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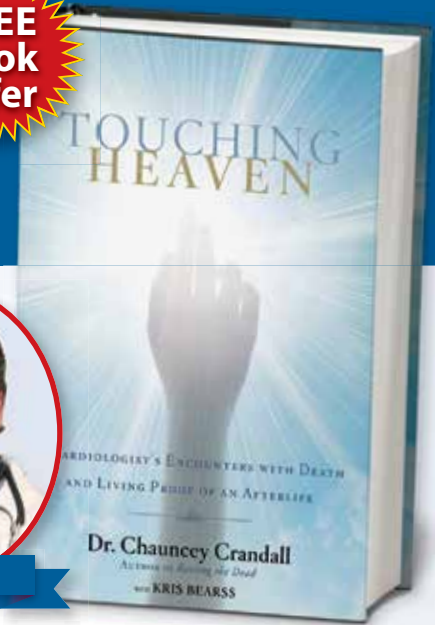
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BY THE NUMBERS

We wanted to gauge any trends reflecting *online* reading of *The Banner*, so in last year's reader survey we asked how much of your reading of *The Banner* was done online. Not surprisingly, readers are definitely digging digital. Here's what we found in 2020 compared to 2016:

Reading Online?

Almost every week



About twice a month



About once a month



Less than once a month



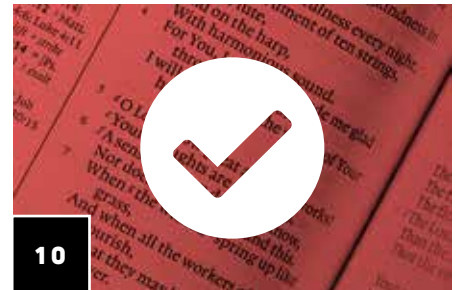
The 2020 survey was conducted in January and February 2020 by the Calvin University Center for Social Research. A total of 769 participants completed the survey. The 2016 survey was conducted by Jet Marketing with a total of 1,265 respondents.

WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » Church Worldwide: Open Doors' 2021 Watch List Shows Impact of COVID-19 on Global Religious Persecution
- » Church Worldwide: Southern Baptist Leaders Meet After Statement on Critical Race Theory Caused Controversy
- » Book: *Stones That Speak*, by Ray Vander Weele
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Correction

The article, "Mother Mary," in the February 2021 issue should have used the following spellings: Hilda Aukeman and Rev. Vern Geurkink.

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Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



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What Is Evangelical?

What the media and popular culture identify these days as “evangelical” is often not the historic evangelicalism defined by its beliefs.



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

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

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

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

MY UNDERSTANDING of the “evangelical” label has changed over time. When I was a Christian in Malaysia, my pastor was a strong Calvinist. Anything that smacked of Arminianism, the theological system opposed to Calvinism, was suspect. He impressed upon me the idea that the American poster child of evangelicalism, Billy Graham, was an Arminian. Hence, I did not trust evangelicalism in my youth.

This wariness of evangelicalism followed me when I went to Canada as an international student, and it’s partly why I eventually gravitated toward the Christian Reformed Church with its beliefs tied to the Canons of Dort. At that time, I did not perceive the CRC as an evangelical denomination.

In this issue of *The Banner*, retired pastor Cameron Fraser asks, “Are We Evangelicals?” (p. 10). Fraser concludes that “to be biblically Reformed is in fact to be historically evangelical.” Fraser outlines what historic evangelicalism (as theologically defined by church historians) looks like. I think he is partly right. But the “evangelical” label in North America, especially in the United States, has over the years taken on a meaning beyond its historical roots.


Consider that the Southern Baptist Convention, the most widely identified evangelical church, with prominent members such as Franklin Graham and Robert Jeffress, never was and still isn’t a member of the National Association of Evangelicals. The CRC is a member of this U.S. organization and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. But which denomination first comes to mind when people say “evangelical”?

What the media and popular culture identify these days as “evangelical” is often not the historic evangelicalism

defined by its beliefs. It has become more of a sociopolitical and cultural religious brand. Let’s call this “cultural evangelicalism” to differentiate it from historic evangelicalism. (It’s more complicated than these two definitions allow, but this can help us get a handle on things.)

Cultural evangelicalism seems to have gradually hijacked the “evangelical” label from historic evangelicalism in popular imagination, especially in the United States—so much so that in 2018 the NAE felt the need to issue a statement reasserting that evangelicalism is defined by its beliefs and is not tied to various “subgroups identified by where we live (or) how we vote.”

This might explain the CRC’s ambiguous relationship with the “evangelical” label. Even though our Reformed theology roots us in historic evangelicalism’s beliefs, as Fraser notes, some CRC folks reject cultural evangelicalism and hence the label. But many CRC folks, as noted in the January issue of *The Banner* by Calvin University historian Kristin Kobes DuMez, author of *Jesus and John Wayne*, are “functionally evangelical.” And many others fall somewhere in between these two poles.

Whether we identify with the “evangelical” label or not, what’s more important is that we are aware of the theological and cultural influences that shape us and our faith traditions. As our Reformed Christian tradition is connected to evangelicalism, we need to have an honest look in the mirror to discern the strengths and weaknesses of historic and cultural evangelicalism and how much either has influenced us, for good or for ill. Then we can follow up with what is perhaps a more important question: have we been more faithful to Christ or to traditions and brands? 



REPLY ALL

Walking Well

I'd like to express my appreciation to Laurie Krieg for her article "How to Walk Well Alongside LGBTQ+ People" (June 2020). Thanks, Laurie, for writing with compassion, conviction, and love. Your insights gave me much to ponder and pray about.

» Sonya Vanderveen Feddema //
St. Catharines, Ont.

Post-Christian World

I question the December issue's description of the world as "post-Christian" "Talking About God in a Post-Christian World," December 2020. True, the position of Christians is shifting in Europe and North America. But we are not the whole world. Christianity is growing in the global South and East. In several countries, the population majority now identifies as Christian. I work, for example, with Christians in Brazil, Central America, Ghana, Kenya, Korea, and Nigeria. They are developing seminaries and universities that educate Christian leaders to serve growing Christian populations. Many of these institutions recognize and value Reformed influence. So let's rebalance our perspective on the "whole world" and be encouraged.

» Shirley J. Roels // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Neland Avenue Decision

I would just like to comment on the decision of Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church ("Woman in Same-Sex Marriage Installed as Deacon," November 2020). After experiencing along with my family and church family in 2004 a horrifically painful church split, I am deeply saddened at the thought of so many church families who will be affected by this decision. I fear this decision will be

the cause of other families leaving their lifelong CRC church families because they simply cannot support a denomination that allows someone who is blatantly living in opposition to God's Word to be in a position of leadership. If Neland Church could recognize that this is so much bigger than them, and if I could only let them feel the pain that a church split causes for one day, maybe they would reconsider their actions.

» Heather DeVries // Goshen, NY

As I read the news of the action of the CRC Council of Delegates (December 2020) with respect to the selection and ordination of a married gay person to the office of deacon, I was grieved. I was reminded (that) when my daughter made profession of faith in our church about 30 years ago, she was "welcomed to full participation in the life of the church ... (and) its responsibilities," except at that time, not as elder or deacon. That has appropriately changed. It seems appropriate to me to let the selection process (which I firmly believe is guided by God) active in a church council and congregation be permitted to function as it did at Neland CRC.

» Philip Kamps // Gallup, N.M.

Porn in the Sexuality Report

Most of the points in the report from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality dealing specifically with pornography are excellent. However, I, as one that struggles with porn, would offer a few additional insights. The short section on "How to Stop Using Porn" may be helpful for the casual user, but it is inadequate for the "addicted" user. The prayers of a non-user are often offered fervently but with an expectation that

things are now fixed. The idea that after a 30-day fast or a 10-week class everything will be fine is not correct. Recovery from porn is a journey not unlike recovery from alcoholism. If a reader is addicted to porn (visit addictioncenter.com/community/signs-of-porn-addiction if you are unsure), find a support/accountability group TODAY. A faith-based group in West Michigan, Finishing Strong, is what has kept me from acting out for many years in the face of continuing temptations. Lastly, a warning to parents: Porn is now pervasive on the internet and can be obtained freely in total secrecy. Beware of how the devil will use your child's computer and phone to lead them into addiction at an early age. Install software such as Covenant Eyes or X3watch, and be very careful with virtual reality platforms.

» Anonymous reader

Same-Sex Marriage

I refer you to *The Banner*, November 2020, "Same-Sex Relationships and the CRC." I was horrified to find this edition in my mailbox with the offensive front cover. And then the accompanying article left nothing to the imagination. The one participant quotes a (Bible) passage claiming to find justification for this lifestyle. Now, I have no argument about her finding forgiveness, but in the passage of the woman caught in adultery, Jesus told her to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11, NKJV). ... I agree this condition might be victimless, but my Bible clearly defines marriage as one man and one woman. It also condemns the practice of homosexuality from beginning to end.

» Derek T. Katz // Phillipsburg, Kans.

Kudos to Gayla Postma for her informative article "Same-Sex Relationships and the CRC." She presented the differing views very well. I feel I can now better understand the arguments for both sides, and the people behind the arguments. Thank you.

» James Doyle // Miami, Fla.

Giving and Receiving

I would like to commend the editor for including a range of opinions on this topic. In view of the narrow perspective of the report to synod on human sexuality, it is time for other voices to be heard. The committee's desire to affirm confessional status on their findings regarding human sexuality is objectionable. Would they suggest persons like myself will not be accepted as Christians by the church's leadership?

» William de Waal // Victoria, B.C.

READ MORE ONLINE

A LOT OF THINGS, including many worship practices, have changed in the congregation where I worship because of COVID-19. We no longer pass offering plates and communion trays. With worshipers seated in every other pew, elders in appropriate protective gear now move through the empty pews and serve the elements to each person directly. We no longer pluck our own pieces of bread from the tray. Instead, it is placed into our hands by the gloved hand of the one who serves. We no longer take; now, we receive.

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body" (Mark 14:22). Some have suggested that, unlike baptism, especially infant baptism, which we passively receive, the Lord's Supper is something we do. It requires our active participation. We must take and eat. But the Greek word translated "take" also means "receive." That is what you do when something is given to you: you gratefully receive it.

There is something right and good and true about this new posture in which our congregation receives the Lord's Supper. Having the serving elders place the bread into each person's hands reflects the way the Heidelberg Catechism imagines the administration of the Lord's Supper: "As surely as I receive from the hand of the one who serves, ... the bread and cup of the Lord, given me ..." (Q&A 75). And it powerfully affirms what the

That is what
you do when
something is
given to you:
you gratefully
receive it.

sacrament symbolizes: how we are made right with God. It is not something we do, but a gift that we gratefully receive. "Without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. ... All I need to do is accept (receive) this gift with a believing heart" (Q&A 60). **B**



Ryan Faber serves with Resonate Global Mission. During 2020, his family worshiped at Faith CRC, Pella, Iowa.



As I Was Saying

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- » A Homeschooling Mom Looks Back on 2020
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Are We Evangelicals?

By J. Cameron Fraser

In 1975, Charles Colson published *Born Again*, the story of his conversion from Richard Nixon's "hatchet man" to evangelical Christian and founder of Prison Fellowship. Meanwhile, Jimmy Carter was running for president of the United States. Carter made no secret of his Christian faith, so a reporter asked him if he was born again. Carter replied that he was, and the term "born again," along with the moniker "evangelical," entered the vocabulary of everyday English. *Time* proclaimed 1976 "The Year of the Evangelical."

Carter might have been a born-again Christian, but his policies proved to be too liberal for some of his fellow evangelicals, leading to the emergence of the Moral Majority, a conservative political action party that claimed much of the credit for the 1980 election of Republican President Ronald Reagan. Since then, the term "evangelical" has come to be associated with the Republican party, right up to the 2020 election. Surveys showed that 81% of those claiming to be evangelicals (mainly white people) voted for Trump in 2016, and similar percentages did again in 2020. This accounts for the shockwaves that went through the secular media for a short spell in late 2019 when the retiring editor of *Christianity Today* (CT), Mark Galli,

stated in print that Trump should be removed from office. Evangelical leaders loyal to Trump downplayed the significance of CT compared to that of the millions influenced by TV evangelists.

It's a turbulent time to be an evangelical in America, leading some Christian scholars who subscribe to historic evangelical beliefs to suggest that it is time to drop the term. A professor from Baylor University, writing before either of the above developments, opined in *The Atlantic* that "Evangelical Has Lost Its Meaning" (Sept. 22, 2019).

What about the Christian Reformed Church? Are we evangelicals? I wish to argue that, despite such popular (mis)understandings, to be biblically Reformed is in fact to be historically evangelical. Let me explain by starting with the historical roots of evangelicalism.

The English word "evangelical" comes from the Greek *euangelion*, meaning "good news" or "gospel." However, a distinct movement known as "Evangelicalism" has been traced to the Evangelical Revival of the 18th-century Great Awakening. This revival had affinities with the 16th-century Protestant Reformation as well as the Puritan and Pietist movements of the 17th century. For instance, Martin Luther (1483-1546),

referred to the *evangelische kirche* (evangelical church) to distinguish Protestants from Roman Catholics.

There is general agreement that 18th-century evangelicalism consisted of four main elements: belief in the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible; an emphasis on Christ's crucifixion and resurrection as the basis of our salvation; the need to be converted or born again; and an activism that involved spreading the gospel at home and abroad, including through social action. To varying degrees, these elements are still true of those we think of today as evangelicals. They cross denominational lines and now even include some who identify as "evangelical Catholics."

How does the Christian Reformed Church understand its relationship to evangelicalism, in both its past and present forms? The denomination has been a member (with a few years' break) since 1943 of the National Association of Evangelicals in the United States. This organization issues position papers on social and ethical issues that are compatible with our views. The Canadian branch of the CRC is affiliated with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada as well as the more theologically mixed Canadian Council of Churches. In sum, the CRC has clear ties to evangelicalism.

In its earlier years, however, the CRC defined itself as Reformed, distinct from evangelicalism, and there are still those who would do so. Specifically, they are suspicious of the revivalist, conversion-based emphasis of the original 18th-century definition of evangelicalism compared to our more covenantal theology of salvation. A fairly typical example of this attitude would be “I Never Was an Evangelical, and I Never Want to Be,” a 2017 essay in *Reformed Journal*.

Alternatively, Neal Plantinga, former president of Calvin Theological Seminary, has popularized the idea of being Reformed as an “accent” within the broader world of Christian conversation. Meanwhile, other CRC members who have been influenced by the charismatic movement, the late Billy Graham’s crusades, or other expressions of the broader evangelical movement do not hesitate to identify as evangelical. Which perspective is correct? Are we, in fact, evangelicals?

Rather than identifying with the four characteristics of evangelicalism, the CRC, especially since the mid-1970s, has identified three distinct but related “minds” in Dutch Calvinism. These are the *doctrinalists*, who stress the importance of sound doctrine as found in our confessions; *pietists*, who like to read the Bible devotionally and emphasize the believer’s personal walk with God; and *transformationalists*, who seek to apply biblical and Reformed principles to the surrounding culture. Transformationalists draw inspiration from Abraham Kuyper, a 19th-century Dutch Calvinist theologian. The CRC’s identity statement *What It Means to Be Reformed* outlines these three positions helpfully and notes: “Obviously these three emphases or minds are overlapping. No hard and fast line can be drawn between them.”

It’s a turbulent time to be an evangelical in America.


This is well put, but how different is this from evangelicalism? I argue it is not essentially different, and that in fact to be biblically Reformed is to be evangelical. To come to this conclusion, I will draw from the words of Richard Mouw, president emeritus of Fuller Seminary. Mouw is back at Calvin University, where he taught philosophy from 1968-85, now serving as senior fellow at the Paul B. Henry Center for the Study of Christianity and Politics.

Mouw identifies himself with both the transformationalist—or as he prefers to call it, *culturalist*—and pietist minds. In a 2012 article in the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, Mouw affirms, “I certainly have strong affinities with that kind of culturalist emphasis; indeed I have been much influenced by it. ... But in the final analysis, I am a pietist. And truth be told, I think Abraham Kuyper was also a pietist.”

Pietism, which originated in 17th-century German Lutheranism, has become an almost derogatory term for those who emphasize a “personal relationship with Jesus” at the expense of cultural involvement. Mouw is aware of this tendency and warns against it while arguing that what is best about pietism and evangelicalism is “the priority of the religion of the heart that in turn must

then give direction to our heads and our hands”—in other words, a personal, prayerful relationship with God in Christ that leads to faith in action.

Abraham Kuyper was certainly concerned with cultural transformation, but he was also a doctrinalist who led a movement out of the predominantly liberal mainline church of his day. Moreover, he emphasized the need for personal piety in such devotionals as *To Be Near Unto God*, and he admired the Puritans. The point is that the three strands in Dutch Calvinism, rather than being in tension with one another, belong together and issue from a transformed heart that is “near unto God.”

A biblical balance of head and hands arising out of a renewed heart in the Kuyper-Mouw tradition, I respectfully suggest, is Reformed evangelicalism at its best. 



J. Cameron Fraser is a retired Christian Reformed pastor in Lethbridge, Alta., who now concentrates on writing as well as preaching.

1. What does the term “evangelical” mean to you? Do you identify with it?
2. Of the three “minds” of doctrinalist, pietist, and transformationalist in the Christian Reformed Church, which do you have an affinity with? Why?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

BIG QUESTIONS

Faith Formation

My small group is boring because people sit there but don't participate. How do I get the members to engage?

Trying to have a conversation with people who really don't want to engage is frustrating and awkward. We often try to avoid those situations socially if we can, but in a small group it can be especially trying.

Sometimes people are reluctant to speak up because they either think the answers to questions are obvious or they're nervous about being wrong. Also, some people just like to be quiet, especially with people they don't know well yet.

If there are questions you answer together in small groups, consider the nature of the questions. Are they questions with a "right" answer, like "What was the first plague that God sent to Egypt?" Questions like this are designed to give a single answer. Consider asking a different kind of question—ones you don't know the answer to, such as "Why do you think Moses hit the rock instead of speaking to it?" or "If you had to pick one verse in Psalm 8 that you think summarizes the whole psalm, which verse would you pick?" The answers to these questions are not obvious or either right or wrong. They invite others to dig into the text and explore what the people in the story were feeling or what the Bible is saying.

Welcome everyone's responses. Make sure the group is a safe place for everyone to speak. Following up with "Can you say more about that?" or starting



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

a question with "I wonder ..." will encourage more conversation.

It is also possible that at the end of the meetings you're feeling frustrated but the others are feeling just fine. It might have gone just the way they wanted it to. A conversation about how everyone thinks the group is going might be a great place to start.

Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries and director of children's ministries at 14th Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich. Robert J. Keeley is a professor of education at Calvin University and director of distance education at Calvin Seminary.

Ethics

It was recently reported that a very prominent billionaire paid only \$750 in federal taxes in 2016 and 2017. Is it right for Christians to try to reduce their tax burden to a bare minimum?

We all depend upon governmental structures and services—parks, roads, law enforcement, national defense, social security, or unemployment benefits when life throws us a curveball. Such things aren't free. At the same time, it's understandable that few of us *like* to pay taxes. We'd rather use that money for other things. Moreover, the tax code is complex and sometimes infuriating. When we hear about wealthy corporations or individuals paying a smaller percentage of

their assets on taxes than less affluent companies or individuals, it's understandable that we get suspicious about inequities in the system.

We also know that Reformed Christians have varying philosophies toward taxes and the government initiatives they pay for. Some believe that "big government" is inevitably inefficient, creates unhealthy incentives, and siphons money from the more promising arena of private enterprise. Others believe that relying mainly on private enterprise easily ignores problems and needs that can only be addressed effectively at the larger scale of government.

While such disagreements will undoubtedly persist, the Reformed tradition historically has stressed the importance of good government because order is integral to creation and necessary to restrain the effects of sin. We live in community and are responsible not just for ourselves, but also for the common good. The purpose of government is to protect and promote the common good.

With taxes, our motives are important. Do I strive to reduce my tax obligation because of genuine beliefs about the superiority of the private sector (including the church) helping the needy and promoting the common good—and do my giving and spending patterns reflect that? Or is it rooted mainly in a desire to keep more for my own private benefit?

One way to love our neighbors as ourselves is to cheerfully pay our fair share of taxes for the common good while encouraging those funds to be spent wisely, efficiently, and effectively.

Matt Lundberg teaches theology at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. Along with his wife and three children, he is part of the church family at Boston Square Christian Reformed Church.

Relationships

I grew up with the admonition, “If you’re not ready to mate, you’re not ready to date.” How do I convey this principle to my teenagers when their friends have girlfriends?

Clearly the above principle was a helpful parental guide for you as you learned to navigate your teenage years. But it is important for you to consider that your teens might need a different approach today. Teens between ages 12 and 18 have a dual task: they must learn how to become independent, and they must also learn how to connect meaningfully with a special person in order to develop the skills necessary to choose a life partner when they are ready for the long-term commitment you speak of. How do they learn these skills? They practice by dating.

Learning to become independent means, paradoxically, becoming hyper-attached to kids in their own age group. At the same time, they seek to create more distance between themselves and their parents.

As well, they must learn to accept the changes in their bodies, which involve a growth spurt, hormonal changes, and sexual development. They have to learn about attraction and emotional intimacy, about trust in a relationship, and about setting boundaries for

themselves and a boyfriend or girlfriend—in short, they learn best by dating within their own peer group.

Parents have to adapt and change their parenting style. Instead of exercising control, they can influence—but only to the degree their teens let them. This too needs practice.

Last, parents need to understand that their teens learn most by observing the pattern of intimacy parents themselves are modeling for their teens.

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

Missional Living

Are we all missionaries?

Imagine a speaker in a church or at a Christian conference asking listeners to raise their hands if they consider themselves to be a Christian. Every hand goes up. Next, the speaker asks how many consider themselves devoted disciples of Christ. Fewer hands are raised, and with less confidence. Finally, they ask who would call oneself a missionary. Would you raise your hand? Do you think of yourself as a missionary?

But can you be a Christian, a Jesus follower, and *not* be a missionary?

In Luke 10:1, Jesus appoints and sends 70 “others” (some translations, including the NIV, have 72). The number 70 symbolizes fullness, a totality. Moses appointed 70 elders (Ex. 24:1), and there were 70 members of the Sanhedrin (Num. 11:16; Ezek. 8:11).

Might the Holy Spirit be bestowing the identity, role, and authority of this “old” leadership upon those whom the Spirit is sending now? Is the Spirit appointing all of Jesus’ new followers to be instruments bearing witness to his grace and reign?

What if we are all, like the 70, ordained, appointed, chosen, and sent?

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson interprets Luke 10:1 this way: “The Master selected 70 and sent them.” The Master has selected you and me too!

I wonder how that makes us feel—excited? Fearful? Honored?

When I think about being appointed by the Lord, I wonder:

Like Isaiah, *Am I worthy?*

Like young Samuel, *Am I hearing you, Lord?*

Like David, *But who am I?*

Like Gideon, *Am I capable?*

Like Moses, *What shall I say?*

Like Esther, *How shall I prepare?*


Like Ruth, *Where am I going?*

Like the prophets, *Who will listen?*

Like Paul, *Who are you, Lord?*

But perhaps the most important question is *How will I respond?*

The first followers, the 70 and countless others, responded, “Yes, Lord,” and in all their comings and goings, in all of their ordinary, everyday lives in their communities, they bore witness to God’s grace and presence. They were missionaries! They remained, shared peace, worked alongside their neighbors, ate and drank what was set before them in community, and in so doing, obeyed Jesus’ command to tell them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you” (Luke 10:5-9).

Karen Wilk is a Go Local catalyzer with Resonate Global Mission and Forge Canada. She is a pastor of Neighborhood Life, a home church movement in Edmonton, Alta., where she also enjoys being a wife, mom, and neighbor. 

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

Essential Health Workers: Working Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

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 year ago—March 11, 2020—the World Health Organization categorized COVID-19, the disease caused by a novel coronavirus, to be a global pandemic. Here’s a glimpse of how three Christian Reformed women in New York and in British Columbia have been serving in essential health services during the pandemic.



Hazelin Ngan

By March 2020, the looming possibility of a COVID-19 outbreak hit home in a way Hazelin Ngan’s city and the hospital she works at were not prepared for. Ngan works as a patient services coordinator at New York Presbyterian Medical Center, a large hospital in the heart of New York City.

As a patient-care advocate, Ngan provides emotional and social support to patients and their families as they navigate the health system. She also provides medical interpretation for speakers of Mandarin and Cantonese. In April and May, she wrote about some of what she was doing and feeling and shared those notes with her church family at City Grace Church, a Christian Reformed congregation in lower Manhattan. In March, everything that was typical in her work no longer was.

Ngan’s first difficult but necessary decision was to move out of her home and

into a hotel with fellow caregivers to keep a safe distance from her husband, her 4-year-old son, and her in-laws, who help care for her son. The emotional burden and trauma experienced by caregivers and patients separated from family supports weighed heavier than both the shortage of personal protective equipment and the extra work of daily increased safety protocols.

As the hospital’s hallways and lobbies filled with patients and the semi-trailer morgues lined up on the street, Ngan turned to what she knew would make a difference. She created a GoFundMe campaign to start a snack and meal program for health care workers. When donations exceeded her expectations, she extended that kindness and care to patients and their families.

“Over the past month, I have been joking that I have two full-time jobs,” Ngan wrote to her church family in May. “One is my regular patient services coordinator job. The other is a full-time encourager role God compelled me to take on.”

Across the continent, Angela Nierop is an intensive care and emergency nurse



Angela Nierop

at Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre in British Columbia.

“Working as a nurse during the pandemic has pushed me beyond what I thought I was capable of doing,” said Nierop, a member of Willoughby CRC in Langley, B.C., “but I also feel honored to have the skill set to help those in a time of need. I draw strength (from) the assurance of God’s protection as I work in a high-risk setting and know my own health is at risk.”

Nierop said it’s our collective responsibility to follow personal safety protocols for the sake of the most vulnerable: the immunocompromised, the elderly, the poor, and Indigenous communities.



Sonya Grypma

Sonya Grypma, vice provost of leadership and graduate studies at Trinity Western University and also a member of Willoughby CRC, saw the focus of her work change beginning in January 2020.

As the former dean of TWU’s School of Nursing, Grypma had the skills needed for such a time. She helped to mobilize and later lead TWU’s COVID-19 Response Team and Health & Safety Taskforce, overseeing the plan to safely offer university education to more than 5,000 students. But Grypma didn’t feel alone in the work.

“B.C. Health and Education ministries together are making and shaping best practice and care as we go,” Grypma said.

“A deep joy in my work keeps me going as well as the urgency of this present situation,” she said. “I know that the decisions we make will protect others.”

—Jenny deGroot

You can find another conversation with five other Christian Reformed healthcare workers on *The Network* at bit.ly/NetworkHealthShare.

New Director for Safe Church Ministry

Amanda Benckhuysen, most recently a professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich., became the new director of the Christian Reformed Church’s Safe Church Ministry in January.



Benckhuysen was appointed to the position in early December by the executive committee of the CRC’s Council of Delegates. She follows Bonnie Nicholas, who retired in November after nine years as director.

Safe Church Ministry began in 1994, five years after a synodical study committee found that 28% of adults in the CRC had experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and that 15% of adults in the denomination had abused another person physically, sexually, or emotionally. Originally known as the Office of Abuse Prevention, Safe Church Ministry was given the responsibility of equipping congregations to recognize, prevent, and respond to abuse.

“My heart has always been about helping the church see and minister better to those who are most vulnerable, and to see that as part of the gospel message, to see that as part of the mission of the church,” Benckhuysen said.

An ordained minister in the CRC, Benckhuysen had been a professor at Calvin Theological Seminary since 2014. Before that, she had taught at the University of Dubuque (Iowa) Theological Seminary for six years and was a campus minister at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. She has stepped away from teaching to take on this new role.

Beckhuysen holds a bachelor’s degree from Queen’s University in Kingston, Ont., a master of divinity degree from Calvin Theological Seminary, and a doctorate from the University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto School of Theology.

Benckhuysen attends Kelloggsville CRC in Wyoming, Mich., where her husband, Martin, is the pastor.

—Greg Chandler

READ MORE ONLINE

Facing the Realities of When Churches Close

Pastor Joshua Benton, placed a stuffed elephant in the middle of his church's council room. It was fall 2016, and the elders and deacons walking in the door were about to hear the reality of the church's finances. Something would have to change for the tight-knit community of Friendship Chapel, and it would have to change soon.

An elephant—a metaphor for a looming problem no one wants to talk about—is in the room for many, many churches. The president of Barna Group, an American research and survey firm, in an August 2020 interview with NPR, predicted one in five churches in American could close within 18 months. A *Montreal Gazette* op-ed in September suggested two-fifths of Canadian churches might soon close. The projections are based on a drop in financial giving and the dwindling confidence of pastors that their churches will recover after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

Amy Schenkel of Resonate Global Mission, the Christian Reformed Church's domestic and international mission agency, doesn't see the financial lag being as big a problem for the Christian Reformed Church as it is for other denominations. Instead, what plagues congregations in our denomination, she said, is unresolved conflict augmented by the pressures of COVID-19.

"I think COVID has been a magnifying glass in our churches," exposing what is good and bad, Schenkel said. Churches can no longer ignore problem areas.

But it's still a good time to ask: what happens when a church closes, and how can congregations navigate uncertainty before they get to that point?

The Process of Closing a Church

There are procedures within the CRC for when a church decides to close: approval from its classis (a regional assembly of churches), transferring members and

ministerial credentials, legal dissolution, and more. But closing a church is much more than procedural.

"No one is prepared, as a pastor, for the process of closing," Benton said. His church, Friendship Chapel in Jenison, Mich., decided to close in February 2017. "They never bring someone into seminary and say, 'Here's a church planter whose church closed after five years.'"

Schenkel agrees the CRC had few resources to offer churches facing closure, and the most recent guide was almost 20 years old. That's why Resonate and the CRC's ministry of Pastor Church Resources teamed up to create "At a Crossroads," a guide for churches discerning their future, published in 2020.

"We wrote it because we felt like there was nothing like this," Schenkel said. "There's so much congregational discernment that has to happen. You don't just wake up one day and decide to close your church! There's a grief process."

"At a Crossroads" is a five-stage conversation addressing discernment, grief, and hope. Closing a church (or reimagining your church) comes only after a significant amount of conversation and time. And even that final stage presents multiple possibilities, such as close and restart, close and bless the community through your building, close and sell the property to bless other ministries, or follow the Spirit in a new way.

Closure Makes Way for New Ministry

Jon Huizenga is a church planter whose congregation was blessed and strengthened by the closing of Pioneer CRC.

Pioneer met as a church for 60 years in Cedar Springs, Mich., a rural town north of Grand Rapids. As the congregation grew smaller in number and more elderly, they decided to close. They had a dream for a new ministry in Cedar Springs and donated the church's financial assets

and 63 acres of property to Classis Grand Rapids North to give to a church plant.

On their way home from a May 2018 classis meeting, Huizenga's wife, Sam, turned to him in the car and asked, "How would *you* like to plant that church in Cedar Springs?"

"It was an immediate sense of invitation from God and excitement for both of us," Huizenga said. Pioneer closed Dec. 31, 2018, and Rise Up opened Jan. 1, 2019. River Rock Church, which Huizenga planted in 2000, became Rise Up's mother church. Several Pioneer members joined Rise Up. "It helped me tremendously to say that I am beginning a new church following on the 60-year history of Pioneer CRC," Huizenga said. "It gives me credibility in a small town."

Six months into the church plant, Resonate's Schenkel visited. "We walked into a huge variety of businesses (downtown), and everybody knew Jon, and Jon knew everybody—the real estate agent, this guy who owned a candle shop, the brewery. You could just see that the presence of Christ was walking in through all of these spaces. All of these relationships were starting to blossom, and the seeds that had been planted there so long ago in this church that decided to close were now sprouting."

Grieving the Loss of the Old

New, sprouting life is exciting, but that life comes through death. And death, Benton reminds us, is hard.

"I've been on the bedside of many people who have died, and it's the same feeling" when a church closes, Benton said. "But instead of having one person, you have a whole congregation."

Though Friendship Chapel closed almost four years ago, Benton and his family still are grieving the loss. He hopes to return someday to ordained ministry, but after three years without another call in the CRC, Classis Georgetown in December



At the final worship service of Twelfth Avenue CRC, some members joined the choir in singing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus." Pastor Mark Bennink said, "We had a tradition of singing the 'Hallelujah Chorus' every Ascension Day."

granted Benton release from office (Church Order Article 14c) to pursue teaching high school English.

Caring for a Pastor Whose Church Has Closed

Mark Bennink pastored Twelfth Avenue CRC in Jenison, Mich., for nearly 11 years before the church closed in December 2018. He said it's important for congregations to care for their pastors' health and well-being especially during a time of closure or transition.

"I was grateful when my former church extended my severance package from six to nine months, realizing how long it can

take for the call process in our current ministry context," Bennink said.

Bennink and Benton both stay in touch with members of their former churches.

Benton said being part of a church closure can be a perceived stigma for pastors seeking a new ministry. "I had one church leadership team outright tell me, 'We can't trust your leadership skills; you had to close a church,'" he said. "I'll be honest, that did hurt. I've learned since then that you have to have darn good leadership skills to close a church."

Equipping Pastors for Hard Realities

It does take leadership to address the elephant in the room, to lead a congregation through difficult conversations, and to listen to the Spirit. What's more, "our pastors are so worn out right now," Schenkel said. "At a Crossroads" encourages congregations to find an outside facilitator for discernment conversations.

To pastors and congregations alike who are worried because of COVID-19, Benton says, "Don't borrow trouble." Be a family. Speak life to each other. New beginnings can come in unexpected ways and places, Huizenga says. And Bennink reminds us that birth and death are part of a local church's life cycle and that the church's impact reaches far beyond its institutional existence.

Conversations around closing a church are unique to each congregation. Even if churches are not facing closure, they must still die to personal preferences, opinions, and outside pressures in order to listen to God and each other, Schenkel said. "Life still comes out of death—out of death comes life, that's our theology."

—Maia VanderMeer

The Banner *wants to continue writing about what happens when a church closes and what a church can do to prevent what seems like an inevitable closure. If your congregation has insights to share, please email news@thebanner.org with the subject line "When Churches Close."*

Noteworthy



Mark Huizenga, a member of LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., was **reelected to his 74th District seat in the Michigan House of Representatives** in November. Huizenga, a Republican, has been in that office since January 2019.



The Christian social justice agency **Sojourners** marked its **50th anniversary in 2020** and in November **named executive director Adam Taylor as its new president**, succeeding founder Jim Wallis. Colin P. Watson Sr., currently serving as executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, serves on the board of Sojourners.

The **World Communion of Reformed Churches**, an ecumenical group to which the Christian Reformed Church in North America belongs, **launched a discernment process** in December. Intending to conduct a series of 17 video conference sessions, the WCRC is asking members to consider **“What Does God Require of Us: Discerning, Confessing, and Witnessing in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond.”**



Community Christian Reformed Church in DeMotte, Ind., reopened its **Community Preschool Roselawn** in September 2019. In January 2021 the preschool **earned a designation in**

Indiana’s quality rating and improvement system for early learning programs. Through the preschool, the church hopes to serve its community in meeting children’s social, emotional, and academic needs.

Director Change for Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

At the start of 2021, the Christian Reformed Church’s Chaplaincy and Care Ministry saw a change of directorship with Tim Rietkerk starting as the new director and Sarah Roelofs moving to a part-time ministry consultant position.

The executive committee of the CRC’s Council of Delegates approved Rietkerk’s hiring in early January.



Tim Rietkerk

Rietkerk has been an endorsed chaplain with the CRC since 1995. Chaplains are pastors who usually serve in specialized settings such as prisons, hospitals, counseling centers, and military installations. The Chaplaincy and Care Ministry offers endorsement, training, and resources for chaplains.

Rietkerk served mostly in the U.S. Army and then in the Veteran Affairs Health Care System in San Diego, Calif., before transitioning to a hospice setting with Vitas Healthcare there. While serving as an army chaplain he was deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq, and 12 other countries. He has a master of theology in Christian ethics from Princeton Theological Seminary (2006) and a master of divinity from Calvin Theological Seminary (1994).



Sarah Roelofs

Rietkerk wants to take that training and experience and share it with other chaplains, whether they’re discerning their calling, actively serving, or remaining in ministry in retirement. “I would love to be that support person to chaplains and their families no matter what type of ministry they’re in,” he said.

Roelofs, who had served as director of Chaplaincy and Care since April 2017, had announced her intention to move to a part-time position in October 2020. That ministry consultant role was approved to be created last January, bringing the total staff of the ministry to three (equivalent to 2.2 full-time positions).

Roelofs, who had served as director of Chaplaincy and Care since April 2017, had announced her intention to move to a part-time position in October 2020. That ministry consultant role was approved to be created last January, bringing the total staff of the ministry to three (equivalent to 2.2 full-time positions).

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Leverne Kent Tanis
1933-2021

Leverne Tanis lived to serve God and others. His children thought he had difficulty retiring because he had no hobbies, but as one of them said at his memorial service, "We realized his hobby was caring for and shepherding people." Tanis died Jan. 10 at Bethany Home in Ripon, Calif.

A graduate of Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, Tanis was ordained in 1958. He pastored Tracy (Iowa) Christian Reformed Church, Alamosa (Col.) CRC, and Paramus (N.J.) CRC. When the new church in Paramus was built it was the first CRC with kneeling benches. From then on, Tanis would always kneel in front of the churches he served when leading the congregational prayer.

Moving across the country, Tanis served Fountain of Life Fellowship in Fountain Valley, Calif., then Oakdale (Calif.) Community CRC, retiring in January 1999. Five years later he was called back to ministry at Knights Ferry (Calif.) Community Church, where he preached for seven more years.

Tanis enjoyed music and movies and loved ice cream.

Predeceased in 2013 by Sarah, his wife of 57 years, Tanis is survived by six children and spouses, 18 grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren (with another expected in 2021).

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Hendrik
(Henry) Jonker*
1946-2020

A man of perseverance and empathy, Henry Jonker was also forward-thinking, thoughtful, and a good listener. He loved the Scriptures and was passionate about preaching. Jonker died Dec. 9, three months after being diagnosed with lymphoma.

In 1958, Jonker emigrated with his family from the Netherlands to Calgary, Alta. A graduate of Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, he was ordained in 1974 and pastored the following congregations: Maranatha Christian Reformed Church, Edmonton, Alta.; Trinity CRC, St. Catharines, Ont.; Victoria (B.C.) CRC; and Ladner CRC, Delta, B.C. In Edmonton and St. Catharines, Jonker took turns with other local pastors to offer worship services in Dutch. He served on many denominational committees, was a delegate to several synods, and served as synodical deputy. A highlight of his career was seeing the offices of ministry opened to women.

After the Jonkers retired to Victoria in 2011, he continued to preach and served as a specialized transitional minister (a specifically trained interim pastor) in Duncan, B.C., and as regional pastor for Vancouver Island. He loved the outdoors, running, and traveling. In 2020 the Jonkers celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

He will be forever missed by his wife, Stien; three children and their spouses; and nine grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Roelofs said she is grateful for what Chaplaincy and Care has accomplished during the time she's served as director, including seeing chaplains become "more deeply connected," weekly prayer sessions together, and new resources developed for a more diverse group of chaplains serving in increasingly varied settings.

Roelofs said the decision to step aside while still using her gifts for the work of chaplaincy came out of a "yearning to be involved more in my local community."

With COVID and "the injustice of racial inequality, the political divide" it felt more necessary to have more to give to those around her, she said.

"To reach and to build bridges with people that maybe I don't see eye to eye with, ... I have to be in community with (them), ... to be in people's lives," Roelofs said.

Rietkerk sees building relationships as the biggest part of what he will do while serving as director from his home in California. "The Chaplaincy ministry is one that is really scattered all over the place—the U.S., Canada, and even some of our military that are stationed over in Europe," he said. "I really enjoy reaching out and forming relationships, so I hope to be a very relational person that way."

The director of Chaplaincy and Care is one of several denominational ministry leadership positions turning over in the next year. Rietkerk expects his experience will help him weather that change.

"It's kind of an exciting and scary thing at the same time," he said. "I've worked, especially in the military, at always being used to change and adapting and figuring things out, so I hope to bring that kind of contribution to the organization as a whole."

—Alissa Vernon, news editor

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Bobby L. Boyd
1945-2020

Longtime pastor and leader in Classis Red Mesa of the Christian Reformed Church, Bobby Boyd died Dec. 19 following complications from a benign brain tumor. Boyd was known for his excellent preaching in the Navajo and English languages, his compassionate pastoral care, and his passion for evangelism.

Born in New Mexico, Boyd grew up in a Navajo family in which his mother was a soothsayer and his grandfather a medicine man. Boyd, however, became a Christian in 1977. He served Baptist and Nazarene churches before studying at Calvin Seminary, and was ordained in the CRC in 1988 under Church Order Article 7 (for candidates without all the prescribed training but with exceptional giftedness). He then pastored three other New Mexico congregations: Toadlena CRC; Bethlehem CRC, Tohlakai; and Church Rock CRC, where he was serving at the time of his death.

Boyd had several leadership roles within Classis Red Mesa and the broader denomination. He loved watching professional basketball and football and refereed junior high and high school basketball games for 32 years. He will be lovingly remembered by his wife, Nora; four children and spouses; and six grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

News Digest

B.C. Churches Host SENT Conference 2020 Online

Albert Chu, lead pastor of The Tapestry, a multi-site Christian Reformed congregation in British Columbia; Aaron Baart, dean of chapel at Dordt University and co-founder of a church-planting ministry in Liberia; and Shaila Visser, national director of Alpha Canada, a ministry featuring a video-based course on Christianity designed for those outside of the church, were three presenters for SENT 2020, a series of online videos emphasizing mission in local congregations. They were invited to participate by the home missions committee of Classis B.C. South-East (a regional group of Christian Reformed churches). The classis hosted its first SENT conference in person in 2019. “We really felt the need to build up a missional DNA at the local church level,” said Jenna Fabiano, associate pastor at Willoughby CRC in Langley, B.C. “The desire for missions needs to come from the local congregation; it cannot be led from the top down.”



For Meg Jenista Kuykendall and Katie Ritsema-Roelofs, ministers at Washington, DC Christian Reformed Church, the violent breach of the U.S. Capitol Jan. 6 was more than national news. Their congregation is 60% federal employees or contractors.

Riots Prompt Pastoral Care From DC Pastors

“It’s not just national politics; it’s the everyday-life, vocational work of my congregation,” said Jenista Kuykendall. That day she ministered to her congregation in the usual way—by reaching out to parishioners by phone and text “with immediate concern for individual church members.”

Ritsema-Roelofs, the church’s worship pastor, said she and Jenista Kuykendall decided to flip everything but the planned preaching text, John 1, for worship the following Sunday to address the moment.

On Jan. 8 the CRC’s Office of Social Justice posted online a corporate prayer, written by Stephanie Summers and read by OSJ director Mark Stephenson, responding to the violence.

On Jan. 8 the CRC’s Office of Social Justice posted online a corporate prayer, written by Stephanie Summers and read by OSJ director Mark Stephenson, responding to the violence.

Florida Church Creates Gospel-focused Boys Club Curriculum



Photo by Jake Motisi

A September 2019 meeting of the C.I.A. boys club at Sunlight Community Church in Port St. Lucie, Fla.

Sunlight Community Church, a Christian Reformed congregation in Port St. Lucie, Fla., has formed C.I.A. (Christ in Action), a boys club that combines athletics with gospel-centered lessons, to reach their community.

Started by Adam Sculnick in September 2019, C.I.A. has expanded to 10 more churches, including one in Canada. One of those congregations is a Christian Reformed church.

The club’s stated mission is “Helping boys connect deeper with God, learn and understand the gospel and grow into men who live out their lives in passionate response to the good news.”

Seventy boys are registered for the Sunlight program this year; 60% don’t regularly attend church or identify as Christian.

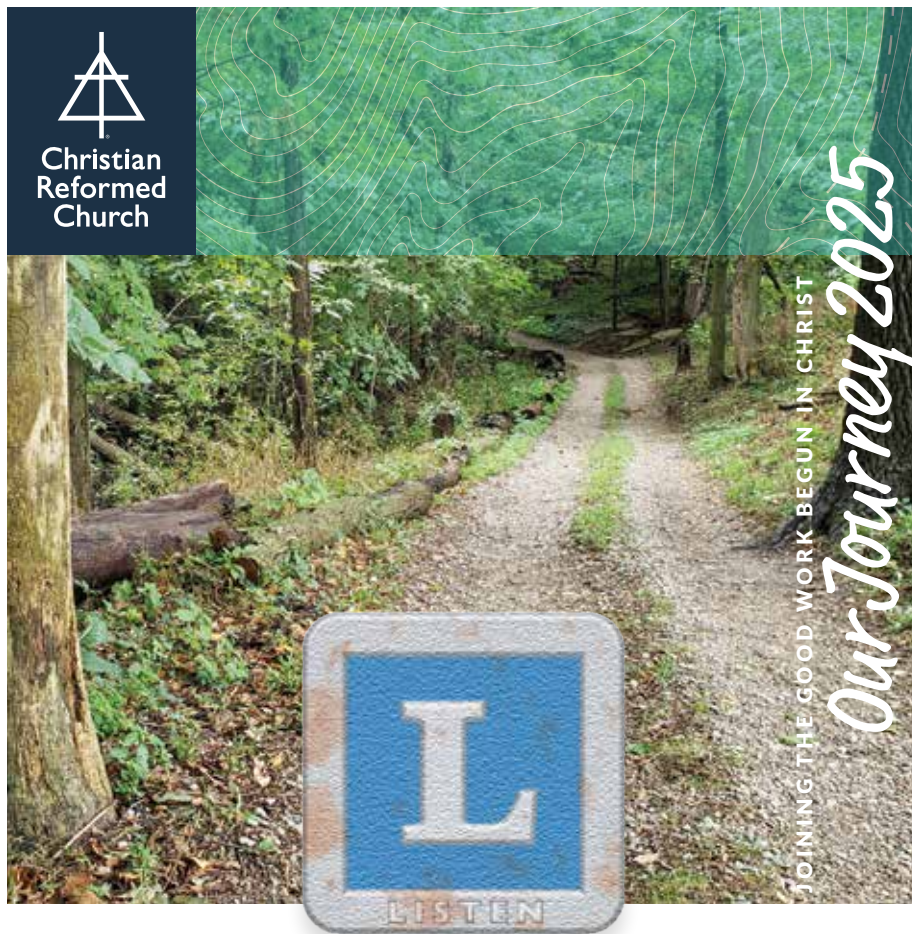
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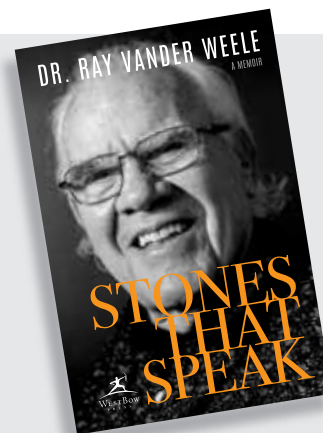
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Listen to the voices of every generation, shaping us for ministry together.

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Ray shares his perspective of growing up in the CRC, of which he has been a member all his life.

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- Tom Rademacher, Author / Writer, and National Columnist of the Year 2017&2018

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network



Listening to the Voices of Every Generation

By Brian Clark and Cassie Westrate

David was a young man when he fought Goliath. Anna and Simeon were senior citizens when they prophesied about the baby Jesus to all who would listen. In fact, the Bible is filled with stories of men and women of all ages and from unexpected places who are used by God as part of God's big plan.

The Christian Reformed Church believes that God continues to use all of us in unique ways. As a denomination, we also recognize that we haven't always acted in ways that value the leadership and gifts of all of our members. That's why the new denomination-wide ministry plan, called *Our Journey 2025*, emphasizes the importance of listening to and utilizing the voices of all of our members, no matter their age.

As one of its four goals, or milestones, *Our Journey 2025* encourages us to be "congregations and communities that listen to the voices of every generation, shaping us for ministry together."

Here are a few examples of how some congregations, ministries, and families are living out this milestone.

Children's Voices

Over the course of 2020, the Gutscher family home transformed into a green-screen stage, editing studio, and mission opportunity.

The three Gutscher children—Megan, 15; Anna, 13; and Andrew, 8—loved volunteering for their church's children's ministry in Rocky Ford, Colo. As with many churches around the world in 2020, COVID-19 put most of their regular children's programming on hold.

"That's when we thought of puppets!" Andrew said.

The family has been recording puppet shows from their living room and sharing the videos on YouTube for their church and community to view.

"It's a family effort to make the puppets," Megan said. "Mom does the sewing, and Dad makes the arms."

The family used podcasts and Bible lessons found on *Kids Corner*, a children's website produced by ReFrame Ministries, to help craft their stories. The puppets are based on the lizard characters from an audio drama the Gutscher children grew up listening to on *Kids Corner*.

"It's fun to show the stories that we have been listening to for so long," Megan said. "It's fun just to show them *Kids Corner*."

See a video about the Gutscher family puppets at KidsCorner.net/kids-in-action.

After putting on a few short virtual puppet shows for their church, the Gutschers hosted an outreach event for their community. They strung together four individual shows from their YouTube channel to make a full-length movie, and a local theater owner offered to show the film free of charge.

"I like reaching kids," Anna said. "I've always wanted to tell kids about God, and it's a good way to do it without having to talk in front of people."

The Gutschers were featured on an episode of *Kids Corner's* "Kids in Action" video series. Each of these videos is hosted by children and features stories of different kids and their families who are sharing God's Word in a unique way. You can find the videos at KidsCorner.net/kids-in-action.

Listening to Young Adult Voices

"There is a massive exodus of young adults from the church," said Steven Kooy, campus minister at Geneva House Campus Ministry at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont. "(There's) a great hunger from churches to know more about how they can prepare their teenagers for young adulthood and how to reach out to young adults."



Steven Kooy (blue shirt, center) and Victoria Sharpe (white shirt, center) with other staff members of Geneva House Campus Ministry, a Resonate Global Mission partner in Ontario.

With an innovation grant from Resonate Global Mission and financial support from Classis Quinte, Geneva House was able to develop a new tool for churches to engage in this work. The training program, called *Beyond Investment*, is available for free to all Christian Reformed congregations.

Victoria Sharpe is a member of Generation Z—the generation born between 1996 and 2010—and was the curriculum's

primary author. The first step in its development, she said, was listening to her peers.

“Listening is always the very first thing we should do in any situation, and especially when we’re in unfamiliar territory,” Sharpe said.

A recent graduate of Queen’s University, Sharpe served as a leader of Geneva House while she was a student. She wants to see members of her generation know and follow Christ—and she hopes *Beyond Investment* will help.

To develop the program, Sharpe read books, articles, and studies from Canada and the United States. She also surveyed teenagers and young adults in Ontario, listening to their personal experiences with faith and church—why they chose to stay in a faith community or, in many cases, why they decided to leave.

“I think a lot of the data we studied and received from the individual responses is that Gen Z feels like they are underestimated and undervalued as a cohort,” said Sharpe. “We’re willing to put in the work to find answers and explore faith and make sense of the world. We just need some help.”

In her research, she heard that Generation Z longed to be taken seriously by churches. She urges the church to “equip, equip, equip in every single area of Gen Z’s life.”

Listening to teenagers and young adults is critical for engaging that work.

“(Young adults) aren’t the leaders of tomorrow; they are leaders right now,” said Kooy, who works side by side with passionate student leaders like Sharpe. “We need to be listening to them—and not just (ask), ‘What’s your input?’ but listen to them and ask, ‘How can we help you lead?’”

Listening to High School and Senior Voices

It’s been 20 years since Arthur Schoonveld retired from full-time ministry as a CRC pastor. Still, he’s finding opportunities to share his own reflections on God’s Word with hundreds of thousands of people.

In December 2020, his biblical reflections were published in ReFrame’s *Today* devotional, distributed in congregations, prisons, and hospitals as well as reaching 268,000 online readers.

Schoonveld’s readers included a class of high school students at Avail Academy in Minneapolis, Minn. Their art teacher challenged them to read the daily passages and then search for reminders of the biblical truths they had read as they went through their day.



“God is always in control. God has a purpose in all things; nothing comes as a surprise to him. For example, when you’re in the middle of a lake on a canoe struggling to cross the lake, you don’t see the beauty like God does. The beauty is on the other side where God is seeing all of us struggling to make it to him. When we understand God’s position and how everything works for his glory we can trust how wonderful it is.”

—Josiah Loge, in response to the Dec. 5, 2020, *Today* devotional titled “Did God Lose Control?”


The students were asked to photograph what they saw and write reflections about how the devotions and their everyday lives intersected. The result was a set of beautiful photos and reflections like the one above from Josiah Loge.

The photos and reflections went to all of *Today*’s online readers, offering a new way to reflect on their morning devotions all day.

“Our goal is to share God’s love and strengthen the faith of people from all different backgrounds and at all stages of life,” said Jeff Bulthuis, managing editor of *Today*. “We are especially excited when these conversations happen among young people.”

Resources to Help

As these stories show, there are many ways congregations can work toward the *Our Journey 2025* milestone of being “congregations and communities that listen to the voices of every generation, shaping us for ministry together.”

The ministries of the CRCNA have many resources available to help your church toward this milestone. Learn more at crcna.org/OurJourney. 

Disability and Agility

FOR MANY YEARS, the Disability Concerns ministries of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America have partnered to offer training for regional and church disability advocates.

Usually, disability advocates gather for these events in person and engage with speakers from across North America. This past year, as borders were closed, social distancing rules were put in place, and gatherings of 50 or more were no longer allowed, none of this seemed possible.

“We work alongside many people who are used to having restrictions imposed on them by society, and we learned from them, received support and encouragement from them, and as a result re-imagined our leadership event for 2020,” said Mark Stephenson, director of the CRC Disability Concerns.

For the first time, Disability Concerns took the training online and opened it to anyone connected to the ministry.

“Shifting to an online platform meant that many more participants had access to the event than in the past,” Stephenson said. “It also meant that our speakers did not need to travel. One of our guest speakers joined all the way from Hungary, and other participants joined from Canada, the United States, and Kenya! The absolute joy for those of us who had planned this new event format was to see friends that previously could not have participated in an event that required significant travel.”

“To be able to attend this conference for the first time was incredibly meaningful to me,” said Jenna Hoff,

disability advocate for Inglewood CRC in Edmonton, Alta., and co-editor of the Disability Concerns Canada newsletter. “For several years, I dreamed of attending this conference but couldn’t, as my disabilities make travel a significant challenge. I am so grateful it was held online this year.”

The event did not quite go off without a hitch. In fact, hosting the conference online helped identify accessibility issues that even Disability Concerns staff hadn’t considered.

given us first-hand experience we can use to advise others about creating accessible virtual environments.”

Stephenson said the conference theme, “Agility,” was chosen long before the pandemic. “We could not have anticipated how relevant this focus would be,” he said. “As the reality of the pandemic sunk in, our ministry had to rapidly shift how we offered support and training to disability advocates and churches across North America.”



Vinnie Adams, Special Needs Ministry director of Faith Church (RCA) in Dyer, Ind., and a member of the Disability Concerns Advisory Committee / Guiding Coalition, created this video for the virtual Disability Concerns leadership event with the support of several members of his church.

“We discovered that using the chat feature (of a video conferencing app) and having a presenter speak simultaneously does not work for people with low vision who use screen readers,” said Terry DeYoung, coordinator for RCA Disability Concerns.

Participants also reminded speakers and event organizers to be as descriptive as possible throughout the online event, noting who was speaking and what images were being shared on screen.

“Advocates with a variety of disabilities helped us identify barriers, design a more accessible virtual environment, and troubleshoot the issues that we discovered,” DeYoung said. “This has

Disability Concerns staff demonstrated agility by reaching out to volunteers and those who access resources, shifting their training to online formats, and listening and learning from a community that embodies agility naturally.

“As a ministry, we have reflected on 2020 and the lessons learned,” Stephenson concluded. “We could not have managed this year without the ongoing support of our disability community. They offered support and guidance at every turn.”

—Becky Jones,
Disability Concerns

The View from Here

Raising the Next Generation of Leaders

MY SON, who lives overseas, was able to come back to North America for a visit from Thanksgiving to Christmas. After a quarantine period, he became part of the household “bubble” with my wife and me. What a difference it made to have him in our home!

On the one hand, not a lot changed. We were living in a time of pandemic. My wife and I continued to work from home and have our regular rhythms of life, yet there was also something new and exciting having Colin Jr. be a part of it.

Some of the most meaningful conversations my son and I had during this visit happened as we engaged in the ordinary experiences of life—over a meal, during a quiet walk, even watching a favorite movie (yes, we even sometimes talked through the movie!).

Reflecting on those times, I realize that it is through such simple interactions that faith is built and lessons are exchanged. It is a way to bless the next generation, but also a way to be blessed in return as we are challenged

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to view things from different angles and consider new ideas.

In 2021 the leadership of the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church will undergo significant change. Several senior leaders are retiring, and this has opened doors for a new generation of leaders to come forward. While we celebrate the many contributions the outgoing leaders have made over their many years of service, we are also excited by the perspective and experiences of new leaders who come to the role with unique ideas and a fresh set of eyes.

Already this year the CRCNA has appointed the following new leaders: Rev. Amanda Benckhuysen, Ph.D., director of Safe Church Ministries; Rev. Tim Rietkerk, director of Chaplaincy and Care; and Carol Koppenaar, director of human relations (U.S.). More appointments are on the way. We pray that this new generation of leaders will extend the reach of the CRCNA even further for the kingdom of God.

Such change is only possible because we have been intentional over the years. We need to seek out people

and, by a process of mutual engagement, release the spark placed in them through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the essence of discipleship. Our successors might not have been directly mentored by us, but if we as a community focus on making disciples of the next generation, there will always be leaders to carry on the work. What’s more, God’s kingdom will be enriched—and many others blessed.

As I now approach retirement, my thoughts turn to the many experiences the Lord has allowed me to have. I wonder if I have done enough to share with others these experiences and the faith they engender.

If you also have such wonderings, perhaps there are yet ways for us to partner to share our stories with the next generation and release them to lead us all into a new future. If you feel God’s prompting to do so, may we all be found obedient.



Colin P. Watson Sr. is the 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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Este artículo está disponible en español en TheBanner.org/spanish.

Internships: Learning and Sharing Together

THE CENTRE FOR PUBLIC DIALOGUE in Ottawa, Ont., offers young people an opportunity that goes two ways.

“We get to add some capacity,” director Mike Hogeterp said, “and we get to learn from—and support—young adults in their understanding of the political world and the Christian calling to seek justice.”

This philosophy came into play when the center hosted Miranda Williams, an intern from the Laurentian Leadership Centre, a program of Trinity Western University in Ottawa. The program places young interns in the heart of Ottawa and offers experience working in politics and with non-governmental agencies.

This collaboration has had significant results. Projects such as Education Together and Journey with Me, working in First Nations communities and among refugees, respectively, would not have been possible without the work of interns, and the opportunity to invest in students to build capacity for justice in the church is an ongoing blessing for the Centre.

Williams, a third-year international studies student, dove headfirst into a (COVID-restricted) five-week internship, designing lesson plans for the Education Together campaign to be used by independent schools in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. The lesson plans focus on building awareness of the current inequalities in First Nation schools in Canada and on how honoring the image of God in all people can lead Christian students to seek justice alongside their Indigenous peers.

“Through this experience, I got a glimpse into what it looks like to promote a positive voice of Christian



Miranda Williams, a student from the Laurentian Leadership Centre of Trinity Western University in Ottawa, participated in a five-week internship with the Centre for Public Dialogue.

faith in Canadian public life,” Williams said. “I learned the important role that listening to our brothers and sisters plays in seeking justice, hope, and reconciliation.”

“Having Miranda join us was a breath of fresh air,” said Cindy Stover, a justice mobilizer who supported the internship. “As a student herself, she brought the perspective of a learner, and that meant her ideas for the curriculum were relevant and engaging.”

The Centre for Public Dialogue could not have provided this resource to schools without Williams’ support.

Teachers are eager to engage with the resource and use it in their classrooms to equip young Christians in their biblical call to justice and reconciliation.

—Victoria Veenstra,
justice communications
team coordinator

Addressing the Seven Deadly Sins During COVID-19

EVEN THOUGH PEOPLE DON'T like being stuck in their homes because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there can be an upside to it, Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung said during the opening session of the 2021 January Series, Calvin University's long-standing annual lecture series.

First, however, the downsides:

"We are facing a weary world," said DeYoung, a philosophy professor at Calvin University, in her talk titled, "Glittering Vices: Soul Care for Struggling Christians."

"At the start of COVID," she said, "people had the energy to bake their own bread and run virtual marathons. But they no longer want to stay on Zoom. People's batteries are drained."

But in this time of weariness, there are opportunities, DeYoung said, adding, "We are confronted by ourselves and how much we need grace."

The pandemic can turn our attention to our need for God. Just as the church father Augustine says in his autobiography, *Confessions*, if we rely only on ourselves "you'll only find that yourself is unreliable," DeYoung said.

Relating some of her own experiences from graduate school, when she thought other students were much smarter than she was, DeYoung said she came to see that God was there and helped to support her in the work she wanted to do.

"I realized when God calls, he equips," she said. "I realized how important it was to refocus from ourselves and on God's unfailing power. Resting in the fullness of God's love was a pattern of living that I learned."



Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung opened the 2021 January Series at Calvin University with a reflection on coming to terms with ourselves and learning to trust God for transformation.

This is a pattern we can learn, however hard that might be, when we find—as is possible during the pandemic—that we can face ourselves full on, said DeYoung.

During the coronavirus pandemic, she added, many distractions are gone. We have time on our hands and can have the chance to discern how God is at work within us. In doing this, we can see how sin weaves into our lives and causes many problems.

"Sin is not a game," DeYoung said, "and deep down we know it. Our own foolhardy choices lead to being trapped in our own bad habits and add up to a way of life that leaves us struggling and entangled."

But we can pay attention to the sin that is within us by naming those

sins—sloth, pride, greed, lust, wrath, envy, and gluttony, for example—and developing a way of life, bolstered by God's grace, that roots those sins from our lives, DeYoung said.

"We are under the care of the Great Physician and can find a way to be whole," she said, "but this takes formation. We need to open our lives to the transformation of God's Spirit. Formation may take many seasons of change."

DeYoung is the author of *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies*. Other speakers at this year's online-only January Series included former U.S. Ambassador William Garvelink, climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe, and best-selling authors Jemar Tisby, Bruce Feiler, and Tara Westover.

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

Finishing Work Just Before COVID-19

NOT LONG BEFORE THE COVID-19

pandemic hit and forced lockdowns across North America, World Renew Disaster Response Services volunteers gathered with community and long-term recovery partners to celebrate with “Miss Mavis” as she received the keys to her new home in Meridian, Miss.

Meridian had been hit almost two years before by a tornado that had destroyed or damaged many homes, including the severely damaged home Miss Mavis continued to live in for 23 months while she waited for help.

Don Waterlander and professional contractors from Orland Park (Ill.) Christian Reformed Church coordinated to ensure that Miss Mavis received the assistance she needed. Orland Park CRC has collaborated with World Renew DRS for over a dozen years, specializing in “whole-house build” projects in several disaster-affected locations.

Four different teams from the Chicago-area church traveled to Meridian over five weeks in February and March to build Miss Mavis’ home from the ground up.

On March 12, despite weeks of record rainfall, the house was ready on schedule for final inspections. As is tradition, World Renew also planned a celebration for the new owner and her adult son Malcolm, who has a disability.

Coronavirus Hits DRS Too

Immediately following the celebration at Miss Mavis’ home, World Renew DRS staff decided to suspend all normal volunteer operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

By the end of the week, teams were heading home ahead of schedule, and more than 400 volunteers had trips canceled.



Dave, a volunteer from Orland Park CRC, teaches GVSU students how to install siding.

Several volunteers stayed for a brief time to make sure that occupied homes had functional kitchens and bathrooms during the coming quarantine.

The Work in Meridian

Orland Park volunteers applied for and received a \$20,000 grant from the Chicago Home Builders Association to help defray material costs for the home in Meridian.

One group of students and adult mentors from Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan, spent their spring break working alongside Orland Park volunteers.

The professional-grade volunteers from Orland Park guided these young volunteers in their work. Chris Adams, the Mississippi volunteer coordinator, summed up the collaboration: “I’m a big believer in ‘training them up in the way they should go.’ It warmed my heart the way Dave (an Orland Park volunteer) taught these young people.”

During a TV news interview, Miss Mavis thanked God for the volunteers who had helped complete her home and told the reporter and all who were watching, “I’ve got a house that ain’t falling down.”

DRS Remains Involved

The suspension of “normal” DRS volunteer activities lasted the rest of 2020, though recovery efforts did not cease. DRS supplied numerous grants, dispatched small teams of volunteers for specific jobs, provided volunteer facilitators for one-day volunteers, and networked with ministry partners to develop safety standards that allowed DRS to move forward as safely as possible.

With the ongoing distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, DRS intends to return to regular volunteering in 2021.

—Chris Gibson,
World Renew
Disaster Response Services

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Soaring

EAGLES ARE AMAZING birds. God designed them to have beautiful markings, strong beaks, and fierce talons (claws). Their power impresses people all over the world, and many cultures revere them as a particularly special creature. In fact, the eagle is the national symbol of at least 24 countries on four different continents.

Indigenous cultures in Canada give the eagle a special place of importance and consider it the strongest and bravest of all birds. An eagle feather is a symbol of honor.

Eagles are expert hunters. Because they hunt by sight, they have excellent vision and are able to see more colors than we can. If you were an eagle, you would be able to see a rabbit over a mile (1,600 meters) away!

Eagles often hunt as they soar above the earth. When the sun heats the earth, hot air rises, creating wind currents called thermals. An eagle's large wings trap this rising air, lifting the bird high into the sky. When eagles soar, they barely have to flap their wings at all, letting them soar thousands of feet (or meters) into the air without any effort.

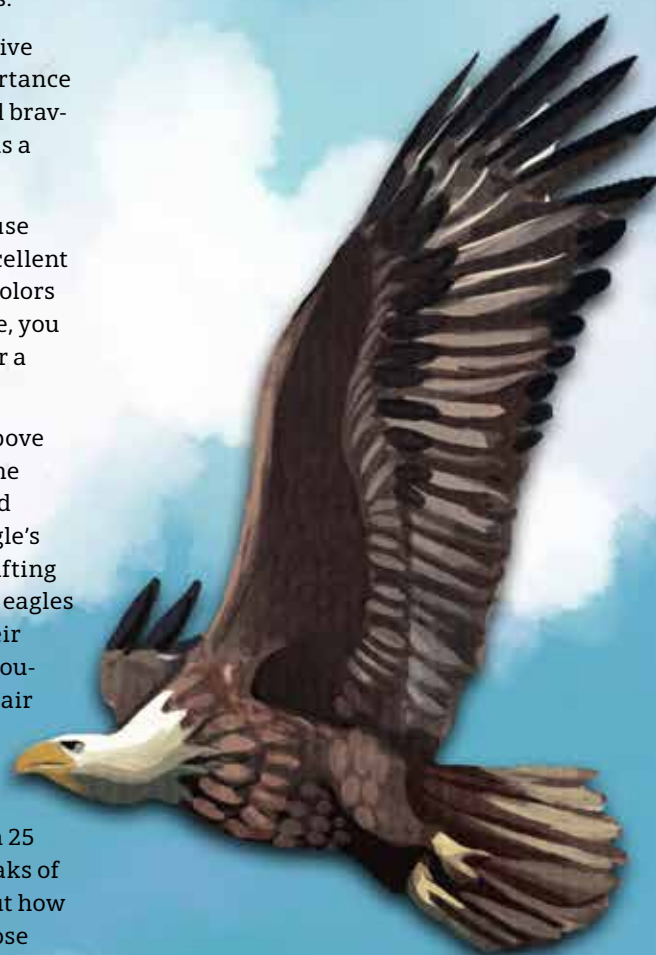
Dig Deeper

Eagles are mentioned more than 25 times in the Bible. The Bible speaks of their power and speed, and about how they soar. Isaiah 40:31 says, "Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles." This passage lets us know that sometimes things might seem tough, but God is bigger than whatever our current circumstances are.

Try This!

The golden eagle lives in Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America. It might be the kind of eagle mentioned in the Bible. It has a wingspan of 73-87 inches

(185-220 centimeters). Your "wingspan" is the distance from one fingertip to the opposite fingertip when you hold out your arms straight out. Measure your own wingspan and the wingspans of other people in your house. How do your wingspans compare to a golden eagle's? **B**



Susie Vander Vaart is an environmental educator and ecologist who spends most of her time outside exploring creation.

Mary, Martha, and Phoebe: Leaders in the Church

By Callie R. Feyen

When synod decided 25 years ago to allow women to be ordained to the offices of pastor and elder in the Christian Reformed Church, many wondered what the future would hold for the denomination.

Now there is a generation of ordained women who recount stories of living into their Spirit-led callings. And in complementarian churches, where people believe the Bible prescribes complementary but not equivalent roles for men and women and reserves ordained leadership in the church for men, women live into their gifts in different ways.

The Bible includes in its narrative many women who followed God's call. Mary, Martha, and Phoebe are just three examples of women using their strengths to serve God. Mary was devoted to listening and learning at Jesus' feet. Martha had a steadfast work ethic. And Phoebe was a shining leader in the early church.

Here are the stories of three women working in Christian Reformed congregations whose leadership roles mirror those of Phoebe, Martha, and Mary.

Phoebe

Sue Kuipers did not grow up in the church. In high school, her shop teacher struck up a conversation with her while he helped her with a project. He invited her to visit Christ's Community Church, the church he attended just a block away from the school in Hayward, Calif.



"Truthfully, I wasn't that excited to go," Kuipers said, "but I was the first and the only girl in the class, and I was pulling an A. I figured I didn't want to do anything to risk that A, and if that meant going to church for an hour, I would." She found herself drawn to the warmth and acceptance of the congregation and was eventually baptized there. "I've been there ever since," she said.

In July 2003, Kuipers became the director of youth and education at Christ's Community. She also enrolled in the Sierra Leadership Network, a three-year program associated with the CRC. Kuipers liked that she could take what she was learning and apply it to her work with the church's youth group. She completed the program in the summer of 2007 and was ordained as a ministry associate and commissioned pastor that fall.

The youth group at Christ's Community focuses on community outreach. There's an after-school program and a community drop-in program with a lesson time and worship service. "Everything is community-based," Kuipers said.

Kuipers grew up in a military family, and in 1971 her father joined the Hayward Police Department. Three years later, he was killed in the line of duty. Since then, Kuipers has had a heart for police ministry. She has served as the Hayward Police Department's chaplain for almost 10 years.

"We love her. She is one of our own," said Delia Muniz, secretary for the Hayward Police Officers Association. "She's an amazing lady with wonderful insight. She loves God and life."

Muniz, who often must come to work in the middle of the night, said she often sees Kuipers there too. "She's one of the biggest supporters for everything we do."

Firefighters and police don't often talk about the trauma they encounter in their work, but Muniz said that when they see Kuipers roaming the halls with her calm and joyful demeanor, they know it's OK to share their emotions. That's when "it's time to take a deep breath. Sue's here," Muniz said.

Kuipers also serves the Alameda County Sheriff's Office and the Bay Area Rapid Transit and San Leandro police departments.

Kuipers acknowledges the growing tension between police and civilians but says, "There is evil in the world, and we need people to stand in that gap." That's what drives her focus to take care of those who serve in law enforcement. "They get into this work because they care about their communities," she said.

Though Phoebe is mentioned in just two verses in Romans, there are a few clues about the type of person she was. She's described as a "benefactor of many people" in her role as deacon, a word stemming from the Greek *diakonos*, meaning "servant."

Likewise, Kuipers said, "I see myself as Christ's servant." She was the first woman to serve as a deacon at Christ's Community in the early 1980s and one of the first ordained women in central California. In 2008, she was one of 26 female delegates at the first Christian Reformed synod that allowed women to serve. The atmosphere was tense, she said, because "you didn't know who felt what."

Still, because synod confirms all ministerial ordinations of the previous year, Kuipers was able to confirm her own ordination.

"I don't want to step in an area where God doesn't want me," Kuipers said, "but it seems like he's calling me here."

Martha

Growing up, Bonny Mulder-Behnia always pretended to be a preacher during playtime.



"It just felt natural," she said. Her father is a pastor, and she was inspired by watching him make a difference in people's

lives. Mulder-Behnia is now the executive pastor at Rosewood Church in Bellflower, Calif. "My father allowed me to do whatever I wanted," she said. "I had no limitation except beyond my capabilities."

That doesn't mean the road was easy. Though preaching felt like a good fit, Mulder-Behnia had never seen a female pastor, so she studied journalism and public relations in college instead. Her calling to go to seminary was confirmed while she was working as a news officer for synod in 1992.

"I was part of the 10 years of the debate over women's ordination," she explained, and she had to report objectively whenever synod continued to deny ordination for women.

"I had a physical reaction to walking into an all-male, all-white group that was deciding whether or not women were permitted," she said. Mulder-Behnia remembers one year when a delegate stood up and said, "I would not dare stand before God on Judgment Day if I were to vote yes." Then another delegate said, "I would not dare stand before God on Judgment Day if I were to vote no."

Mary was devoted to listening and learning at Jesus' feet. Martha had a steadfast work ethic. And Phoebe was a shining leader in the early church.

When synod at last voted to open the offices of elder and pastor to women, Mulder-Behnia said, "I went on a walk and was crying because I'd realized this is for me."

But that was not the end of the struggle. When Mulder-Behnia began seminary, she was one of the only women taking classes, plus she continued working full time. "I worked doubly hard in order to excel," Mulder-Behnia said. "I was representing all women, and I had to prove that we can do this."

Though she faced difficulties, Mulder-Behnia also felt supported. One supporter was the Committee for Women in the CRC, which provided scholarships for women to go to seminary. When Mulder-Behnia graduated, Joan Flikkema and Dorothy Van Hamersveld, who led fundraising and promotion for the committee, were there. "They're heroes," Mulder-Behnia said.

Mulder-Behnia has served Rosewood Church for nearly two decades, and her pastoral role is all-inclusive. She preaches, offers pastoral care, teaches, leads staff, coordinates administrative work, and oversees communication and marketing. Her responsibilities

are one of the reasons she identifies with Martha.

"People always leave Martha in the kitchen," Mulder-Behnia said, "but she was a spiritual giant. She was the doer. She was a leader." Like Martha, Mulder-Behnia is willing to serve but is a leader in her service.

"Martha knew the Scriptures, and she spoke confidently to Jesus," Mulder-Behnia said. She attributes that confidence and Martha's willingness to ask questions to Martha's close relationship with Jesus.

Mulder-Behnia leads her church with that same combination of Scriptural knowledge, a close relationship with Christ, and a willingness to question.

"She is a franchise player," said Rev. Dan Brink, who pastored with Mulder-Behnia until his retirement in February. "The thing about Bonny is she's not only able to do ministry effectively, but she's exceptional at recruiting, organizing, and training others to do ministry too."

When she first arrived at Rosewood, Brink said, there was a glaring need to improve the children's and youth ministry.

"Bonny breathed life into that ministry," he said. "She shepherded the youth along even though she wasn't a youth pastor." Through Mulder-Behnia's efforts, GEMS and Cadets have become a side door to the church.

"It is not an exaggeration to say that there are hundreds of people that come to church through the ministry that Bonny has done or catalyzed," Brink said.

"I pretty much have my hands in everything," Mulder-Behnia said. "When the moment calls, I will be the leader. Other times, I am the one behind the scenes."

Mulder-Behnia said the church wants to reflect what the neighborhood is like, so part of its outreach includes integrating Spanish into worship services, Bible studies, and children's

and youth ministries instead of having separate programs. “We are figuring out how to be one family,” Mulder-Behnia said.

“This is where I fit. This is what I love,” she concluded. “My journey was a long and winding road. Even in those hard times, I feel confident that this is what God wants me to do, and this is where God wants me to be.”

Mary

Cathy Vyn begins every day with walking and praying. For well over a decade, she’s been memorizing Scripture, and those words guide her every morning on her walks before breakfast. “Those words are in my heart,” Vyn said. “They help me stay grounded and rooted.”



As she drives to work as an elementary school teacher’s aide, Vyn sings hymns. She’s written some favorites on cards and leaves them

in her car so she can commit them to memory as she drives. “It is another thing I do to praise God in my everyday life,” she said.

Vyn is also an avid journaler. For 17 years, she’s documented what God has been teaching her and how she sees God at work in her life. Having struggled with low self-esteem due to her upbringing, Vyn has a strong desire to live a healthy and joyful life as well as to learn and grow. Journaling has helped Vyn see God with her in all things.

Because of these devotional practices, Vyn connects with Mary. As the Kids’ Hope director, Vyn said she depends on Jesus’ presence, encouragement, and convictions so she can do her ministry work with joy.

Many who read Mary’s story—Vyn included—ask, “What woman has

time to just sit at Jesus’ feet?” Vyn responds simply, “Mary thought it was important, so I’m just going to make time for it.”

Vyn is a member of Sunrise CRC in Lafayette, Ind. The church is part of Classis Illiana, one of the three classes in the CRC that hold a complementarian view of gender roles.

Sunrise’s vision is to be passionately involved in its community, so in 2011, when a teacher at a local elementary school presented a need, the church thought establishing a chapter of Kids Hope USA would be a great fit. Kids Hope USA is a national program that brings together mentors from local churches with students from neighborhood schools.

Because of Vyn’s work in elementary classrooms, she understands that students’ emotional needs must be met before they can grow intellectually. So when Kids Hope was introduced, she immediately expressed interest in being a mentor. But she had no plans to become the director.

“I felt inadequate,” she said. But she also felt God calling her to the task. Her husband and some friends affirmed and supported her, so Vyn began training for the role.


She’s now been the program director for 11 years. Vyn still gets to mentor children, but she also trains and recruits volunteers, matches students with mentors, and supports those relationships throughout the school year.

“I take care of the administrative tasks and communicate verbally with the school teachers and staff,” Vyn said. She also makes church presentations and newsletters to keep the church informed and involved.

Vyn admits to feeling lonely and disappointed at times with all that leadership entails, but she said she keeps steady on her walk through consistently returning to God’s Word and laying her struggles at God’s feet.

“Every ministry needs a champion,” said Sunshine pastor Randy Bergsma. “Cathy has really been the champion in our church for Kids Hope. Not only does she faithfully find mentors for students, but she faithfully checks with the mentors to encourage and share additional resources and ideas. Her passion is a beautiful thing. More than all that, you can tell she really cares about the kids.”

Romans 8:28 has been Vyn’s guiding verse for years, and she applies it to her work with Kids Hope USA. “It’s God’s work in me that brings his love to others,” she said. “I’m trusting God to carry out his plan for this ministry. This is not my ministry. God will carry it out in the way that he sees it needs to be done.”

And that might be how best to sum up how the Christian Reformed Church has chosen to sit with two views on ordaining women to church office—for those who hold that it is not allowed by Scripture and for those who hold that Scripture gives room for the ordained ministry of women, the denomination continues to try to maintain unity, trusting that God will carry out his ministry according to his will and good purpose. 



Callie Feyen is a writer living in Ann Arbor, Mich. She attends First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor and is the author of *The Teacher Diaries: Romeo and Juliet*, and *Twirl: My Life in Stories, Writing & Clothes*.

Running the Race Together

It is only in community that we properly grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior.

LIVING AMONG THE BLUFFS and cliffs of Wisconsin's Niagara Escarpment gifts me with gorgeous trails for running and hiking. On one particular five-kilometer run, I found myself inadvertently part of High Cliff State Park's 50K Ultra trail run. Now, I'm no slouch when it comes to trail running, but 50 kilometers is in a league all its own, and I'm not a member.

Perhaps another would have turned back and run another time, but I take my daily run seriously, so I continued on my favorite trail knowing the Ultra runners would at some point have to part ways with me. It wasn't until the second kilometer that I realized my trail was the final loop of the 50K. I was nearing the finish line!

I'm a full-time mom—a career that does not come with many accolades. No one cheers me for a job well done or gives me a paycheck for my hard work. So I'm not going to pretend the shouts from bystanders and fellow runners of "Good job!" and "Way to go!" did not penetrate deep into my withering soul and boost my confidence into puffed-up pride in my splendid stride. I was glowing. After all, we were magnificent!

Only the slightest trace of guilt reared its ugly head as I easily blew by my fellow runners, keeping an incredible pace for someone so near the end of a 50K. Too embarrassed to speak as I passed other runners on the left, I only gave a thumbs up as they called, "Nice run!" while eating my dust. It wasn't until the final kilometer that I began to question what was really going on inside me. Was I this desperate for encouragement, accolades, and praise? Or was it something more? As I neared the finish, where a group of bystanders formed a hand bridge above my head to run under, I realized what it was that felt so good and that I so longed for: community.

I was part of something! We were in this race together, striving for the same goal, enduring the same hardships, looking ahead to the same finish line. We were a community—a sweaty, exhausted, endorphin-filled community. And I loved it.

We were created for community. Beginning with our triune God living in community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, community has always been. It was with this intention we were created: to commune with God and one another.

"It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18, ESV), declared the three-in-one God. So God made us a community, commanding us to hold fast to one another as we live in relationship and unity. We were made for community.

In a culture that relies on cellphones for communication, social media for affirmation, and privacy hedges for seclusion, we have lost sight of that for which we were made. We desperately need community. It is only in community that we properly grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. It is in community that we find comfort, encouragement, affirmation, accountability, strength, and rest. It is in community that we more deeply understand our triune God and draw near to God. It is in community that we find the fertile soil in which we may grow to be more like Christ. Without community, we are unprotected and vulnerable to flaming arrows. It is only in community that the church can truly grow, flourish, and endure. We need one another.

Though I was 45 kilometers short of true community on that particular hot summer day, I was nonetheless reminded of my deep need for others. And if you are wondering, I did not officially cross the finish line. I quietly veered off the trail so the true champions of the day could receive their due praise. **B**



Laurie Kreller Pluimer is a full-time wife and mother of two. She is a member of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Appleton, Wisc.

The Pursuit of a Behavioral By-Product

It's the unfortunate catch-22 of our quest for happiness: we all want it, but it was never designed to be a goal.



Corey Van Huizen is the pastor of The Gathering, a church plant in Caledonia, Mich. He and his wife, Alanna, love all things on, in, or near water.

"I JUST WANT to be happy."

Have you ever thought that, said that, or heard someone else say it?

In some ways we all just want to be happy—to have a jump in our stride, a smile on our face, a warm feeling in the chest. It's part of what it means to be American. The pursuit of happiness is even listed as an "inalienable right" in the Declaration of Independence, for crying out loud. We think everyone has a right to seek happiness. We all want to be happy.

And yet so few of us are. We're often depressed, anxious, angry, tired, busy—but we don't seem to be happy. When's the last time you heard someone respond to the question "How are you?" by smiling and saying, "Quite happy, thanks!" It almost seems offensive.

Now, if you're the kind of person who is on a happiness quest, what I'm about to say might bother you: When you aim at happiness, you will miss it—every time.

Why?

Because happiness can never be the goal. It is always a by-product.

When you make personal happiness a target to shoot for, you will always miss it.

The feelings of personal happiness you're after—the actual, physiological feelings—come from a variety of neurotransmitters in your brain: dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, and oxytocin. Some of them, such as dopamine, provide quick happiness "hits" that we get from accomplishing a goal. It's sort of like a quick reward system. It comes from different things such as getting "likes" on social media, crossing a chore off a list, winning at a slot machine, drinking alcohol, smoking, playing video games, or shooting a

target at the range. Other neurotransmitters, such as oxytocin and serotonin, are longer-lasting releases that come from things like altruistically helping others, building deep relationships, and living a healthy rhythm of life.

Happiness, then, is quite literally a neurological by-product of certain behaviors. But when it comes to dopamine, if you live to get that short burst of happiness, your brain will require more and more in order to release it. You'll need to have more drinks, take more risky gambles, or set more goals to reach. So "being happy" is not quite as simple as figuring out what activates those neurotransmitters and doing it over and over again.

That's also true for the other, deeper, longer-lasting happiness neurotransmitters. If you help others only to feel happy, you will find that happiness eludes you. If you build relationships only to make you happy, you will find that the grass is always greener on the other side. If you only live a healthy rhythm of life to make you happy, it will never be enough. It's the unfortunate catch-22 of our quest for happiness: we all want it, but it was never designed to be a goal.

When you aim at happiness, you will miss it—every time. Helping others for your own personal gain is inherently selfish. Loving others and building deep relationships so they can make you feel good about yourself is manipulative. It doesn't work.

The personal pursuit of happiness is a flawed endeavor. In fact, researchers have repeatedly found that when people make "feeling good about themselves" their ultimate pursuit, they actually end up tanking every other area of their lives!



Photo by Nathan Dumbaro/Unsplash

A Different Focus

So what are we supposed to do? Are we all doomed to lives of despair?

Not quite.

We just need a new goal—a new target to aim for.

In the introduction to one of his most famous sermons, Jesus says that true happiness is a by-product of hungering and thirsting for righteousness, of a life lived right (Matt. 5:6). Later in that same message, Jesus outlines what practicing righteousness looks like.

Righteousness is the idea of living in line with God's will and intention for human beings. Jesus gives his listeners three behaviors that have righteousness as their goal: prayer, generosity, and fasting. Each of these behaviors taps into an important relational dimension of our lives.

Prayer taps into our relationship with God. Living in line with God's will and intention means engaging in relational dialogue with God. It means acknowledging who God is and all God has done throughout history (Matt. 6:9). It means setting aside our own wills and plans for life submitting to God's will (Matt. 6:10). It means telling


God what we need physically, relationally, and spiritually (Matt. 6:11-13). But if you engage in a relationship with God simply to make yourself look or feel good, you will find that selfish end eluding you.

Generosity taps into our relationships with others (Matt. 6:1-4). Living generously toward others without expecting anything in return is an important part of living well. But again, Jesus explains that those who are generous with others only for personal gain will not end up receiving what they originally set out to find. If you help others only to feel good about yourself, that won't happen.

Fasting taps into our relationship with ourselves, our rhythms and desires. Do we give in to every impulse and craving, or are we capable of mastering our own flesh? Yet again, if you fast only so you can feel good about yourself, you will require the affirmation of others, and fasting so others will praise you will never satisfy that hunger for happiness in the long term!

Jesus' teaching is simple: happy are those who hunger for and seek after living in line with God's will when it comes to being in relationship with God, others, and oneself. Unhappy are those who hunger for and seek after personal happiness.

So to all those pursuing happiness: Quit. Give up. As the ancient writer of Ecclesiastes said, you're "chasing after the wind."

That's because happiness is not a goal. It's a behavioral by-product of a life lived in line with God's will. This is why I think everyone should follow Jesus. Make righteousness the goal, and the rest will follow. Just imagine how different our world would look if people were chasing that goal. Besides, it's what we're biologically wired for! 

1. What are some things that make you happy? Have they given you lasting happiness?
2. What do you think biblical righteousness means? Can you describe it?
3. Have you ever practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting? What was the experience like?

READ MORE ONLINE

Listening to the Classics

David Copperfield

By Charles Dickens; narrated by Richard Armitage

David Copperfield, Charles Dickens' own "favorite child" book, appealed to me because it is a semi-autobiographical novel of how Copperfield (essentially Dickens) became a writer. So when I heard that British actor Richard Armitage had narrated this book, I was in. His gold-standard narration of this massive classic gives vivid life to a grand cast of characters: a greasy Uriah Heep, a kooky yet kind great-aunt, and stouthearted allies, such as the salt-of-the earth Peggotty. Now when I see the brick-thick tome lying on my mantle I smile, because I now regard young Copperfield and his friends and foes as intimate friends. (36 hours, 30 minutes)

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Written and narrated by Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou's majestic writing is resplendent with prose that demands a reread—or a re-listen. As I listened to the story of Angelou's upbringing in a small Arkansas town, I felt as if I was there with her, which is probably why the terrible scenes of her sexual abuse are so searing. Not every writer is a good narrator, but Angelou is superb. Her deep voice rings with emotion and certainty as she narrates her own powerful story. As a poet, Angelou knew just how to deliver a line with perfect pace. (10 hours, 11 minutes)

Island of the Blue Dolphins


By Scott O'Dell; narrated by Tantoo Cardinal

I had never read the 1961 winner of the Newbery Medal, but listening to it was just the balm I needed in 2020. From the book's description: "Karana is the Indian girl who lived alone for years on the Island of the Blue Dolphins. Hers is not only an unusual adventure

of survival, but also a tale of natural beauty and personal discovery." Tantoo Cardinal, a Canadian actress of Métis and Cree descent, is the perfect narrator. Her subtle accent and pronunciations lend an authentic underpinning to Karana's story, You will be inspired by Karana coming of age alone on an island and surviving by her wits and grit. (3 hours, 55 minutes)

Little House on the Prairie

By Laura Ingalls Wilder; narrated by Cherry Jones

This second book in the Little House series finds Ma, Pa, Laura, and Mary leaving their cabin in the Big Woods and setting out for Kansas. We travel with them in their covered wagon and listen as they face the hardships and rewarding moments of pioneer life. Cherry Jones does a crackerjack job of narrating different ages and genders, differentiating between Pa and little Laura effectively. One treat of this narration is the weaving in of Pa's fiddle throughout the book. Jones has a rich, soothing voice that lingers in one's mind. In the words of *Read Aloud Revival's* Sarah Mackenzie, "these are truly some of the very best audio books I've ever heard." (8 hours, 50 minutes) 

Check our *Mixed Media* reviews at TheBanner.org for reviews of other first-rate classics in audiobook form, including *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston, *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury, and *The Odyssey*, by Homer.



Lorilee Craker, a native of Winnipeg, Man., lives in Grand Rapids, Mich. 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.



Transcendent Kingdom (Audiobook)

By Yaa Gyasi,
narrated by
Bahni Turpin

Reviewed by Michelle Loyd-Paige

Gifty's Ghanaian parents migrated to a small town in Alabama before she was born in search of a better life. When Gifty's mother joined the local First Assembly of God congregation, her two children in tow, they were the only Black family in the church. Rather than feeling God's presence there, Gifty feels disconnected. The disconnection deepens when her brother has "an accident" and dies. Where was God? Experiencing the realities of racism, mental illness, addiction, and poverty—as Gifty's family did—can try anyone's faith. Gifty's faith was tried. How does it end? You will have to read the book or listen to it. Bahni Turpin's voicing of Gifty's Ghanaian mother in the audiobook seemed spot-on, although some of her other voices were off. Note: This book has a sprinkling of profanities. (Random House Audio. 8 Hours, 41 minutes)



Wonder Woman 1984

Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

Gal Gadot brings her evident smarts once more to the Diana Prince / Wonder Woman role. For me, a middle-aged and somewhat sexism-stymied female, I thrill to see a woman saving the day. Yes, it's empowering. Kristin Wiig appears as Barbara Minerva / Cheetah, a longtime villain in the DC Comics universe. Pedro Pascal co-stars as a different antagonist, and Robin Wright and Connie Nielsen return to their Amazon warrior roles. Even Lynda Carter, the original TV Wonder Woman, sends a smile to us.

Chris Pine reprises his role as pilot Steve Trevor. I was glad, too, until I noticed little spark in his scenes. What could have been deeply poignant wasn't. And what of the plot and theme? It's not complicated. We go to see the good "gal" win. (Warner Bros. Pictures)



Library's Most Wanted

By Carolyn Leiloglou, illustrated by Sarah Pogue

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In this humorous Western-themed children's picture book, young Libby is made deputy librarian by her Aunt Nora. Libby has a deputy sheriff's badge prominently displayed on her shirt and takes her job very seriously as she patrols the children's section. Soon, Libby becomes annoyed with a boy who returns a dog-eared novel, irritated with a toddler who gnaws on a board book, and displeased with the children who mess up the Wild West display. In this playful, winsomely illustrated children's picture book with a serious underlying message, author Carolyn Leiloglou writes in the endnotes, "While I hope my readers enjoy the fun Western theme in this story, I really hope they realize that libraries aren't about corralling books. They're about rounding up readers!" (Pelican)



SHE (Podcast)

By Jordan Lee Dooley

Reviewed by Kayleigh Fongers

SHE is a faith-based personal development podcast for women, covering a variety of topics that span many different stages of life. Listeners can learn business advice, self-confidence tips, health and wellness information, relationship guidance, and so much more. Each episode of the *SHE* podcast is like chatting with a friend over coffee—a friend who gives great advice and wants you to experience personal growth and change. Though the *SHE* podcast is delivered from a Christian perspective, it's sure to provide encouragement for any listener. The podcast tagline says it all: "Come invited. Leave ignited." New episodes of the *SHE* podcast are released weekly and can be streamed or downloaded from most podcast platforms.

The Lowdown

Orchard House: Two women, one living in present-day Massachusetts and another in Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House soon after the Civil War, overcome their own personal demons and search for a place to belong. (Tyndale)

Sequel to Blockbuster 1980s Movie: Prince Akeem Joffer (Eddie Murphy) is set to become King of Zamunda when he discovers he has a son he never knew about in America: a street-savvy Queens native named Lavelle. Honoring his royal father's dying wish to groom this son as the crown prince, Akeem and Semmi set off to America once again in *Coming 2 America*. (PG-13, Amazon Prime, March 5)

Memories Are Made of This: In *Remember: The Science of Memory and the Art of Forgetting*, neuroscientist Lisa Genova (*Still Alice*) explores how memories are made and how we retrieve them, explaining why we remember, why we forget, and how to help protect our memory. (Harmony, March 23)

Is Our World Less Religious Than Ever?

Religious energies
permeate
our work,
our romantic
relationships, our
exercise routines,
and, of course,
our politics.



Justin Ariel Bailey, Ph.D., is assistant professor of theology at Dordt University. He and his family are members of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa. He is the author of *Reimagining Apologetics* (IVP Academic, 2020).

IN OUR NORTH AMERICAN context, the number of religious “nones” is on the rise. Norms of Christian morality have lost their purchase in the wider culture. Our corner of the world is becoming increasingly pluralistic and increasingly secular.

Pluralistic means that we are exposed to more competing visions of what it means to be human than ever before. *Secular* means that religious faith is increasingly optional, conceived more as an expression of personal identity or tribal affiliation than as a statement about transcendent reality.

But both of these terms mean the diversifying of religious options, not the diminishing of religion. We are not becoming less religious. Humans are incurably religious. We can't seem to give up the clarity, comfort, and community that religious frameworks provide.

Religion provides clarity because it grants legitimacy to our intuitions about the world, especially our sense that some things are simply right and others are simply wrong. Religion engenders community because it gives us a sense that we are connected to others beyond ordinary kinship. Religion provides comfort because it tells us our experience is intrinsically meaningful and we are not fools for hoping there is more than what we can see.

But there is also a dark side to religion, which is why some want to abolish it. Our desire for clarity might lead us to become self-assured and dogmatic. Our desire for comfort might lead us to become self-absorbed and delusional. And our desire to belong to a community might incline us to excuse our tribe and to exclude those who don't fit.


In this way, we can construe religion rather broadly, including any number of “secular” pursuits. There is a word for this, coined by writer David Zahl: *seculosity*. Seculosity is religiosity

directed toward earthly rather than heavenly aims. Our religious crisis, Zahl says, is not that religion is going away but “that we are more religious than ever, and about too many things.”

His point is that religious energies permeate our work, our romantic relationships, our exercise routines, and, of course, our politics. Who has not felt judged by someone else's parenting style or eating habits? Who has not worried about saying the wrong thing on social media, unleashing its collective fury? Americans may be less officially devout, but there is no shortage of religious fervor outside the church.

The question is not whether religion, with its hunger for clarity, comfort, and community, will disappear, or even whether religious pursuits will continue to proliferate in nontraditional ways. The question is whether the religious frameworks we adopt will be robust enough to resist the darker tendencies towards dogmatism, narcissism, and tribalism.

The sort of clarity that Christianity offers is not that of certainty but of faith. It is a clarity rooted in the reality of the resurrection, yet still open to surprise. The sort of community that Christianity engenders is not that of self-preservation but of self-giving love. It is not bound by external identity markers, but centered on the beauty of Jesus Christ.

And the sort of comfort that Christianity offers is the comfort of costly hope. It is not a cheap hope that denies the experience of divine absence or the slowness of our own transformation. It is rather the hope that tells us that the world does not rise and fall on our effort alone, and that no matter what happens, we *belong*—body and soul, in life and in death. In an increasingly complex but incurably religious world, this gives us solid ground on which to stand. 

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

Down:

1. The CRC's ministry of _____ and Care
2. God's _____ speaks through us all
3. It's a behavioral by-product
5. An animal mentioned more than 25 times in the Bible
8. Christ in _____ boys club
10. Listen to the voices of every _____
11. Vital, necessary
13. There are this many deadly sins
15. City in Mississippi hit by tornado

Across:

4. She was a shining leader in the early church
6. *I Know Why the _____ Bird Sings*, by Maya Angelou
7. *Time* proclaimed 1976 "The Year of the _____."
9. A conference to build up local mission in British Columbia
12. A guide for churches to discern their future: "At a _____"
14. A theological system opposed to Calvinism
16. Humans are not meant to be alone, but in this
17. *David _____*, Charles Dickens' own "favorite child" book
18. The nationality of Gifty

Answers to the February 2021 puzzle



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Church Positions Available

HIRING FULL TIME PASTOR Maple Ridge Christian Reformed is hiring a Faith Formation Pastor. Job description & information available online at mapleridgecrc.com

LEAD PASTOR - Aylmer CRC in Aylmer, Ontario is seeking a 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 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.

MARANATHA CRC OF WOODSTOCK, ON IS SEARCHING FOR A LEAD PASTOR. In keeping with our mission, Finding Joy in Following Jesus, we desire a shepherd to nurture growth in our faith with Biblical preaching, to encourage discipleship and small group growth and to equip our members to reach out and shine God's love in our community and in all of God's world. Contact maranathacrcsearch@gmail.com

PASTOR Cornerstone Community Church, a gathering of dedicated Christians meeting near Silver Lake in Mears, MI, is currently seeking a part-time pastor skilled in leadership, preaching and teaching from the Bible, equipping and training, pastoral calling and outreach. A candidate should demonstrate a strong personal relationship with Jesus and an exemplary lifestyle that reflects Biblical standards for leadership in the church of Christ, be people-oriented and outgoing with a warm and inviting personality and cultivate a team spirit. For more information email vic@pcctech.net.

SEARCHING FOR A PASTOR AT FAITH COMMUNITY CRC IN COLTON, SD, located just 25 minutes northwest of Sioux Falls, SD. We are looking for a Pastor who is committed to biblical preaching, has an interest in teaching our youth and reaching out to the community. If interested call Brad Wegner at 605-201-7234 or email at btwegner@alliancecom.net or Dustin Huisman at 712-330-7630 or dhuisman78@gmail.com

WORSHIP COORDINATOR The Junction Church in St. Thomas, ON is seeking to fill a 16-20 hour per week position for a Worship Coordinator. This position requires music

proficiency and an ability to plan a variety of worship styles in a multi-generational setting within the Christian Reformed perspective of Blended Worship. Interested candidates can visit our website at thejunctionchurchstthomas.com for a more detailed job description and to submit a resume with references.

Denominational Announcements

AGENDA FOR SYNOD 2021 Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the office of the executive director of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda: a. Overtures, communications, and appeals to synod are due no later than March 15, and must first be processed through the local council and the classis. b. Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the Credentials for Synod form, as well as the completed information form for each synodical delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes and the appointed delegates as soon as possible, but no later than March 15. Materials will be included in the Agenda for Synod if received before the synodically established deadlines. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director of the CRCNA

ANNUAL DAY OF PRAYER Synod has designated the second Wednesday in March (March 10, 2021) as the Annual Day of Prayer. All CRC congregations are requested to take this opportunity to ask for God's blessing upon the world, our nations and communities, crops and industry, and the church worldwide. U.S. Councils, if it is judged that the observance of the Annual Day of Prayer can be more meaningfully observed in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer (U.S.), you have the right to change the date of a special service accordingly (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 578). The National Day of Prayer (U.S.) is Thursday, May 6, 2021. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director of the CRCNA

Birthdays

BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS



MAE VAN ZWOL KRUIS celebrates her 100th birthday Mar. 8 with 8 children, 34 grands, 39 greats, & 1 great-great. She & her late husband Rich served God as missionaries in the Navajo Nation, & she faithfully continues a devoted prayer ministry. Send well wishes to 600 Gurley Ave, Gallup, NM 87301.

BIRTHDAY 95 YEARS

FRED JACOBS celebrated his 95th birthday on February 11. While his family couldn't gather due to Covid, we celebrated God's countless blessings on us by connecting virtually. Please send birthday greetings to Royal Park Atrium #234 400 Parkside Dr. Zeeland, MI 49464

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS



KATHRYN (KAY) HOITENGA turns 90 on March 27. Celebrating with joy and thanksgiving are her children, Camilla (Daryl Hale) Hoitenga, Brent (Sharon) Hoitenga, Noralyn Masselink, and Alanna (Perrin) Rynders, grandchildren and great grandchildren. She lives at 2016 Mallard Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.

Employment

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Obituaries

BUSSEMA, Florence of Burr Ridge, Illinois, passed away Tuesday, December 29, 2020. Florence was a lifelong Chicago area resident and she spent her summers in Holland at the family cottage. Florence was also a faithful member of the Christian Reformed Church. A private funeral ceremony was held and interment took place in Lakewood Cemetery in Holland, MI. Florence is survived by her husband, Cornelius Bussema; children,

Laura (Richard) Kuipers, Valerie DeBoer, John (Catherine) Bussema, David (Mary) Bussema; grandchildren, John DeBoer, Stephanie Kuipers, Michael DeBoer, Thomas (Sheila) Kuipers, Alexander Bussema; sister, Ruth Visser; Brother-in-law, William Buiten. Florence was preceded in death by her sisters and brothers-in-law, Martha (Robert) Molenhouse, Bernice Buiten, Connie (Duane) Rosendahl, Richard Visser and son-in-law, Gary DeBoer. Memorial contributions may be made to the American Diabetes Association, P.O. Box 7023 Merrifield, VA 22116-7023 or to Timothy Christian Schools, 188 West Butterfield Road, Elmhurst, IL 60126. Professional service entrusted to the Dykstra Funeral Home - Downtown Chapel.

BUURSMAN, John, Holland, MI received the crown of righteousness on January 9 at the age of 90! He is survived and dearly missed by his wife of 67 years, Barbara, children Sue & Dick Landman, Kathy & Greg Door, Randy & Debra Buursma, 14 grandchildren, and 9 great grandchildren. Now this man of God is pain free at the feet of his Saviour-PTL!

COK, Barbara, age 92 of Manhattan, MT went home to Heaven on December 11, 2020. She is survived by John, her husband of 71 years, son Michael (Kathy), Dan (Barbara), Diane (John Ferguson), Joan Cok, Connie Cok, 9 grandchildren and 20 great grandchildren.



GELDERMAN, Herman, 94 years old of Neerlandia, AB, went peacefully to his heavenly home on January 6, 2021. He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Lula (Krikke) whom he loved dearly, and their six children, Marcia (Henry) Stik-

ma, Rosalie, John (Pat Van Neck) Gelderman, Wendell Gelderman (Marian Groot), Karen Gelderman (Jack Keefe) and Howard (Brenda De Waal) Gelderman. Herman adored and was proud of his 16 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren. A farmer all his working years, Herman was kind, friendly and accepting of others. He found joy in his loving relationships with family and good friends and was continually amazed by God's creation shown to him in the natural world. He was a peaceful presence in his church and community and lived a life of gratitude. Greetings and condolences to Lula and the family send to marciastikisma@gmail.com

HAAK Bernard J. (Bernie), Holland, MI, went to be with his Lord and Savior on Nov. 25, 2020, at age 88. He was preceded in death by his son, Bill, in 1992. Bernie is lovingly remembered and deeply missed by his wife of 66 years, Ruth, his daughter Cathy and Jeff Potts, daughter-in-law Laura and Ross Bolman; grandchildren and great grandchildren, Brendan and Kailey Haak (Ellison), Tim and Haley Potts (Brady, Kyla and Harper), Elisa-

beth Potts and fiancé David Miedema, Dave and Libby Potts, Emily and Hank Bowen, and Ava Joy Potts. Also surviving are his brother, Bill and Lynn Haak of Tucson, AZ and sister Elaine and Norman Lokker, and in-laws Virginia and Ed Hoezee of Grand Rapids, MI, and the Rev. Robert and Ruth Klingenberg of Allen, TX. God is faithful and His promises are sure. John 11:25

HEKMAN, Gertrude (Van Till), 100, passed away Wednesday, December 30, 2020, in Grand Rapids, MI. She was born and lived most of her life in Ripon, CA where she was active as a homemaker and secretary to husband Martin, director of Bethany Home. They were both active in church and community services and were strong promoters of Christian education. In retirement they often served with the Red Cross in disaster relief. She was predeceased by Martin (1998). Gertrude has 7 children, Lois Vander Wel of Grand Rapids, MI; Janice Holwerda of Grand Rapids, MI; James (Kathy) Hekman of Holland, MI; Donald (Martha) Hekman of Kemptonville, Ontario; Shirley (Ken) Vander Wall of Canton, MI; Edwin (Sue) Hekman of Chula Vista, CA; Kenneth (Marybeth) Hekman of Holland, MI; 22 grandchildren (5 in heaven) 32 great-grandchildren and 1 great-great grandchild. She is survived by her sister Edith (Marvin) Den Dulk of Ripon, CA and brother Howard (Betty) Van Till of Grand Rapids, MI; and was preceded in death by her sister Marjorie (Robert) Vander Schuur of Ripon, CA.

HUITSING, Betty (Brands), 93 of Tucson, AZ (formerly Wheaton, IL) went to heaven on January 12, 2021. She is survived by her brothers Bob (Irma) Brands and Don (Nancy) Brands, children Jay, Jayne (Terry) Kok, and Jim (Paula), 7 grandchildren, 14 great grandchildren.



LEYS, Rev. W. Wayne, age 77, of Zeeland was welcomed into his Heavenly Home on Saturday, January 30, 2021. Pastor Wayne loved the Lord and he loved the church of Jesus. He served as pastor of CRC churches in: Colorado Springs, CO, Elmhurst, IL, Atlanta, GA, Littleton, CO, and Lockport, IL. Wayne served on the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA for six years, three of those as president. He was also actively involved with Home Missions for many years. Additionally, he served as chaplain of the Will County Detention Center in Illinois for nearly two decades. Wayne had a heart for people and loved to hear what God was doing in their lives, especially if he could hear it while enjoying breakfast. Whether meeting with a CEO or an inmate, Wayne saw the image of God reflected in everyone and desired for everyone to know the love of Jesus. Even in the last weeks of his life, despite the toll Alzheimer's had taken, everyone who entered his room heard the gospel from Pas-

tor Wayne. In addition to the church, Wayne was a dedicated husband, father and grandfather. His love, laughter and the accompanying smirk will be deeply missed by those who survive, including: his wife of 54 years, Christine Leys; children: Jeff (Shelly) Leys, Sarah (John) Brinkmann, Maria (Ben) Bowater; 13 grandchildren; siblings: Ken (Carole) Leys, Roger (Julie) Leys, Ruth (Peter) Kelder; in-laws: Marie (Phil) Holtrop, Jo (George) Faber, Bill (Mary) Greenfield, Pete (Jane) Greenfield; as well as many extended family and friends. Memorial contributions may be given to Calvin Theological Seminary or Rehoboth Christian School.

STEIGENGA, Alice (Nykamp) of Ripon, Ca, age 85, passed away of Covid Jan. 15, 2021. Preceded in death by husband Joe, she is survived by her children and grandchildren: Colleen & Dave Duke (Heidi & Cameron Guerra), John & Shirley (Kelly, J.J.), Dan & Lori.



STEL, Shirley Ann Jenkins, age 72, of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on Jan. 20, 2021. She was passionately in love with Jesus, and eager to meet her savior face to face. She is survived by her husband, Philip, and her daughters and their

children, Kathleen (Monte) Herford [Isaac, Audrey, Quentin] and Beccy (Stephen) Blann [Jules, Calvin]; five stepchildren and their families: Marilyda (Steve) Chacon [Ryker, Bowden, Ellery, Cooper]; Hendrik (Erika) [Ava, Lily, Kaelyn]; Derrick (Ruth) [Noah, Gavin, Baker, Lucia, Garrett]; Karissa (Eric) Sjaarda [James, Jakob, Caleb, Hannah]; Lauralee (Mark) Wikkerink; and a son Ken (Karen) DePeal [Mason and Aly, Marcus]. Also survived by her brothers, Bill (Carolee) and Ray (Julie) Jenkins and their families; Phil's six siblings; a brother- and sister-in-law from his first marriage, their spouses, children and grandchildren.



STOUTMEYER, Rev. Garrett H., born in Kalamazoo, MI, on December 31, 1932, went to be with the Lord on January 5, 2021. He was preceded in death by his parents, Garrett and Margaret Stoutmeyer; sister, Paula Dobson; and his in-laws, Gilbert and Rose Bussies; and sister-in-law, Marilyn Vander Hulst. Garrett graduated from Kalamazoo Christian High School, attended Western Michigan University, and Westminster Seminary-Philadelphia, PA; his greatest academic joy was to graduate from Calvin College where he received his BD and Master of Divinity degrees. Ordained in 1958, it was his privilege to serve CRC churches in New Jersey, Michigan, Illinois and Florida. While in Holland, MI, he was the daily radio minister of "At the Master's Feet". Delegated to Synod several times, he served as a Synodi-

cal Deputy, Classical Clerk of several Classis, Board of Calvin College Trustees, and the Board of World Missions. He was awarded a Clinical Pastoral Education degree from MacNeal Memorial Hospital in Berwyn, IL. Following retirement in 1997, together with Barbara, they founded the non-denominational Central Chapel and Lake Alfred Ministry in Haines City, FL, and he preached there for 17 consecutive winters. He is remembered for his gift of memorization and oration; his great joy was bringing God's word and he expressed gratitude for living his passion of preaching, teaching, and counseling. He is survived by his loving and supportive wife of 66 years, Barbara; his children, Cynthia Volkers, Carolyn (Dr. Justin) Wilson, Daniel (Lisa) Stoutmeyer; 10 grandchildren; and 21 great-grandchildren. A private family celebration of life service has taken place with the burial at Graafschaap Cemetery in Holland. In lieu of flowers, the family suggests memorial gifts to LaGrave Christian Reformed Church or World Renew. Condolences may be sent online at www.mkdfuneralhome.com.

TERPSTRA, Marie, of Fremont, MI, and formerly of Des Plaines, IL, went to be with her Lord and Savior January 18, 2021. Marie enjoyed traveling, and was the best mother and grandmother. She was well known for her delicious banquet, which she gave to many people, and also donated to many charities. She was married to Henry "Hank" Terpstra for 73+ years, and he survives her along with children: Wayne & Miriam Terpstra, Charles & Sandy Terpstra, Bruce & DeDe Terpstra, Ann & Steve Yonker, Alan & Jackie Terpstra; 15 grandchildren & 18 great grandchildren. Memorial contributions can be given to The Fremont Area Community Foundation for The Fremont Christian School Endowment Fund, 4424 W. 48th Street, Fremont MI 49412, or to Fountain View Retirement Village of Fremont, 102 Hillcrest Drive, Fremont MI 49412. Online guest book available at www.kroeze-wolffis.com.



VERHAGE, Eugene, age 89, of Hudsonville, went to be with his Lord and Savior on Monday, January 11, 2021. He is survived by his wife, Terry VerHage; children, Jackie and Tom Tellier, Bonni and Robert Alexander, Lenee Weber, Pat Her-ring; grandchildren, Amber and Joe, Jack, Paul and Michelle, Erica, Samantha, Jes and Ben, Ross, Camden, Gabe; great granddaughter, Iris; sisters-in-law, Jeneane Goorhouse, Judy Beukelman, Audrey and Adrian DeDoes, Grace Brummel; many nieces and nephews. Eugene served his country in the US Army. He was a history teacher at Holland Christian and Hudsonville Christian Schools. He also taught at the Reformed Bible Institute. He was a Calvin Basketball fanatic and a Jeopardy genius at Aurora Pond in Wyoming. Memorial contributions may be made to Crossroads Prison Ministries or Association for the Blind.

WERKEMA, Jacklyn N. (Brumels), 84, of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away Jan. 26, 2021. She was the devoted wife of Gordon R. Werkema for over 60 years. She was predeceased by daughter Susan G. Werkema, brother Weldon, and brother Jack. In addition to her husband, beloved Jackie is survived by daughter Nancy Lynn Haas and sons Gordon R.G. Werkema, Mark A. Werkema, and Joel Werkema; their spouses and children; great-grandchildren; siblings-in-law; lifelong friend Amy Ritsema; and many nieces and nephews. The family respectfully suggests memorial gifts may be sent to the Susan G. Werkema Art Scholarship Endowment at Seattle Pacific University (via <https://give.spu.edu/> or 3307 3rd Ave. W., Ste. #304, Seattle, WA, 98119-1779 (in memory of Jacklyn).

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If God Has Something to Say, It Will Be Said

In a world that values typical abilities, God values us all as diverse individuals, regardless of our abilities and capacities.



Jenna C. Hoff is a freelance writer and editor in Edmonton, Alta. She is a member of Inglewood Christian Reformed Church.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS HAVE PASSED, and still I think about a small boy I never met. I wonder how he is doing. I wonder if he has lived up to his father's long-ago dream for his life. I wonder if as he grew up he gained the ability to utter a single word.

I learned of this child at a youth group event on a Friday night in a church packed with teenagers bused in from across the city. A team made a presentation, and then one of the team members, a young father, began to speak. I think he went off script. He wept. With anguish pouring from his soul, he began to talk about his child.

The child was in mid- to late toddlerhood and had not yet learned any words. While the possibility that a child might live with communication disabilities would be concerning for most parents, this father was especially devastated by the situation because it brought him to a cliff's-edge juxtaposition of faith and present reality.

You see, when his son was born, the father believed God told him the child would one day grow up to be a preacher or an evangelist. His son not being able to speak seemed to throw all that into question.

"How," the father anxiously mused, "could someone who can't speak ever preach the word of God?" Tears flowed down his cheeks as he shared his efforts to hold on to faith even in the face of the unknown and seemingly impossible.

If I could, I would go back in time to that long-ago night and speak reassurance into the heart of the broken-hearted young father. I'd tell him that speech is not necessary to proclaim the word of God. That disability does not have to be a barrier to evangelism. That evangelism doesn't always happen in formal ways, such as with

a sermon. And that even if the little boy never learned to verbally communicate, if God had something to say through him, it would be said.

I would tell him this without using speech myself, instead using an assistive communication device I began to use eight years ago. This machine turns words I type into mechanically spoken words.

In a world that values typical abilities, God values us all as diverse individuals, regardless of our abilities and capacities. While some may think you have to communicate, move, or think in the "normal" way, God sees a bigger picture.

God's grace speaks in us and through us—all of us. That doesn't include only people who can speak or communicate in other language-based ways, such as through a communication device. I have been privileged to encounter people who because of very severe disabilities had little formal communication abilities. But these people too had much to say and much to teach those around them.

I think of a man I worked with years ago in a group home. His communication consisted of blinking yes or no to a question, although he was inconsistent in this ability. Yet in the calmness of his spirit, in his joy, and in the love emanating from him, Christ spoke through him.

It reminds me of 2 Corinthians 12:9: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

So though I sometimes wonder about that young boy and whether he did grow up to be able to speak, one thing I do not wonder about is if he grew up to share the word of God. If God truly planned this for the boy's life, then whether or not he lives with disabilities, it will come to fruition. **B**

When God Sends a Porta-Potty

Climbing to the mountain summit involved a 1,000-foot elevation change and scaling many large rocks, but we made it.



Martin Wiles lives in Greenwood, S.C., and is an English teacher and author who serves as managing editor for Christian Devotions Ministries and a copyeditor for Courier Publishing. His most recent book is *A Whisper in the Woods*.

MY DAUGHTER and I left for an overnight backpacking trip on the Flat Laurel Creek Trail near Canton, N.C. We hadn't backpacked in 19 years. She had aged. So had I. We planned to set up camp after three miles, then pack a day bag and hike to a nearby mountain bald boasting 360-degree views.

Making good time, we arrived at our campsite, set up our tent, hung our food, prepared a day bag, and set out for the bald. The weather forecast called for thunderstorms, and we could already hear the thunder rolling across some of the nearby mountains.

Climbing to the mountain summit involved a 1,000-foot elevation change and scaling many large rocks, but we made it. The view was spectacular—for about 10 minutes. No sooner had we taken our pictures than dark clouds socked in the mountains and their valleys. We, along with other sightseers, headed for cover.

When we reached the loop trail on our way down from the summit, we headed for a parking lot, which had a porta-potty. As we looked at the trail sign, trying to find the starting point for the loop trail we sought, the storms arrived. We had no place to take shelter except the small overhang leading into the porta-potty. Eventually, we had to open the porta-potty door and stand inside—not a welcome smell.

We spent 45 minutes in that smelly place before the storm moved on. A fellow hiker pointed us to the trailhead we sought, and we headed the

one-and-a-half miles back to our tent. The rain had turned the trail into a river, and we plodded through.

As we walked, I heard a strange noise coming from my left boot. I looked down to see the sole had separated. When I picked up my foot, the sole fell off. Another few yards down the trail, I heard a sound coming from my right boot. Same thing. All of a sudden, I was wet and soleless.

After looking at the trail, we wondered whether our tent was still intact and dry inside. Though the tent remained, everything in it was soaked. Having plenty of daylight left, we decided to pack up and head back home.

When I remarked that it seemed as if both a real and a symbolic dark cloud hung over us during our hike, my daughter came to her optimistic rescue. God had allowed us to see from the bald for 10 minutes before the clouds obscured the mountains. God had provided a porta-potty for shelter when we needed it. Our tent had not blown away. We saw many beautiful wildflowers along the way. Even though I was soleless, I still had a semblance of shoes on. And we had a wonderful adventure such as we had never experienced before. **B**

Blessings in troubling times



Christians in Mexico have been experiencing many of the same struggles we've faced here in the United States and Canada for the last year. Funerals without family members or friends present. Loss of jobs. Increased time spent at home.

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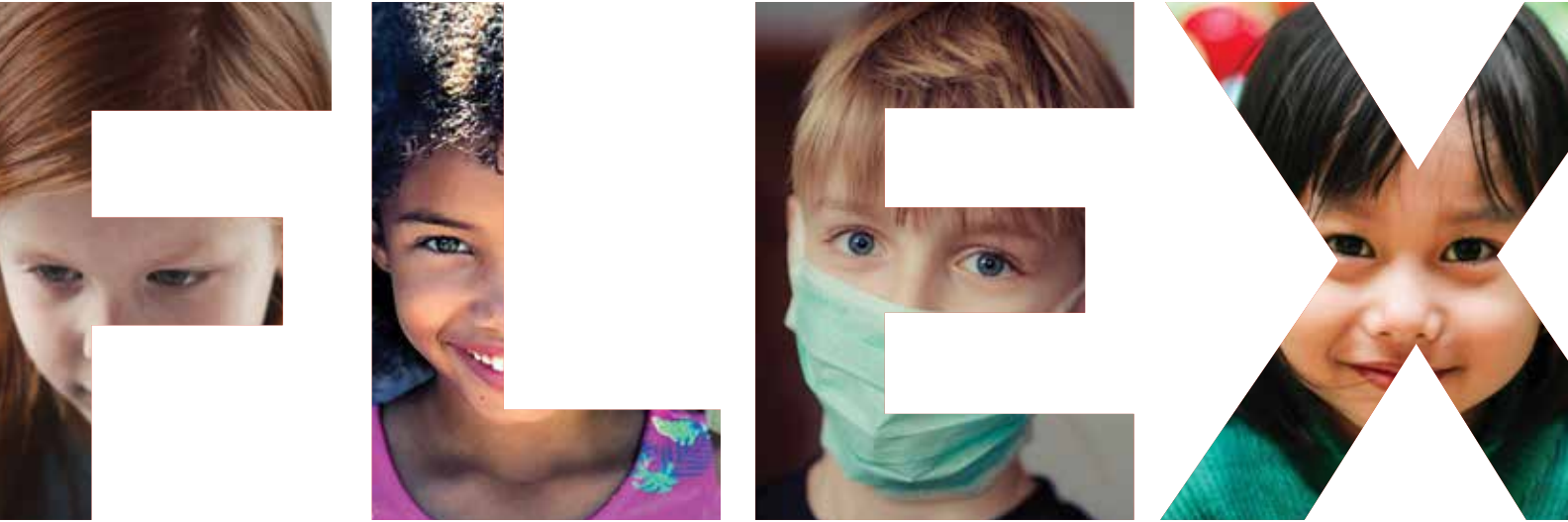


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