren & 23 great-grandchildren. Family celebrations are planned to praise God for the great blessing of this much loved man.

BIRTHDAY 95 YEARS

STEVE HOEKMAN will celebrate his 95th birthday on April 3. He and Jeanne live at 999 W Second St #148, Ripon, CA 95366. He worked in Christian Schools in Ripon, Kanawha IA, Racine WI, Denver CO, and New Holland SD. Their children (Mark, Kent, Tim, Joel, Tom, and Rebecca) are grateful for the long example of faithfulness, love, and support. We love you, Dad!

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

WILBERT (BILL) VAN DYK of Grand Rapids, MI celebrates his 90th birthday on April 15, 2020. Husband of the late Elaine, father to five, grandfather to 11, and great-grandfather to 8. Congratulations and much love from your family!

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 65 YEARS

VANDER LAAN - With thankfulness to God we, Jack and Millie (Mildred Vander Markt), celebrated 65 years of God's blessings on March 24, 2020. 11206 SW Northland Dr; Port St Lucie, FL 34987. Children: Daughter, Cheryl Gill, deceased, Granddaughter, Gloria

Singletary, deceased, Great grandson Leander Tupper, and Granddaughter, Kelli Singletary. Son, Douglas, deceased. Son, David and Patricia Vander Laan, Granddaughters, Jaclyn and Tara. Son, Dwayne and Lisa Vander Laan, Grandchildren Travis and Kim, Britney and Chad, and Douglas.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS

DEJONG, Delmar and Carol DeJong will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on April 8. Their children and grandchildren are grateful for their love for each other and family! Deb and Cal Vis (Eric, Julie), Doug and Amy DeJong (Trevor & Amanda, Jessica, Shelby)

HOEKSEMA 60TH ANNIVERSARY The children of Jack and Jean (Elling) Hoeksema thank God for 60 years of marriage on April 9, 2020! We are so blessed for the wonderful example they have given all of us!



HUIZINGA, John & Pat (Piebenga), of Wyoming, MI will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on April 7. Their children are Donna & Tim Ritsema, Ruth & Ben Cook and John Jr & Heidi Huizinga. They have 8 grandchildren & 8 great grandchildren. God is good!

Donna & Tim Ritsema, Ruth & Ben Cook and John Jr & Heidi Huizinga. They have 8 grandchildren & 8 great grandchildren. God is good!

Obituaries

DE VRIES, Leona (Langstraat), age 87, of Peoria, IA passed away February 9, 2020. She was preceded in death by her husband, Harold, and she is survived by her children: Harlan (Donna), Larry (Rosie), Dennis (Bev), Pat (Stan) Dykstra, Bryce, Wavern (Bev), Kevin, and Kimberly (Brian) Vander Berg; 19 grandchildren and 49 great-grandchildren; and brothers Henry Junior Langstraat and Terry Langstraat.

DEJONGE, Herbert "Herb" C., 85, of Grand Rapids, MI, went to be with his Lord and Savior on February 14, 2020. He leaves behind his beloved wife, Shirley (Sieggers) DeJonge; his children, William & Melissa Dykstra, Jay & Mabelle Knochenhauer, Mitchell & Jill DeJonge, Jim & Heysook DeJonge, and Jane DeJonge; 13 grandchildren; and 5 great grandchildren.

DOORN, Bernard "Bud" A., age 87, of Plainfield went to be with his LORD on March 2nd, 2020. 2101 Nicholas Ct, Bettendorf, Iowa, 52722. Beloved husband of the late Geraldine for 66 years; loving father of Edward Doorn, Diane (John) Klosak, and Gary Doorn; devoted grandfather of Kimberly (Joshua) Smith, Michael (Rachel) Klosak, Jillian (Jay) Reavis, and Randall Klosak; great-grandfather of Alexander and Abigail Smith, Ethan, Liam, and Elliott Klosak, and Weston and Olivia Reavis; dear son of the late Arthur and the late Tena Doorn; uncle of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Timothy Christian Schools, 188 W. Butterfield Rd, Elmhurst, IL 60126, are appreciated.

DOORN, Geraldine "Gerry", nee Smith, age 90, of Plainfield went to be with her LORD on February 28th, 2020. 2101 Nicholas Ct, Bettendorf, Iowa, 52722. Beloved wife of the late Bernard for 66 years; loving mother of Edward Doorn, Diane (John) Klosak, and Gary Doorn; devoted grandmother of Kimberly (Joshua) Smith, Michael (Rachel) Klosak, Jillian (Jay) Reavis, and Randall Klosak; great-grandmother of Alexander and Abigail Smith, Ethan, Liam, and Elliott Klosak, and Weston and Olivia Reavis; dear daughter of the late Edward and the late Ida Smith; fond sister of the late Marjorie (the late Adrian) Laning, the late Stella (the late John) Van Tholen, the late Jacob (the late Jeanette and the late Flo) Smith, and the late John (the late Gwynn) Smith; aunt of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Timothy Christian Schools, 188 W. Butterfield Rd, Elmhurst, IL 60126, are appreciated.

FISHER, Charles, age 95, went "Home for the Holidays" on December 23, 2019; 2121 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546. Formerly of Wyckoff, NJ, Charlie loved his Lord and enjoyed 68 years of marriage and family. He is survived by his wife, Ann (Vande Ree); children: John (Sheree) Fisher of Troy, NY; Jim (Kerry) Fisher of Waldwick, NJ; and Patti Fisher of Grand Rapids, MI; his grandchildren: Kristen (Christopher) Groen, Joel Fisher, and Kara (Eric) Van Marion; and great grandchildren: Carter, Ethan, and Zachary Groen; and Chase and Colette Van Marion.



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HAAN, Kay-nee DeGraaf, 91, of Holland, MI was welcomed into her heavenly home on Feb. 7, 2019. She is preceded in death by her spouse of 31 years, Rev. Gilbert Haan. She is survived by children, Marcia (Mark) Behrens, Barb (Dave) Kiekintveld, Gilbert (Chris) Haan, 4 grandchildren, a great-grandson, and sister, Henrietta Billings. Kay will be lovingly remembered as a devoted wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She was a teacher, social worker, volunteer at Herrick Public Library, and long-time member of Providence CRC. She

enjoyed painting as a hobby, and vacations in northern Michigan and the Netherlands.



SCHUTT, Herman, age 100, of Hudsonville, formerly of Sayner, WI, went to be with his Lord and Savior on Saturday, February 8, 2020. He was preceded in death by his wife, Louise Schutt; sisters, Jenny and Abe Hoving, Lee and Jake Oppewal, Gertrude and John Cook. He is survived by his children, Muriel and Philip Bouman, Lenore and Michael Klunder, Nicholas and Deborah Schutt; grandchildren, Matthew and Shawn

Bouman, Sarah and Kevin Edwards, Brent and Kara Bouman, Katherine Klunder, Clayton and Kara Klunder, Connor Klunder, Rebecca Schutt; 9 great grandchildren; sister-in-law, Celia De-Boer. Herman and Louise were owners of the Ace-Hi Bottled Gas Company Inc. for many years. He served in the US Navy during WWII.

VAN STEMPVOORT, Myra J. (nee Brink), dearly loved wife of John W. Children: Randy Alice), Mark, Dale (Herma), Sharon (Ron), Janice (Ed), Jeff (Yvonne). 15 grandchildren and 23 great grandchildren. Sister: Katherine Van Drunen.

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The Cost of Truth-Telling

I do not need to defend the truth.

It is quite the opposite—truth will defend me.

As I Was Saying is a forum for a variety of perspectives to foster faith-related conversations among our readers. These perspectives do not necessarily reflect the views of The Banner.

TRUTH IS A LADEN WORD these days. We see it being shouted by people on opposite ends of a spectrum over a number of polarizing issues. In many instances, the word “truth-telling” is misused when it becomes a self-justifying moral high ground against critiques.

We live in a spiritual warfare, the essence of which is still about truth versus falsehood.

Truth-telling can be very costly. Take the #MeToo movement: the first outspoken victim or advocate is often hushed, shunned, or verbally attacked. The cost of losing friendships and trust for people can be discouraging, to say the least.

On the other hand, such experiences are also truth-revealing moments. The realization of how fragile human relationships are and how people succumb to spiritual darkness is sobering.

I know this because I have been there. When a #MeToo story in the church was confided to me, my default mode was silence. I said I would pray for her. Then I looked away. But for the next two years, my conscience continued to moan. I had to go back and ask what happened. It was emotionally draining to listen to the details. But the power of truth demands I look it in the face, despite unease. Being able to do that was spiritually liberating.

The biggest struggle came to me after hearing and believing the truth. The knowledge of such soul-wrenching truth demands I speak up. Through writing for Chinese-language public media, I had been an advocate for vulnerable groups. I believe truth bends toward the vulnerable, not the

powerful. In the literal sense, the person of Truth once did bend down to us—he became vulnerable and paid the cost as an advocate for his people.

In these circumstances, truth-telling can be a testing spiritual discipline. I tell the truth and extend trust to people who are willing to hear it. Then I prepare myself for that trust to be forfeit, for my own credibility to be challenged. Often I expect defeat.

The ministry of Jesus Christ on earth was about truth-telling. Jesus became a pain to the religious leaders. Knowing the depravity of human nature, Jesus must have prepared for defeat, too. He did it nonetheless.

A lawyer friend once encouraged me, “Truth is your best defense.” I then realized I do not need to defend the truth. It is quite the opposite—truth will defend me. I later came to understand: I can actively present the truth, and then truth-telling becomes the hearer’s responsibility. God is testing this person’s heart in how he or she responds to it.

While doing this, it is important my attitude and demeanor also embody truthfulness and humility. But truth-telling can often trigger internal anger. It takes a deep reliance on God to practice self-control and not be overcome by indignation. Watching the cloud of #MeToo witnesses, I am amazed at how some victims of sexual abuse rise above their trauma to become more like Jesus Christ. Truth-telling restores our Christ-like humanity.

When is truth-telling not costly? Never. Not even for God. **B**

This article was originally posted Aug. 15, 2019, on our blog, *As I Was Saying*, and has been shortened for print. To read the full article, visit TheBanner.org.

Mary Li Ma, Ph.D., is a research fellow at Calvin University. She is a member of Plymouth Heights CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

A Holy Pathway

With her hands clasped behind her dad's neck and the lower part of her face hidden behind her arm, she looks at me.

THE LITTLE GIRL IN FRONT of me is about 2 or 3 years old. On stage, the praise team gets ready to lead the congregation into worship, and we are asked to stand. In church with her mom and dad, the girl impatiently tugs on her dad's coat and asks to be lifted up; soon her little head rests on his right shoulder. With her hands clasped behind her dad's neck and the lower part of her face hidden behind her arm, she looks at me. I sing. I keep on singing. But although I look at the words on the screen in front, I cannot help but sense her constant staring at me, making me oddly aware of my jaws opening and closing and the sound coming out of my mouth.


She is a pretty girl with long blond hair and blue eyes. Oddly, her eyes give the impression she is not looking *at* me but, in a strange, unfocused way, *through* me. What might she be looking at? Shortly after the last song and the children's story, she joins a large group of little ones and leaves for kids' church.

The brief happening stayed with me throughout the day, and it dawned on me that rather than my being the focus of the girl's attention, something entirely different had been going on. I suddenly wondered if, with her little head so close to where her dad's singing voice had been resonating, the old, sacred Words of Life had blended with the harmonious sounds of the faithful to find a conduit, a mysterious, holy pathway to the little girl's soul. And then I could not help but wonder if it's possible that those of us who cannot recall a time when they accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior might have been called by God in this way!

Of course there is no way of knowing this. I have shared this idea and it has

sparked interesting conversations. If nothing else, it would give legitimacy to the thought that it is good for our children to be together with Mom and/or Dad in the "big" church for at least a little while. And it might even be food for thought for those of us who now or in the past have had questions about the doctrine of election.

After church I caught a glance of the same little girl. She was skipping around with some other kids as if nothing had happened.

Did it? 



Frank DeVries is retired after an active life in the field of Christian education in Canada. He and his wife worship at Fleetwood Christian Reformed Church in Surrey, B.C.



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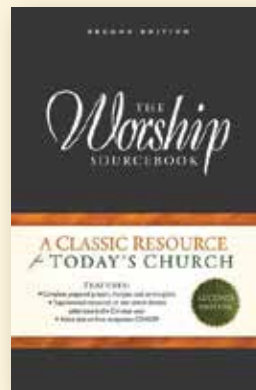
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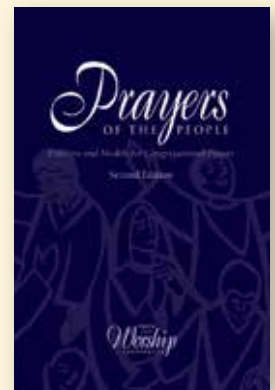
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