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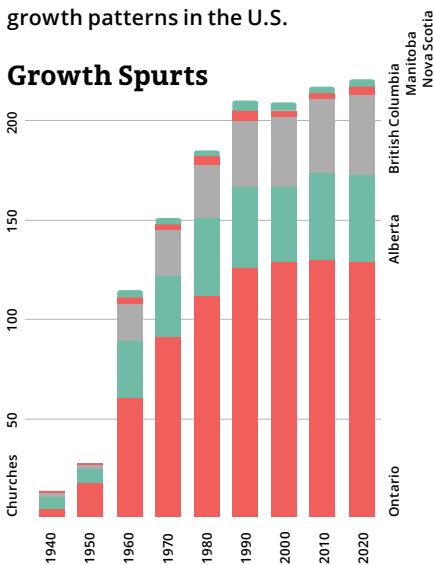
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# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

The Christian Reformed Church in North America got its start in 1857 when about 130 families separated from the Dutch Reformed Church. After World War II, tens of thousands of Dutch Reformed immigrants joined the CRCNA. Below is the growth in the number of churches in Canada by provinces with more than one church. Next month we'll show growth patterns in the U.S.

### Growth Spurts



Based on data from Heritage Hall at Calvin University. Heritage Hall is the archive for the CRCNA, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin University.



**Cover:** Taking a weekly Sabbath is meant to be a gift from God, not a joyless burden. // Photo by Xavier Mouton / Unsplash

## WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » Church Worldwide: U.S. Supreme Court Ruling Lifts Ban on Indoor Services, California Houses of Worship Mixed on Regathering
- » Picture book: *Harlem Grown*, by Tony Hillery
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**Correction**

The article, "Loaded Words" (January 2021) should have said that throughout the Old and New Testaments the Bible is clear in its call to do justice.

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**BANNER**

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## Resurrection Hope

When we look at the world today with all its problems, from wars and racism to abortion and climate change, we are tempted to despair.



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](http://TheBanner.org).

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Este artículo está disponible en español en [TheBanner.org/spanish](http://TheBanner.org/spanish).

**WE HAVE LIVED** through a difficult and stressful year. We had an ongoing pandemic resulting in thousands of deaths, hospitalizations, and social restrictions. There were protests about racial injustice in the U.S. and Canada in the wake of George Floyd's murder. A divisive U.S. election culminated with an insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Christians, including those in the Christian Reformed Church, have been caught up in the tension and disputes arising from all of these events. From debates over masks and worship gatherings to Black Lives Matter to Donald Trump and Christian nationalism, Christians find themselves arguing with each other. In the CRC we are also arguing about same-sex marriage and denominational restructuring, among other things.

It seems as if everyone's stress is heightened. We have become overly sensitive; our fuses are much shorter. For many, the lack of in-person social connections due to pandemic restrictions has only made these qualities worse.

When we look at the world today with all its problems, from wars and racism to abortion and climate change, we are tempted to despair. Every step forward seems to be met with several steps back.


But, thank God, we have Easter. Christ's resurrection gives me hope. I strongly believe that Jesus was truly resurrected from the grave (see my article "Was the Resurrection of Jesus a Myth?", p. 40). And because it's true, I have steadfast hope not only for an eternal life for me and my loved ones, but also for the renewal of the world.

The apostle Paul wrote that "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. ... For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:20, 22). This resurrection also means that

when Christ comes again at the end of human time, he will overcome all barriers to God's kingdom, including systemic barriers. Paul continues, "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:24-25).

According to renowned biblical scholar Kenneth Bailey, the original Greek words translated in the New International Version as "dominion, authority and power" are not rare words, but "standard words used for governments and earthly rulers" (*Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, p. 445). These were the same words Paul used to speak of the governing authorities in Romans 13. "The apostle," Bailey concludes, "as much as announces that one of the goals of the resurrected Christ was the setting aside of eternal Rome (the empire)" (p. 445).

Christ's resurrection is the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). It is also the firstfruits of the renewal of the world, the ushering in of God's kingdom, and the defeat of all that wages war against God. Animosity will be defeated. Lies will be defeated. Racism will be defeated. Viruses, illnesses, and suffering will be defeated. Even death, the last enemy, will be defeated (1 Cor. 15:26).

At times it might not look as if God will triumph, but looks can be deceiving. Easter reminds us that God has triumphed and will triumph again. Glory to God! 

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

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## REPLY ALL

### Truth Will Win

Your excellent editorial about the challenges you face from readers of differing commitments made me ruefully laugh at myself (“Truth Will Win,” January 2021). At 74 years old, I hold with considerable passion some views which I would have opposed with equal passion 50 years ago. I’m convinced that the Spirit has guided me on that journey. That gives me a bit of patience with those who don’t yet hold the “correct” opinions that I do!

» Syl Gerritsma // St. Catharines, Ont.

### Same-sex Relationships

I am glad you are so directly addressing the issues of same-sex relationships in advance of the important discussions ahead in 2021. In two of the past issues, though, I noticed what appears to be use of terminology that is not congruent with commonly used descriptives (November and December 2020). You use “same-sex attraction” (SSA) to describe people in clearly defined homosexual identities and long-term relationships/marriages. Same-sex attraction is clinically defined as emotional and/or sexual interest. A fairly large percentage of people in our North American context have experienced SSA or have ongoing SSA. A much smaller percentage move through a process from SSA to sexual orientation (an enduring pattern of attraction based on desire) or identity (the process of labeling oneself).

» Jeff Kreiser, M.A. in educational psychology // Folsom, Calif.

### Sexuality Report

Why would anyone be surprised by the report on human sexuality? When only members who adhere to the 1973 synodical statement were allowed to be on the

committee, the result was preordained all along—sort of like holding an election where only one political party is allowed to vote and then being shocked by the outcome. The Christian Reformed Church deserved better than this.

» Valerie Terpstra Van Kooten // Pella, Iowa

### Narcissism in the Church

The exclusively psychological perspective of this article suggests that Christian spirituality has little to offer this particular malady. What psychologists call narcissism today our spiritual forebears once called vanity, vainglory, and pride. It was one of the seven deadly sins. The cure for vainglory was humility cultivated in community, and the process of arriving at humility was self-knowledge. Self-knowledge was a process of prayerfully looking into one’s heart as with a mirror, and it was marked by such things as the opening of the soul, disclosure of thoughts, watchfulness, and attention to oneself.

» Ron Klok // Edmonton, Alta.

### December Issue

Whoever gets their hands on *The Banner* first in our household dog-ears the pages of their favorite articles. Your December issue had all the pages (except the ads) bent over. Compliments to the contributing authors and your editorial staff. Well done!

» Russ Vandergraaf // Langley, B.C.

### Hurt by the Church

On page 12 of the January edition (“Big Questions”), therapist Judy Cook replies to a question about family members hurt by the church. “How can I engage my family members in a sensitive but

honest discussion?” Her reply, “It begins by repenting on behalf of the church,” falls short. Cook misses an important step. First, find out if the church is right or wrong. Cook’s advice would have Jesus repent because he caused the rich young ruler to go away sad. I pastored a church for 42 years and presently attend the CRC in Guam. I can say without any doubt that not everyone who is hurt by church, or a (specific) church, is hurt because the church did something wrong. Sometimes people are hurt because the church does what is right.

» Howard Merrell // Guam

### Infant Baptism

Kathy Smith’s answer to the question about child dedication (“Big Questions,” February 2021) covers some well-trod but seldom-examined ground. The argument that “a helpless infant demonstrates the truth of baptism—that God chooses us—in a way that is less apparent when adults are baptized because it may seem from adults’ testimony that they, not God, are the primary actors in their salvation” would be a powerful one, except that Scripture never makes it in relation to baptism. Rather, the emphasis is on the faith of converts who bring their families into the church by baptism. Besides, adults are saved by grace just as much as children are, and their testimonies can and should reflect that. The most egregious assumption is that all that is needed is “to disciple people toward understanding and affirming infant baptism.” In some (perhaps many) cases this will help, but there are those who understand the arguments perfectly well and still reject them.

» J. Cameron Fraser // Lethbridge, Alta.

### Are We Evangelicals?

I would add this to the article (“Are We Evangelicals?” March 2021): whatever Christians may decide to do in terms of embracing or rejecting or divorcing themselves from the word “evangelical,”



## The Trauma of Bullying

politicians of today will use the term (as a praise or as a condemnation) for the sole purpose of attracting some voters and denouncing others. And sadly, what politicians do with the word will have a greater effect on its definition in the minds of the broader population than what those who actually are “evangelicals” claim for the word.

» Doug Vande Griend // online comment

### White Privilege

I read the article “Hobbit Heroics and the Responsibility of Privilege” (January 2021) and found that it piqued my curiosity. I am wondering what it practically looks like to destroy white privilege as the article suggests. Many of the ideas are a little abstract and idealistic in my mind yet. I suppose the main question I pose is: what would it look like to practically live up to what the article suggests?

» Caleb Kamerman // online comment

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**I GREW UP FEELING** like I was an outcast, ugly, friendless, no-good person—at least, that is how I felt at school. At home I just felt invisible because my parents didn’t know what was going on at school.

From elementary school until I graduated from high school, I was subjected daily to taunting and teasing from my peers. I was called ugly and stinky. Kids said I had cooties and wouldn’t play with me. I was pushed around in the hallway. A group of boys ganged up on me and shoved me in a closet. Another time I was locked in my locker. These are just a few of the things that happened so often they broke me.

I believed the lie that I was not deserving of physical and emotional safety. I believed I was nothing.

The trauma of bullying affected my physical and mental health. Daily in high school, I had stomachaches, I couldn’t concentrate on my school work, and I started to suffer from suicidal ideation.

When I left school, the bullying stopped, but the effects did not.

I continued to suffer deep shame about what had happened. I felt broken and unlovable. Even when people accepted me, I doubted their sincerity.

I cried out to the Lord over and over again to heal me. My prayers seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Looking back, I now realize that God did hear those cries; the healing was just slower than I wanted. Slowly, I have learned to trust people. I’ve seen several counselors who have helped me.

I finally came to a place in my journey where I could hear the affirmation the Lord has been saying to me since I started crying out to him.

When I left school,  
the bullying  
stopped, but the  
effects did not.

I trusted my pastor enough to share with him about the bullying I endured growing up. After I shared, he led me in a healing exercise where he had me imagine I was in a safe place and Jesus was with me. As Jesus was hugging me on my bed, he said to me, “You are loved; you are safe; you are accepted.”

This was about two months ago, and still Jesus’ words resonate with me. They are becoming my lifeblood. Every time I have a negative thought, I try to bring my mind back to those words: “You are loved; you are safe; you are accepted.”

The Lord heard my cry and, in his perfect timing, he answered me. And as time goes on he will continue to heal me until I meet him face to face and all my sorrows will be gone. **B**



Andrea Meszaros lives in Newcastle, Ont., and is a member of Rehoboth CRC in Bowmanville. She was a partner missionary with Resonate Global Mission in Budapest from 2008-2018. She is currently a secretary for her public school board.



# The Gifts of Sundays

By Lorilee Craker

I was lounging on the couch one Sunday with a pile of cookbooks, leafing through an old church cookbook from our beloved Grandma Finney, my husband's late grandmother, looking for recipes by her and other family members. Though the only recipe I could find of hers in that particular book was for "Health Salad," a quivering Jell-O creation featuring mandarin orange slices and shredded carrots, I relished the browsing anyway. It was like time travel to muse about the lives of church ladies, now in Glory, with their old-fashioned recipes and pithy little sayings.

Sayings like "Sunday is the golden clasp that binds together the volume of the week." This particular maxim sits at the bottom of the yellowed page, below recipes for rhubarb jam and mock raspberry preserves—though why raspberries need to be mocked in this way I will never know (the recipe calls for pureed green tomatoes, sugar, and raspberry Jell-O).

Musing, leafing, lounging—these leisurely states of being are unique to Sundays. The week with all its anxieties, stresses, and cares can be snapped shut by the golden clasp. The Sabbath, which was changed by early Christians from Saturday to Sunday because the resurrection of Christ took place on a Sunday, is like a mini Easter every week because we celebrate the resurrection every Sunday, first at church and then in our practice of Sabbath.

Weekday habits of drivenness and deadlines are fastened, put away. It is time to dwell in the spacious place of resurrection living, of rest, relaxation, and relationship, to receive with open hands the gifts of Sunday.

## The Gift of Freedom

Sunday is a day of freedom, not confinement or restriction. But resting one day per week is easier said than done. We are a restless people, given to *doing* rather than *being*. And from ancient days we have also been given

to legalism, adding artificial ingredients and rules to the day set apart from work and works. The earliest followers, says Tim Foley in his book *Rest—For the Rest of Us*, piled all sorts of things on top of the original commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Ex. 20:8).

"They (added) over 600 rules of *no* and *don't*, which supplanted the simple list of *do*: finding delight," Foley says. In our own faith tradition, I have heard some "don't" story doozies. There was the old man who, as a boy, on hot, humid Sundays at his parents' cottage, was allowed to dip only his feet in the water, not submerge his body, because swimming was not allowed on a Sunday. And the child who was chastised for reading *National Geographic* on a Sunday. "You should read something more appropriate on a Sunday," he was scolded, "like the Bible." Though many of us might think of Sunday as a dreary day of "you can't," it's meant to be a freeing "you don't have to" day. That shift changes everything.



### The Gift of Slowing Down

One of my favorite ways to make Sunday slow and easy is to throw a beef roast or a pork loin in the slow cooker the night before. Slow-cooked food is perfect for a day that is meant to be just as easygoing. “The Sabbath,” writes Alan Fadling in his book *An Unhurried Life*, “gives us an unhurried one-in-seven rhythm woven into the very fabric of creation.” On Sunday, we can slow down, relax, and take a much-needed deep breath, especially if we don’t have to be anywhere at any special time. It’s a day to dawdle, to laze and loaf. It’s a reminder to live beneath what Fadling calls “the easy and well-fitting yoke of Jesus, a yoke that isn’t burdensome or exhausting.” It feels just right.

### The Gift of Delight

Back to those unfortunate boys who were rebuked for reveling in God’s creation: their parents robbed them of delight, one of Sunday’s brightest gifts. Their parents were like the Pharisees, obsessing over Sabbath laws and making sure everyone followed them to the letter. “What was lost in all this was the fact that God created the Sabbath as a day of delight for his creation,” Foley says. “It was no longer enjoyable and turned somewhat into a day of dread.” Dread is definitely not the point of Sunday; neither is boredom. Enjoying Sunday means leaning into what delights and re-creates you, whether that be gardening, hiking, or playing in the waves on a sticky summer day. “It’s about spending time delighting in God, first in worship and then in other ways,” said David Beelen, my now-retired pastor. “If I do that best in a kayak, then that’s what I should do. I also love cutting the grass and painting because they are restorative works for me.” What restores and delights you?

It is time to  
dwell in the  
spacious place  
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relaxation, and  
relationship.

### The Gift of Relationship

“Sunday is a day of rest, re-creation, and relationship,” Pastor Dave preached in a long-ago sermon. Recreation and relationships on Sunday were new ideas to me, but Pastor Dave was right. Beyond fellowshiping with the saints at church, on Sunday there is just more time for people. Undistracted by the machinery of the week, I can tune in to my favorite humans, and they with me. I can play games with my family, converse over a leisurely Sunday lunch, or drive to the lake together. I can call my son in Kansas, my mother in Manitoba, or my college roommate in New Jersey.


Monday through Saturday, I am always trying to get something done for work, post a blog, or pay the bills, but Sunday is “measured not by productivity but by relationship,” Foley says. If an activity—or no activity at all—increases your most important relationships, it’s a good thing.

### The Gift of Reset

Sunday, the golden clasp, shuts off the past week and allows for recovery, recalibration, and reset as we exist in the healing spaciousness of the day. Here we can stop with the “human

doing” and try a little “human being.” This means shutting down even anxious thoughts of the week ahead. When I have a worrisome thought insinuating itself, I say, “Nope, that can wait until Monday.” Medical bills, worries about loved ones, and workaday stresses can all wait until Monday, when a new volume will be written in my life and yours.

Sunday is also a prime excuse to disconnect from social media and screens. Unless something major has just happened, like my son’s wedding, I have made it a rule not to post and definitely not to mindlessly scroll and possibly get snagged on someone’s political post. Because I am an author building my platform (mainly on Instagram), it is tempting to check and see how a post of mine is doing. When I stick to my guns and don’t even peek, I am refreshed, my (hopefully) soft addiction to my phone broken, at least for one day of the week.

This is God’s gift to us: When we embrace Sabbath values of relaxation, play, worship, and just *being*, our resurrection lives are recovered; we are renewed. When we slow down and enjoy our rest, we become more graceful, stronger, more resilient, holier. Our good works—our best works—will grow out of that rest. In short, we become more of everything God has made us to be, because of his golden gift of Sunday. 



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](http://lorileecraker.com) or on Instagram @[thebooksellersdaughter](https://www.instagram.com/thebooksellersdaughter).

## BIG QUESTIONS

### Digital Life

#### Am I the only one annoyed by group emails?

Just as there are appropriate times for someone to stand at the head of a table, wait for silence, and make an announcement for all to hear, there are times for emails (or texts) to be sent to groups of people. But most of our lives don't require that kind of drama—especially the time we spend in an office. Why do we do it?

Like so many parts of our digital lives, the speed at which we can do something is swift, and the cost to us is often nil. That's part of the problem.

More often, I think, it's because we are not respectful enough of other people's time.

Research suggests that when we're focused, an interruption such as a group email that doesn't directly relate to us makes us lose an average of 11 minutes as we regain our focus. That would be problem enough, but unless people are careful to reply only to the original sender, everyone gets all of the responses. And just when you think it's finally over, Tricia in marketing gets back from her honeymoon and restarts the process by responding to the original group email.

Might I suggest a simple solution? Before sending or replying to an email, take a quick look at the address list



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohórquez

and make sure everyone you're about to send it to will welcome it.

I know this isn't a big deal in the grand scheme of things, but if we all do our part, the global irritation index will certainly decline.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the Christian Reformed Church and art director of *The Banner*. Wondering about any part of the digital side of your life? Tell him about it at [dean.heetderks@gmail.com](mailto:dean.heetderks@gmail.com).

### Church/Bible/Doctrine

#### When a pastor of long-standing service in a congregation retires, does the Christian Reformed Church recommend that she or he mentor the incoming pastor for a period of time?

Some denominations do not allow retired ministers to remain members of the church they last served, knowing that all too often problems can ensue. Either congregations cannot give up their reliance on or affection for the former pastor, or retired ministers have difficulty letting go of the involvement and influence they enjoyed, or subsequent pastors are unable to establish themselves while facing the constant presence of the former pastor—or sometimes all of the above!

The CRC has been aware of those concerns but also recognizes that not every situation with a former pastor goes sour and believes that rules should not prevent people from flourishing in the churches that best suit them, their families, and the church.

Synod addressed this matter in 2009 in response to an overture that raised these concerns. Synod did not create specific rules but did adopt guidelines for pastors and councils who need to discern a healthy approach to this kind of situation. The guidelines recognized the potential benefits and hazards of the ongoing presence of a former pastor. Some of the benefits include continuity of relationships, pastoral care assistance, and wisdom that could be shared from one pastor to the next—perhaps the kind of mentoring this question suggests. Hazards include a lack of boundaries, a congregation too attached to the former pastor, or an undermining of the new pastor.

The CRC's guidelines recommend a signed agreement to manage the relationship and to ensure that the new pastor is well supported. In this agreement, former pastors pledge to support the new pastor, not undermine their ministry, and agree to officiate in formal acts of ministry only with the approval of the council. All requests for pastoral care should be referred to the new pastor.



Back to the original question: the CRC does not recommend that a former pastor mentor a new pastor. It could be a wonderful opportunity, but it might not work in all situations. Where and when possible and beneficial for all, it sounds like a good thing!

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

### Vocation

## How do I decide whether to take a new job or keep the one I have?

It is a blessing to be able to choose whether to take or keep a job. Paid work is one way God provides for us: it allows us to pay bills, take care of loved ones, and even enjoy the good things of God's creation. Jobs also provide a way to contribute in a meaningful way to society. It is cause for sorrow when people cannot experience this because of unemployment or underemployment.

To help you decide, ask how this position might allow you to love God and love your neighbor. Will this job allow you to honor God with work by developing your gifts, growing your skills, and using your time and energy to care for the world? Will it provide you with helpful experience and opportunities to connect with others? Does it help you to promote justice and care for those who are suffering?

It's also helpful to ask what harm the job might cause. Would taking this job mean participating in work that harms the environment or hurts others? Does it get in the way of other important things you ought to be doing, like studies or helping family? No job is worth the cost of losing your

relationships with God, your family, or another community.

There can be a lot of pressure to take a job, especially if it pays well. Proverbs teaches us that it is good to be financially responsible, but we can also run the risk of living as if our own efforts save us. It is helpful to wonder how we might use the gifts God has given us, recognizing these gifts also include the freedom of youth and limited responsibilities and even having others to help with financial stability.

As you continue to wonder, know that sometimes the answer to your question comes from the Spirit's gentle nudging, and sometimes it comes through the encouragement of your community. And sometimes we simply need to step forward in faith, trusting that God will make the best of our choices.

May God give you hope and wisdom as you navigate this situation.

Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink is the Christian Reformed chaplain at the University of Toronto.

### Stewardship

## If people have talents in music, writing, hospitality, technology, or some other area that could benefit the church community, do they have an obligation to serve?

God-given gifts and talents are, as a general rule, to be used for the "benefit of church and kingdom," as we like to say. As with other things of value, these are not private possessions to be hoarded, but a part of the commonwealth of the community. Note, however, that they are for the benefit of church *and* kingdom.

We should remember that the church is not the only arena that counts. It is easiest for us to grasp that activities within the context of church life are a form of worship. A proper kingdom theology, however, understands that all uses of God's gifts are a form of worship, regardless of where or when they are expressed.

The upshot is that we should seriously consider how our gifts and abilities can benefit the community and offer them cheerfully as appropriate. There are, to be sure, other considerations that come into play. If our gift or talent is a significant part of our daily work such that we are immersed in its expression, Sunday may be a place of refuge, respite, or sabbath from our daily work. A band director or guitar instructor is not demonstrating poor stewardship because they would prefer not to lead the praise band on Sunday.

In a similar vein, some people might find the attention that comes with public expression of their talents to be unwelcome, causing anxiety and discomfort. A sensitive church community will not force people into the public eye when such attention might be damaging.

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



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

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# Alberta Church Plans Second Drive-in Easter Service

## NEWS

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“It was beyond anything we could have imagined,” said Pastor Ryan Pedde of a 2020 outdoor Easter Sunday service that saw about 800 people in 242 vehicles worship in the Dow Centennial Centre parking lot and had another 3,000 people tune in online.

Bridge Church, a Christian Reformed church plant in Fort Saskatchewan, a small city 25 kilometers (16 miles) northeast of Edmonton, Alta., planned to repeat the event for Easter 2021 because the COVID-19 pandemic continues to make gatherings without physical distancing a risk for transmission of the virus.

“There is a great deal of talk these days about a ‘new normal,’” Pedde said. “One of the advantages of a church plant is that we are so young that there is no established ‘normal.’ Church plants are ideally tooled toward innovation and change.”

Last year’s service included a snowfall and worshipers participating from their cars. They saw Pedde on a large screen and tuned in to the audio on an FM radio channel.

“The honking (of car horns) as a way of saying ‘amen’ or ‘yes’ was pretty cool,” said Bruce Gritter, who was pastor of Edmonton’s The River Community CRC at the time and was involved in the 2020 service.



Cars gathered for an Easter Sunday drive-in worship service in Fort Saskatchewan, Alta., April 12, 2020.

There was an opportunity during the service for individuals to text the word “hope” to a specific number “if today you’ve decided to follow Jesus.” Twenty-five people did so.

“We are intentional about trying to reach people through multiple avenues,” Pedde said. One of those people who reached out by text last Easter, he said, “was plugged into online discipleship classes. He came for the first time physically in the fall and was baptized! It was a dance between multiple avenues of engagement.”

Classis Alberta North (a regional group of churches) and Resonate Global Mission contributed funds toward insurance costs, the rental of LED screens, and other needs to make the service possible.

—Janet A. Greidanus



Photo by Chris Slagter

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## Crosses Stand as a Witness in Iowa

Each year before Easter, members of Ocheyedan (Iowa) Christian Reformed Church’s Cadet club (a club for boys in first through eighth grades) help assemble three crosses on a mound at the edge of town in Osceola County, Iowa. Cadets Andrew, Alex, and Jonathan raised the crosses March 30, 2020.



## Photo Project Helps Church Members 'Journey to the Cross'



Photos by Sue Contant

Journey to the Cross photo gallery at Willoughby Church.

In preparation for Lent in 2020 (the 40 days plus Sundays leading up to Easter), the visual arts team at Willoughby Church in Langley, B.C., invited congregants to contribute to a photography gallery titled "Journey to the Cross."

Members responded with over 50 images of crosses found in nature or set in landscapes and architecture from within homes and local neighborhoods or travels abroad.

Ryan, 11, was the youngest photographer, with an image he called "Stick Cross." Ryan said: "I just saw two crossed twigs in the grass when I was delivering (news)papers."

The photographs, which were printed and mounted on the walls of the church's front foyer in March of 2020, ended up remaining there for all of 2020. The church returned to the theme for the 2021 Lenten season, asking once again "for photograph submissions depicting a cross anywhere in nature, technology, architecture, etc. ... We hope that these photos will assist you in meditating on the cross of Christ as we journey towards Easter."

See the individual photos at [instagram.com/willoughbychurch](https://www.instagram.com/willoughbychurch).

—Jenny deGroot

### IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Garrett (Garry)  
H. Stoutmeyer  
1932-2021

With a gift for memorization and oration, Garry Stoutmeyer lived his passion for preaching, teaching, and counseling. He died Jan. 5 after a brief illness. His daughter, Cynthia, died 10 days later from lupus.

Graduating from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and ordained in 1958, Stoutmeyer served Prospect Park (N.J.) Christian Reformed Church; Calvin CRC (now Foundation Church), Holland, Mich.; Elmhurst (Ill.) CRC; New Hope Community, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Faith CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Coopersville (Mich.) CRC; and Bethany CRC, South Holland, Ill. In Holland, Mich., he was the minister of the daily radio program "At the Master's Feet."

Stoutmeyer served the denomination on the boards of Calvin College and World Missions (now a part of Resonate Global Mission), as a delegate to several synods, as synodical deputy, and as stated clerk in multiple classes. He also obtained certification in Clinical Pastoral Education.

After retirement in 1997, the Stoutmeyers enjoyed 17 winters in Haines City, Fla., where Stoutmeyer preached at Lake Alfred Ministry and Central Park II Chapel, which he and his wife founded.

Stoutmeyer loved flowers and, if not a preacher, would have been a florist.

He is survived by Barbara, his wife of 66 years; two children and spouses; 10 grandchildren; and 21 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

### IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Philip J. Kok  
1941-2021

A faithful servant of God with a pastor's heart and a gift for public prayer, Phil Kok died Jan. 23, 10 months after receiving a diagnosis of Stage IV lung cancer.

Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Mich., Kok was part of a family of pastors, with two uncles, two brothers, and a son all serving in the ministry. After working in the food and print industries and serving honorably in the National Guard, Kok returned to school, attending Dordt College (now University) and then Calvin Seminary.

After graduation and ordination in 1971, Kok served the following churches: First Christian Reformed Church, Sioux Falls, S. Dak.; Living Faith Community, San Diego, Calif.; East Leonard CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.; First CRC, Lynden, Wash.; and Almond Valley CRC, Ripon, Calif.

After retirement in 2006 he served nine churches in Iowa, Michigan, and California as an interim pastor. He concluded his ministry by returning to Almond Valley CRC as pastor of visitation until his illness prevented him from continuing.

Kok was an avid golfer and enjoyed going out for dinner and playing card games with close friends.

He is survived by his wife, Joyce; five children and spouses; and 11 grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

# Council of Delegates Cancels Synod 2021, Discusses Ministry Share Pledges, Governance

When the Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church met by video conference Feb. 17-19, it discussed Synod 2021, new ministry share pledges, ongoing governance restructuring, and more. The 53-member Council meets three times a year to conduct the work of the CRC's synod between those annual meetings.

Council chair Paul DeVries reminded delegates, as they convened on the first day of Lent, that as servants of Christ, their first responsibility is not to the material things of meetings.

"The truth is that the powers and the principalities of this dark world seek to use the material stuff—national divisions, arguing about institutions and functions—... to divide and conquer brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. And we are not exempt from some of those arguments, hurts, and pains."

DeVries noted, "We want to take our time during our meetings to be sensitive to the spiritual temperature in the room," and he encouraged delegates to break at times for prayer, specifically around spiritual warfare.

## Synod 2021 Canceled

Weighing responses to a survey of stated clerks of classes (regional groups of churches), the opinions expressed in letters, and the current cross-border travel restrictions, the Council decided to cancel the Christian Reformed Church's Synod 2021 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Council also decided that synodical discussion of the Human Sexuality Report will wait until 2022.

Instead of synod, the Council will host a special meeting in June to deal with items that cannot wait a year, such as approving candidates for the ministry and budget matters. That was the same process followed when Synod 2020 was canceled.



Members of the Christian Reformed Church's Council of Delegates met by video conference Feb. 17-19, joined by staff of CRC ministries and other guests.

The decision to cancel was not easily made. Several delegates said there could be a way to convene some form of synod without bringing everyone together in one place. One suggestion was to allow Canadians to gather in one location and Americans to gather in another. However, other delegates noted that in Canada, travel across provincial borders is not currently allowed, and in some provinces people are discouraged even from moving between municipalities. With vaccination rollouts unlikely to be completed by June, it is highly unlikely that restrictions will ease before then.

Delegates voted 38-10 in favor of canceling. The CRC's synodical services announced the decision to staff and guests to Synod 2021 shortly after the vote Feb. 19 and published some clarifying questions and answers online (see [crcna.org/synod/FAQ](http://crcna.org/synod/FAQ)).

## Ministry Shares Reimagined

For the first time in the denomination's history, the budget for the coming fiscal year (starting July 1, 2021) will be based on what churches pledge to contribute.

In the past, budgets were created first, and then churches were asked to remit a certain amount to meet that budget.

Delegates heard updates from staff on current pledges and the planned process to allocate the funds (see "Ministry Share Pledges Low, But New Churches Contributing," p. 18).

## Governance Restructuring Continues

During the three days of Council meetings, delegates alternated between meeting as a full Council and meeting concurrently in the two corporations that make up the two-nation Christian Reformed Church of North America. That practice began at last February's meeting, when the Council was informed that the Canadian delegates (collectively, the CRCNA Canada Corporation) had received legal advice indicating changes were needed to comply with Canadian tax laws.

The Structure and Leadership Taskforce, assigned to finalize a proposed organizational structure as well as new job descriptions for senior denominational

staff in the two countries, presented a verbal progress report to the Council. SALT's full report is expected in May (see "Governance Restructure Causing Confusion, Angst," p. 19).

## Mercy and Justice Staff Report Escalating Intimidation

CRCNA executive director Colin Watson Sr. reported to the Council that there has been an increase in offensive online comments as well as racist social media posts referring to the work of the CRC's Office of Social Justice, and that staff have received threatening communication in the mail, leaving them concerned for their safety. Some of the communications were concerning enough to report to the police. In reviewing the comments, DeVries told delegates several came from officebearers in the CRC.

A letter and some unsigned postcards with disturbing images were mailed directly to Mark Stephenson, currently director of the CRC's OSJ and Race Relations as well as of Disability Concerns. Stephenson responded to delegates' questions and expressions of concern. "It's extremely upsetting," he said.

Delegates prayed for staff affected by this situation and discussed practical matters of security and how to respond to those known to be behind the threatening messages.

Watson told the delegates that he appreciated their prayers, and encouraged them, "As we go about our daily ministry, if we even hear someone speaking in a derogatory manner about anyone else—regardless of race, regardless of class—I would just ask that we please confront this.

"As Christians, I do believe that we can be different, be the salt and light God wants us to be. Please, as you hear folks denigrating others, if we could all just stop right there and say, 'This is not Christian. This is not what God wants us

to be, and we've got to stop this.' We've got to be a light in society that ends this," Watson said.

## Senior Executives' Retirements Delayed

The Council heard that Watson and John Bolt, the CRC's director of finance and operations, have agreed to delay their planned retirements by one year. Watson had already delayed his by six months. With governance restructuring taking longer than expected, the delayed retirements allow continuity of ministry.

Watson became the executive director in February 2020 after then-director Steven Timmermans suddenly resigned. Until then, Watson had been the CRCNA's director of ministries and operations. Some of the tasks he had in that role were given to other denominational leaders over the past year, but many responsibilities stayed with him, leaving Watson shouldering two jobs. To help alleviate that overload, the CRCNA U.S. Corporation (the American delegates on the Council) at this February meeting authorized Watson to appoint a deputy to the executive director with responsibility for U.S. ministry operations, effective until at least June 2022.

In Canada, interim staff appointments put in place more than a year ago have been extended until June 30, 2022. The CRCNA Canada Corporation at a Feb. 13 meeting extended the appointments of Darren Roorda, Canadian ministries director and acting executive director; Terry Veldboom, interim director of finance and operations; Kevin DeRaaf, interim director of Resonate Global Mission; Peter Elgersma, interim director of congregational services and advancement; and Maureen Beattie, interim director of human resources.

—Gayla R. Postma and  
Alissa Vernon, news editor

## In other actions, the Council:

- » Interviewed and confirmed as new director of Candidacy Susan LaClear (David Koll, the current director of Candidacy, retires this summer).
- » Noted that ReFrame Ministries (formerly Back to God Ministries International) is ending its French-language project in Haiti after more than a decade. Resources have shifted to Burkina Faso, the center of ReFrame's French-language ministry.
- » Received the final report from the Ad-hoc Committee for the Prevention of Abuse. It noted that the Office of Dignity and Respect, created as part of the denomination's plan to prevent abuse of power, has been changed to "Dignity Team," a group to "foster a culture of full respect for all persons as equally called by God to contribute to the life of the church."
- » Noted that churches are using the Challenging Conversations Toolkit from Pastor Church Resources to discuss the Human Sexuality Report, now slated to be on the agenda of Synod 2022.
- » Noted that the Canada Corporation adopted new bylaws.



## Ministry Share Pledges Low, But New Churches Contributing

Congregations are pledging to contribute less funding for shared denominational ministries than what was received in previous years, but many churches that have never contributed are now promising support. The contributions, called ministry shares, support the Christian Reformed Church's administration, missions, seminary, and congregational service ministries.

The CRC's Council of Delegates received the pledging update at its latest meeting. (See more meeting details on p. 16.)

For the first time in the denomination's history, the budget for the coming fiscal year (starting July 1, 2021) will be based on what churches pledge to contribute. In the past, budgets were created first, and then churches were asked to remit a certain amount to meet that budget.

Moving to a pledge system is all part of the CRCNA's Ministry Shares Reimagined, a program begun in 2019 because churches were routinely giving less—sometimes considerably less—than the requested amount. Denominational budgets were based on rough estimates of anticipated giving. Now, congregations, in conversation with their own classis (regional group of churches), pledge to send in a specific amount, with budgets then set accordingly.

CRCNA executive director Colin Watson Sr. reported that with pledges from 928 of the denomination's 1,031 churches, financial commitments in the U.S. total about 15% less than funds received in 2020 and in Canada about 5% less.

"We are grateful that in a number of cases, churches that previously did not participate in the ministry share process are now opting to participate. This is especially true in some smaller and ethnic minority churches," Watson said. "We praise God for this new level of commitment."



### Potential Cuts

In preparation for the new way of budgeting, ministry leaders were asked to list what programs could be scaled back or eliminated if the money received was less than the previous year's budget. Perhaps the hardest hit are congregational services ministries: 70% of their budgets depend on ministry shares.

Some of the suggested service cuts include but are not limited to:

- » Reduced faith-formation resources, affecting catechism resources and funds for Christian school partnerships
- » An 8% reduction in the budget for *Dwell* church-school curriculum
- » Reduced faith-formation coaching and consulting
- » Fewer worship resources
- » Reduced continuing education grants from Pastor Church Resources

While money received in Canada is kept separate from funds received in the U.S., most denominational ministries are jointly operated and rely on combined funding from both countries, according to Terry Veldboom, director of finance

and operations (Canada). "The 70/30 split, which approximates the ratio of CRC members in the USA and Canada, respectively, has been used as a general rule of thumb for the cost sharing of joint ministries and synodical activities," he said.

### Distributing the Pledged Amounts

Also new is how the received ministry shares will be allocated. In the past, allocation proportions have typically rolled over from year to year, with ReFrame Ministries (formerly Back to God Ministries International) receiving 12%, Calvin Theological Seminary receiving 10%, Resonate Global Mission receiving 31%, and Congregational Services sharing 23%. (The remainder goes to denominational services and a special assistance fund.)

Under Ministry Shares Reimagined, ministry leaders will together decide on allocation annually, looking more intently at the various joint ministries and initiatives in terms of strategic priority, according to Veldboom, who noted that those strategic priorities might not be the same in Canada as in the U.S.

—Gayla R. Postma

## Governance Restructure Causing Confusion, Angst

CRT, COD, ESL, SALT, CRA. The myriad of acronyms in play is only the beginning of the confusion that has marked the Christian Reformed Church's governance restructure conversations of the past year.

The CRC's Council of Delegates heard an update on the progress at its meeting Feb. 17-19. A final report should come to the Council in May.

A year of meetings, including some closed listening sessions, has shown tensions that surfaced last year continue (see "Still Bumps in the Road for CRC's Restructuring," June 2020). Two Canadian classes (regional groups of churches) have asked the denomination's synod to put the proceedings on hold, with one citing a violation of the Church Order. (Church Order is the record of rules the congregations of the CRC have covenanted together to follow; it governs the functioning of the denomination.)

Further complications include a range of legal opinions that the Structure and Leadership Taskforce (SALT) has been asked to take into account (see "Council of Delegates Convenes 'Special Listening Session,'" February 2021) and the absence of input from synod, which has been canceled two years in a row due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The move toward restructuring began more than a year ago after Canadian delegates received legal advice that changes were needed to comply with Canadian tax laws regarding charitable organizations—particularly, to ensure that direction and control of resources designated to a charity remain in Canada.

About 70% of the Council delegates are from the U.S. and 30% from Canada, reflecting the percentages of church members on either side of the border.

Delegate John Lee, Classis Iakota, is SALT's chair. He noted in the meeting that while the presenting issue was tax compliance, there is much more history involved. "There is a history of not living into decisions we've made. There's a historic wound and frustrations surrounding that," he said. "There is also a contemporary desire for contextualized ministry."

To help find a way through the process, in February 2020 the Council created the Ecclesiastical, Structural, and Legal Team (ESL). That team presented recommendations that each country have its own executive director and suggested an ecclesiastical officer could provide a bridge between the two and oversee ministries that are not country-specific, such as the candidacy committee and the denomination's seminary. Having received the ESL's initial work, the Council disbanded that group and appointed people in both countries to write job descriptions for the three proposed positions. In October 2020, SALT was created to find a way to appropriately align the proposed job descriptions. SALT's report was due in February, but its mandate was extended to May 2021 so members could consider new legal advice.

Working concurrently with all this is the Canadian Restructure Team (CRT), which is proposing substantial changes to Canadian ministry. That is causing some to question whether the changes being made to comply with the Canadian tax rules are unnecessarily expanding. Classis Toronto, in asking for a halt to restructuring, referred to a letter it received from CRCNA Canada Corp. that said, "As we thought about restructuring to achieve compliance, we realized there was a larger opportunity here. That is, since we are in need of restructuring moving into 2021, it is best to consider how so that a number of considerations are kept in mind: ongoing effectiveness, a desire to 'reduce the footprint' of the denomination, connecting wholeheartedly to the local church, all the while not simply becoming a mirror to the CRCNA in the U.S. but rather be built for the most effective contextual approach to ministry in Canada."

CRCNA Canada Corp. received the CRT report Feb. 13. While appreciating the work presented, it declined to endorse that report even in principle until the joint work of SALT was done. Delegate Melissa Van Dyk, Canadian at-large delegate, wondered if creating separate documents like the CRT report is "creating more anxiety in the system than (there) actually needs to be."

—Gayla R. Postma

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. W. Wayne Leys*  
1944-2021

During 40 years of ministry, Wayne Leys made discipleship a priority. Kind and hospitable, he loved taking people out for breakfast and hearing about their lives. "My dad was an amazing listener whom God equipped to shepherd people into a deeper relationship with Jesus," said one of his children. Leys died Jan. 30 after several years of living with Alzheimer's disease.

Leys graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary and was ordained in 1969. He pastored Cragmor Christian Reformed Church, Colorado Springs, Colo.; Elmhurst (Ill.) CRC; New Hope Church of Dunwoody, Atlanta, Ga.; Ridgeview Hills CRC, Littleton, Colo.; and Community Life CRC, Lockport, Ill. For almost two decades he served as chaplain of the Will County Detention Center in Illinois. He retired in 2009.

Leys served on former boards of the CRC, including the Board of Trustees, with three years as president, and the board of Home Missions. He liked to jog while memorizing Scripture. People around Zeeland, Mich., where he lived, knew him as the man jogging while flipping through his cards.

Among those who will miss his love and laughter and the twinkle in his eyes are Christine, his wife and partner in ministry for 54 years; three children and spouses; and 13 grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

# Classis Watch: Winter 2021

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, a regional group of churches.

Many of the actions taken by classes are governed by the CRC's Church Order, the rules that govern denominational life. Here are some of the actions by classes in the past several months (up to Feb. 8):

Seminary graduate Derek Ellens was **welcomed into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** (Church Order Article 10).

**Ministers released** from a congregation (Church Order Art. 17a): Revs. Heather Strooboscher, from Calvary CRC (Wyoming, Mich.); David Prince, from At the Crossroads Ministries CRC (Britt, Iowa); Bruce Gritter, from The River Community CRC (Edmonton, Alta.); and Tom Kragt, from Evergreen Ministries (Hudsonville, Mich.). Kragt is a minister with the Reformed Church in America. His credentials are held by Great Lakes City Classis of the RCA.

## Leaving Ministry in the CRC

*Classes may end a pastor's ordained ministry status, guided by Church Order articles 14 and 17.*

*Designations of release (reflecting the manner and spirit in which the minister acted during the time leading up to and including resignation from office) are honorably released, released, dismissed, or in the status of one deposed (Art. 14).*

Timothy Howerzyl was **honorably released**.

Ronald Smeding (October 2019) and Josh Benton were **released**.

David Jeltema was **deposed**.

Ministers retiring (granted emeritus status): Revs. Pablo Canche, Kenneth deBoer, and Charles Kooger (retired March 2019) (Church Order Art. 18).

## Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors, called to specific roles within their**

**classis**, were Bryan Branderhorst (Greater Los Angeles); Erik Pluemer (Southeast U.S.); Enrique Esber (Southeast U.S.); Anthony Vander Laan (Chatham); Mike Brummel (North Cascades); Aaron DeBoer (North Cascades); Matt Hochhalter (Holland); and Ben Snoek (Holland) (Church Order Art. 23).

Rudy Gonzalez (California South) and Barry Foster (Illiana) were granted **commissioned pastor emeritus status**.

## New Ministries and Ministry Changes

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

Iglesia Misionera Renacer, Monterey Park, Calif., and Iglesia Todas Las Naciones, Hudsonville, Mich., were recognized as **emerging**.

**Name change:** Cornerstone Church in Pella, Iowa (formerly Second CRC of Pella).

## Other Matters

Classis Southeast U.S. formed a committee to, among other things, "clarify ... how synodical reports function within the life of the local Christian Reformed congregations and whether those reports have any binding power over decisions made by Neland Avenue CRC." In June, Neland Avenue CRC, in Grand Rapids, Mich., appointed to the office of deacon a woman who is in a same-sex marriage. In its explanation of that action, Neland's council wrote in an August congregational letter, "Our understanding is that all synodical reports and decisions related to homosexuality have been pastoral advice given to the churches (1973, 2002, and 2016)."

## Synod

*These actions connect to synod, the broader assembly of the Christian Reformed Church. While Synod 2021 has been canceled*

*due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these actions were taken before that decision was made.*

**Classis Chatham** is asking synod to clarify "**categories of synodical pronouncements/decisions/reports/positions/advice and the extent to which they bind the churches.**"

**Classis Zeeland requests that synod appoint a committee *in loco*** "to deal directly with Neland Ave. CRC on this public matter that affects our whole denomination." Such committees are delegated by synod to address a situation on a local level. (For example, Synod 2005 appointed a committee *in loco* "to investigate the position of the council of First CRC, Toronto, regarding persons living in same-sex committed relationships and seek a response" *Acts of Synod 2005*, p. 744). Zeeland also asks that synod "declare that Neland has six months from the close of synod to repent for breaking covenant and publicly depose their deacon or begin the process of disaffiliation." **Classis Holland requests that synod "instruct Classis Grand Rapids East to instruct the Council of Neland Avenue CRC to rescind its decision** to ordain a deacon in a same-sex marriage, thus nullifying this deacon's current term."

Several classes are sending requests or communications to synod about the denomination's **human sexuality report**, which now won't be deliberated until 2022 (see p. 16). **Classis Holland asks synod to adopt the report** and its recommendations. **Classis Red Mesa is sending a communication to affirm the report's recommendations** to declare the church's teachings on sexual immorality to already have confessional status and to "declare that Church Order Article 69-c ('Ministers shall not solemnize marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God.') is to be interpreted in the light of the biblical evidence laid out in this report."

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor



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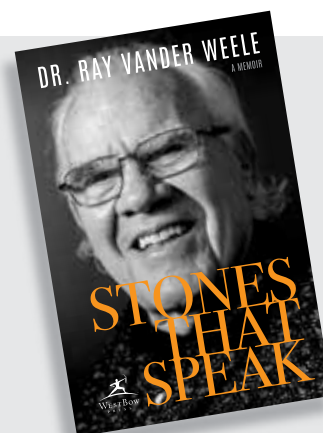
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# Growing in Diversity and Unity



By Cassie Westrate and Victoria Veenstra

**T**he Lord is transforming the Christian Reformed Church from its origin of a predominantly white denomination to more of a mosaic portrait of what God really intends,” said Reggie Smith, the CRCNA’s director of diversity.

In fact, one of the denomination’s *Our Journey 2025* ministry priorities is to “grow in diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome, sharing our faith as we build relationships with and honor the cultures of our neighbors and newcomers.”

Today, as people move throughout the world and various cultures collide, the denomination has an opportunity to worship God and seek God’s shalom together as a diverse family of Christ. But that work is sometimes easier to talk about than to do. It takes intentionality.

Here’s a glimpse of how some CRCNA congregations and agencies are working toward that vision:

#### Welcoming Refugees

“Diversity has taken on all kinds of meanings,” Smith said. “I’m defining diversity in terms of people groups and nations and the biblical theme of God’s kingdom. God’s kingdom is big; it’s wide; it’s vast; it’s spacious.”

One of the ways the CRCNA is growing is by welcoming people from different countries, including through refugee sponsorship. World Renew, the Centre for Public Dialogue, and the Office of Social Justice work to provide better support and a better welcome for refugees moving to Canada and the United States. Several CRC congregations are involved in this ministry too, and some, such as New Life CRC in Guelph, Ont., even serve as sponsors for refugee families.

New Life has been sponsoring refugees for more than 20 years. They consider it a long-term commitment. Currently, the congregation has three active applications for sponsorship underway with the Canadian government—but that doesn’t mean the process is smooth sailing. In one case, they’ve been waiting for two years for an application to be reviewed and approved.

“It is not clear when that processing will occur,” said Gary VanArragon, a member of New Life’s refugee sponsorship team.

The most recent family that New Life sponsored arrived from Somalia via Yemen and Turkey. The family arrived

New Life CRC in Guelph, Ont., helped to sponsor refugees from Somalia. Pictured (from left) are newcomers Abdulkadir, Dhuba, and Mana with co-sponsors Aisha and Abdi.

during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the church jumped into action to work within the current health and safety guidelines.

“When the family arrived,” VanArragon said, “we were required to provide transportation from the airport in sanitized vehicles that were large enough to allow for appropriate distancing.”

The church also worked to provide temporary housing and supplies for the two-week isolation period required for those entering the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. Refugees such as this family from Somalia have experienced trauma and hardship. They often arrive with few belongings and resources. This requires sponsors to work hard and be flexible, but as CRC congregations welcome and support such newcomers, they have the opportunity to be examples of Christ to those who need to experience his love and peace.

#### Growing Through Church Plants

One of the fastest ways the CRCNA is growing, both in numbers and in diversity, is through ethnic minority church plants. Resonate Global Mission partners with more than 15 ethnic minority church plants and more than 10 multiethnic church plants in the U.S. and Canada.

Ethnic minority church plants are uniquely equipped to provide meaningful faith communities for people to worship and learn about God in their own culture and language.

“The most important thing is a sense of belonging,” said Eric Sarwar, pastor of Artesia City Church in Artesia, Calif. “When you are an immigrant, you don’t know the language. You don’t know the system. You don’t know who is going to help you or not.”

Artesia City Church is a faith community of first- and second-generation immigrants from India and Pakistan. Moving to a new country can be isolating, and India and Pakistan both have cultures that are more community-focused than the individualistic cultures in Canada and the U.S. Sarwar planted the church after moving to the U.S. from Pakistan and struggling to find a church where he could worship in his own language and culture.

Artesia City Church has grown rapidly. Sarwar and a few people originally started meeting for worship in a home. Within three months, the house was crowded, and Trinity CRC offered space in its building so the church plant could meet and welcome more people.

One member is a young man who moved alone from India. He didn’t know anyone in his new community and was,



among other challenges, struggling with the immigration process. But then he learned about Artesia City Church. Not only was this man able to worship God in his own language and culture, but he found a spiritual family.

“Living in a foreign land, when you are away from your biological or blood relatives, you find your spiritual bonding with the church,” said Sarwar. “You find family who speak your language, share in your culture, (and) know the challenges you face.”

Artesia City Church is just one example. In Wyoming, Mich., another church plant is providing a faith community for the growing population of Spanish-speaking people from throughout Latin America. Comunidad Cristiana Internacional (International Christian Community) was planted by Robert Garcia with support from Resonate, Classis Grand Rapids South, and Community Christian Reformed Church.

“We are working together in a single vision to reach the Hispanic community,” said Garcia, who is from Venezuela. The church plant has welcomed individuals and families from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Argentina, Mexico, and other countries. Many people who connect with Comunidad Cristiana Internacional are not Christians, but through the church plant, they’re able to learn about God in their own language. Several people have accepted Christ and are continuing to grow in their faith.

Planting and supporting church plants for communities of all cultures and ethnicities in Canada and the U.S. require support from across the denomination. It also provides the entire denomination with new opportunities to listen and learn from other Christians.

### **Growing in Unity**

As people from throughout the world are finding a home in the CRCNA, working to better understand immigration policies and procedures is one way the denomination is striving to better welcome and support people from all cultures and countries.

“There’s a lot of misinformation floating around about our immigration system (in the U.S.),” said Kendra Utter David, the Office of Social Justice’s immigration and justice specialist. That’s why many Christian Reformed churches and community members are participating in the OSJ’s Church Between Borders workshop.

Churches, colleges, universities, and other ministries in the U.S. are developing their understanding of how the immigration system works through the interactive three-part

workshop. Yolanda Vega, senior academic and career adviser at Hope College, regularly offers the experience to her students.

“In a day and age where immigrants are often vilified in the media, it was important to me that the students have accurate information and an understanding of the realities surrounding legal immigration,” Vega said.

The workshop has been helping students better understand the challenges immigrants face. After a recent Zoom meeting, Vega asked students to reflect on what they had learned. Most of them knew little to nothing about the process or pathways of legal entry to the U.S.

“They didn’t know about the parameters limiting each pathway, nor did they realize how difficult and complicated the system is,” Vega said.


That’s one of the most common pieces of feedback the OSJ hears from churches, schools, and other ministries who have participated in Churches Between Borders.

“As Christians called to love our neighbors,” Utter David said, “it’s important to back up and look at how the immigration system really works so that we can work toward immigration justice.”

### **Resources to Help**

This is just a glimpse of how the CRCNA’s churches and ministries are growing into the vision of God’s kingdom in Revelation 7:9—“a great multitude ... from every nation, tribe, people, and language.”

“It’s important to be hospitable to the new thing that God is up to,” Smith said. “It has to do with how we share power, how we share resources, how we share decision-making, how we share the gospel. Unity doesn’t mean assimilation ... (and it) doesn’t mean uniformity. It means that we all bring gifts to the table. We all have a small slice of what God’s kingdom is.”

The ministries of the CRCNA have many resources available to assist you in your journey to grow in unity and diversity. Learn more at [crcna.org/OurJourney](https://crcna.org/OurJourney). 

## More Than We Can Handle

**AS ADIE JOHNSON** reflected on her past year as a chaplain at St. Joseph Hospital in Denver, Colo., she noted the many times she was confronted with the saying “God will not give you more than you can handle.”

“I firmly believe that is neither true nor biblical,” Johnson said. “We often get more than we can handle.”

The past year has proven that. Johnson vividly remembers the fear, disorientation, and confusion she and others felt as the hospital shifted to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

“At first, due to the personal protective equipment shortage, we chaplains were asked not to go into COVID rooms, even at a death,” she said. At the time, not even patients’ family members were allowed to visit.

“Some patients were still conscious as they were dying, and to have no family with them injured all the staff to watch,” Johnson recalled, noting that watching someone die alone was traumatizing and painful, especially for those trained to walk alongside patients and families during these times.

Eventually, a nurse or chaplain was permitted to go into a COVID room to hold an iPad so a patient could see their loved ones. Later, visitors could be in the room at the end of a patient’s life, but Johnson said the trauma of those early days scarred her and other staff. The stress of serving those in need during an escalating crisis for months on end was also trying and stressful.

“By far the most horrendous time for us here at St. Joe’s, beyond that initial shock wave, was the first week of December,” Johnson said. “Our (infection) numbers were skyrocketing again, everyone was exhausted, many staff were getting sick, the ICU was



Adie Johnson, seen here with a therapy pony, serves as a chaplain at St. Joseph Hospital in Denver, Colo.

understaffed, nurses were quitting, and we as chaplains could hardly keep up with the deaths.”

But even in these times of having too much to handle, Johnson could see God at work.


“God was active in the little acts of kindness, sacrifice, and caring I witnessed, from the housekeepers who went in to clean COVID rooms and interacted with patients with deep attention, to physicians racking their brains for ways to help these super-ill patients,” she said.

“God was present in the support from the community that came as cards, meals, masks, musicians outside the front of the hospital, and chalk drawings on our sidewalks.”

Through the fellowship and care of fellow chaplains, hospital staff, the Christian Reformed Chaplaincy & Care Ministry, and the surrounding community, Johnson said she felt supported, valued and never alone during what was one of the hardest years of her life—a year when many faced more than they could handle.

Over the years, Johnson has learned to anchor herself with 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 when someone expresses the opinion that “God won’t give us more than we can handle.”

“Paul flat-out says their experiences were far beyond their ability to endure—in fact, they thought they were going to die!” Johnson explained. “But I love even more what he learned from that experience of getting more than they could handle—that God ‘has delivered us ... and he will deliver us again.’ They set their hope on him, and so should we.”

The CRCNA has 150 chaplains serving in hospitals, military settings, prisons, and other places around the world. Please continue to keep them in your prayers. 

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,  
CRC Communications

**The View from Here**

# The Beautiful and Diverse Family of God

*After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." — Revelation 7:9-10*

**WHEN I BECAME A MEMBER** of Madison Avenue Christian Reformed Church in New Jersey in the early 1980s, that congregation was quite diverse in terms of age, race, and ethnicity. I think it is fair to say that this was an anomaly within the denomination at that time.

Today, however, multiethnic congregations are becoming more and more commonplace in the CRCNA, and the denomination also has more congregations representing specific, non-white, non-Dutch immigrant or language groups."

Today's CRCNA is made up of 1,025 congregations in Canada and the United States. More than 210 of those are congregations primarily consisting of ethnic minorities, and another

I have learned that God's ways of blessing and working are also diverse.

110 are multiethnic congregations. Moreover, as we look at where our denomination's recent growth has been happening, we expect growth in the near future will come from these types of communities. We praise God for this reality and for our movement toward God's Revelation 7:9 vision.

With great diversity, however, come greater challenges. We all know our own stories of God's blessing in our lives, and it is easy to assume that others experience God in exactly the same way. Yet I have learned that God's ways of blessing and working are also diverse. We can see this clearly as we reflect on God's work in the Bible. Jesus' way of healing was not formulaic; sometimes he touched, sometimes he spoke, sometimes he was up close, sometimes he was at a distance. God's vast creativity is unfathomable.

In the same way, as we embrace greater diversity in our families, communities, congregations, and denomination, it is important that we make space to learn about and from each other. We can't rely only on the familiar or traditional ways of worship or of being church.

So let's rise to this challenge and embrace this opportunity. Let us open ourselves to where God might be at work in the diversity of our communities. Let's take time to listen to and learn from each other, especially those who come from different backgrounds than our own. And let's strive for the goal laid out in the denomination-wide ministry plan, *Our Journey 2025*, that our congregations and communities "grow in diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome, sharing our faith as we build relationships with and honor the cultures of our neighbors and newcomers."

God's idea of diversity is so much bigger than ours, yet he calls us to be a significant part of it. May we recognize and embrace how God is weaving a tapestry unlike anything we have ever seen or experienced.



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](http://TheBanner.org).

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## Calvin Seminary Launches New Doctor of Ministry Program



Aaron Einfeld

**A KOREAN-AMERICAN PASTOR** serving in the Philippines, a denominational leader, a pastor from Northern Ireland, and a retired Church of God in Christ minister seeking new ways of education for his denomination are members of the first cohort of students in Calvin Theological Seminary's new Doctor of Ministry program.

Years in the making, the program launched in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in the fall of 2020 as students tuned in online to meet with one another and begin their course work.

Taking between three to five years to complete, this program of study is an alternative to a Doctor of Ministry program for which a pastor must have the means and time to spend several years on a campus working toward the degree. Those programs have developed over time, but CTS had the opportunity to start from scratch, adapting its program to the realities of who makes up congregations, how congregations worship, and how pastors function today.

"We have structured the program to reflect a global church that is diverse in many respects," said Danjuma



Danjuma Gibson

Gibson, co-director of the new program and professor of pastoral care at CTS.

"A lot of people in ministry are second-career or bivocational," he said. "Ours is a deeply Reformed program serving the global church. We see Reformed theology, with its high view of Scripture, as very important."

Aaron Einfeld, director of admissions, added, "The seminary is trying to provide a wider range of options for people in the church. We want to be serving more folks."

This is a program in which students—all of whom must be currently working in ministry—and faculty will work together to identify and fulfill the desires and goals that students bring to the program. Essentially, students will focus on issues they want to address in their ministries.

"We are inviting a plurality of leaders to be part of the program," said Geoff Vandermolen, co-director of the program and director of vocational formation at CTS. "We are asking, 'What kind of person, leader, scholar, and pastoral presence do you want to be?'"



Geoff Vandermolen

The program offers a combination of personal reflection, spiritual formation and development, elective coursework, and directed doctoral studies. Students will write a dissertation to round out their coursework and research.

"I can't wait to see and hear what they come up with to help serve the church," said Vandermolen.

A large portion of the work will take place in conjunction with CTS faculty in the students' pastoral settings. In addition, students will spend time on campus twice a year.

"We will meet for a week, and then students will go back out to their pastoral settings," Gibson said.

Scholars and practitioners from Calvin University and perhaps other institutions are likely to be part of the program, interacting with students in their areas of focus.

"We want to help students to be the scholars they want to be and the pastors they want to be and to do that with a broad Reformed expression," Vandermolen said.

—Chris Meehan,  
CRC Communications

## A Wall of Temptation

**FROM ALCOHOL TO SMOKING** to pornography, the temptations that Gastón faces growing up in Burkina Faso, West Africa, aren't any different from those in most North American contexts.

But the stakes are higher for him.

Some of Gastón's boarding school classmates will sneak out at night, climbing over the school's security wall to join the local party scenes.

"I often followed them over that wall and joined in," Gastón said. Still, as a Christian living in a Muslim-majority country, every time Gastón made that climb, he knew he was hurting not only his own image, but Christ's.

For some of Gastón's friends, he might have been their only personal connection to the Christian faith. So every time Gastón chose to go over the wall, he missed an opportunity to share what it means to follow Christ.

### Wide-reaching Stories

Gastón isn't alone in his struggle. He has peers everywhere in his country—peers who love Christ as much as he does. Working with ReFrame Ministries' French ministry team, young Christians are sharing their stories online to reach French speakers across West Africa. (ReFrame



Gastón (right) offers video testimony with English subtitles at [ReFrameMinistries.org/Easter](https://ReFrameMinistries.org/Easter).

Ministries is the new name of Back to God Ministries International.)

Gastón regularly follows these programs, and they have helped him grow in his faith every day. In fact, he recently shared his own testimony in a new video from ReFrame's French ministry team.

Now when Gastón faces temptations, he repeats a few words to himself: "You're a child of God, and you have to set a good example. You have to leave a mark on your generation, to leave a mark on those around you."

### A Turning Point

In addition to talking about temptations he faces, Gastón also shared his story of a near-death experience.

While traveling home one day, Gastón was in a terrible motorcycle crash that left him in a coma.

"After coming out of the coma," Gastón shared, "for three months straight I couldn't even form a complete sentence. But one day, while I was in my hospital bed, I heard this inner voice saying, 'If you believe, you will see the glory of God.'"

That time of suffering became a turning point for Gastón. He now wants to live every day for Christ alone.

The Christian Reformed Church's work through ReFrame helps young Christians like Gastón know they are not alone in their faith journey and in the struggles that can come with it.

"I would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to take part in this program," Gastón said.

—Brian Clark, ReFrame Ministries

## The Questions Strangers Ask

**THE MASKS WE WEAR** to slow the spread of COVID-19 hide the smiles that once helped us acknowledge strangers. But in the hamlet of Neerlandia, in rural Alberta, Canada, members of Neerlandia Christian Reformed Church donned masks to welcome a stranger.

Ayan was that stranger—and not just a stranger, but a refugee: Ayan and her four children arrived in Neerlandia in August 2020, in the midst of the pandemic.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, which is Canada's Blended Visa Office-Referral program, identifies refugees and connects them with private sponsors for resettlement in Canada. IRCC and private sponsors share the costs of supporting refugees for one year. World Renew's refugee program provides support and guidance to private sponsors such as Neerlandia CRC to sponsor families like Ayan's.

Ayan fled Saudi Arabia as a political refugee and found asylum in Malaysia. "Women have no rights in Saudi Arabia," she explained. Sadly, as a refugee she also had no rights in Malaysia, and she lived in constant fear that she'd be detained by police.

As the family prepared to resettle in Canada, Ayan's children questioned her: "Where will we go to school?" None of the children had been thriving in the Malaysian school. "Will we like Canadian food?" In Malaysia, the family often did not have enough to eat. "Will we see snow?"

Once the family arrived in Neerlandia, masked refugee committee members delivered food during the mandatory 14-day quarantine period and communicated with the family via WhatsApp. The children had more questions: "Are there wild animals in the bushes?" The refugee committee members



Ayub (14), Ayan, Omar (5), Abyan (11), and Aniso (12) in front of their new home.

reassured them the animals are harmless. "Why is it so cold in the house?" Ayan needed instructions on how to use the thermostat.

After the quarantine ended, the refugee committee members continued to visit, and the family soon welcomed the faces behind the masks as friends. The children started school and made friends there too. And as the family became more accustomed to their new life, another question was answered: they saw snow!

On a chilly December day, Ayan smiled as her son Omar played in mounds of snow. "Snow is fun!" Omar yelled. "I like snow! I like Canada!"

Ayan and her family are not the only ones who have gained from this connection. One member of the refugee committee admits, "I love this



Omar playing in the snow.

family. They bring diversity into our community. It's so great to learn (about) a new culture." And for the refugee committee that has sponsored four BVOR families since 2015, one question remains: "When will we welcome another family?"

—Laurisa O'Brien, World Renew





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# The Armor of God

**GOD IS A MASTER DESIGNER.** God made everything (from nothing!), and he not only knew what to make but how to make it. And God's amazing handiwork is inspiring! Scientists and engineers often study structures in nature for ideas. One example is the design of protective gloves, vests, and helmets. Many animals have armor that protects them from the environment and from predators.

## Armored Animals

In Spanish, "armadillo" means "little armored one." The bony plates that cover its body are loosely connected so that the armor is flexible (the three-banded armadillo can even roll itself into a ball!). This armor protects the armadillo from thorny shrubs.

A pangolin will also roll into a ball when threatened. Its name comes from a Malay word that means "roller" or "one who rolls up." Instead of the armadillo's bony shell, however, pangolins are covered in scales made from keratin—the substance our hair and fingernails are made of.

Turtles, tortoises, and terrapins have shells that are permanently attached to their spine and rib cage. Their armor isn't flexible, but some turtles can pull their heads into their shells. You can learn more about turtle shells here: [tinyurl.com/udq8qg5f](https://tinyurl.com/udq8qg5f).


Shrimp, lobsters, snails, and oysters have something called an exoskeleton, or an outside skeleton. These exoskeletons aren't made of bone, but they support and protect these creatures' bodies.

Reptiles, including snakes and lizards, have scales made from keratin. Their scales protect them from the weather and allow them to live in dry places by slowing water loss from their bodies.

Fish also have scales. In some types of fish, the scales grow as the fish grows.

If you looked at one of these scales up close, you would see growth rings just like a tree has.

## The Armor of God

When you think of armor, you might think of things that protect your body from being hurt. The armor of God is different. The armor of God can protect you from things like temptation and lies. In Ephesians 6:10-17, we read that the armor of God is the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. When we study God's Word and trust in Jesus as our Savior, God protects us against temptation and lies. 



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





# Praying with Jesus in Solitude

By Denise Posie

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. —Mark 1:35*

**I**t is not unusual for me to hear someone say, “I’m struggling with finding time to be alone with God in prayer.” I believe many Christians have this same struggle. Perhaps you have said this yourself. Finding time is a significant barrier to spending time in prayer. It is not always easy to sacrifice and give up something else. Most people have busy lives filled with so many meaningful activities involving family, work, ministry, and personal matters. This is a reality of the 21st century. However, many of us desire to see something different for our current prayer practices.

We can be inspired by Jesus’ example of finding quiet time with God. The gospel of Mark describes how Jesus and his disciples are on the move from one place to another. In the synagogue at Capernaum, people identify Jesus as one who teaches with authority and who, more surprisingly, casts out an impure spirit from a man on the Sabbath. Jesus’ reputation grows, and so do the crowds following him.

His disciples James and John accompany him to their next stop, Simon and Andrew’s home. Within moments of their arrival, Jesus is told that Simon’s mother-in-law is sick in bed with a fever.

This next part makes me smile: Jesus goes to her, takes her hand, and helps her up, and the fever leaves her. The atmosphere changes as gratitude and

joy fill the room, and she begins to serve her guests. The news about her healing travels.

Later that evening, Jesus heals all the sick and demon-possessed who come to him. The night was long and draining. The rhythm changes, though.

Jesus probably got some sleep, but there was something far more important on his mind. He enjoyed being with people, but not always. The voices of people questioning his power and authority, of the sick expecting to be healed, and of the disciples faded away. Mark describes Jesus finding an opportune time to leave the house and go to a quiet place to pray. Up to this point, Jesus had been responding to others’ needs. Now he attends to his own needs.



The outer work of ministry and inner work of soul care is propelled by his relationship and oneness with the Father. Jesus prays in solitude, an essential part of his life.

There are two other instances when Mark describes Jesus withdrawing from his disciples and the crowds to talk with God in solitude.

Before feeding the 5,000, Jesus invites his disciples to “come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31). He invites us today to do the same. After teaching and feeding the crowd, Jesus went up on a mountainside to pray (6:46).

Just before his arrest, late at night, Jesus meets alone with God in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-41). Mark describes how challenging it was for the disciples to stay awake and pray nearby.

In Mark 1, he purposefully leaves while the disciples are asleep. We note the importance of alone time with God. Little is known about what happened in these moments of solitude and prayer, but I believe it was critical for Jesus’ well-being and mission to regularly set aside his public ministry to get away to pray. He left the regular routine of things behind.

We can learn from Jesus’ example. It begins with a desire to get away for some time alone with God in prayer.

My first retreat experience occurred when I was in seminary: a one-day respite from the typical routine of attending classes and studying. We received an optional prayer guide with biblical themes and Scripture passages. I had access to my Bible, a hymnal, a journal, a prayer shawl, and a prayer rug. There was also a prayer tower available on campus. (These types of dedicated places for prayer are becoming more common on seminary campuses.)

Retreatants were told not to interact with each other, but to practice silence. At the beginning of the day, I could not imagine how fruitful and fulfilling

During these  
times of  
quietness,  
we grow in  
knowing God  
and ourselves.

this experience would be. Since then, it has become a regular part of my life.

When is the right time to pray alone? Some faith traditions practice morning, midday, and evening times of prayer. It takes time to figure out what works best for your lifestyle. There is no set format.

Different seasons of the year or life rhythms require schedule adjustments. Jesus prayed for hours at a time and sometimes all night. Some individuals spend a few days or even longer at a retreat or monastic center, seeking God’s face using labyrinths, libraries, bird-watching, and nature trails.

In my travels, sometimes I choose to stay at a monastic center instead of a hotel. If a retreat center is not an option, a long walk at the lake or some other safe, secluded place can be a good space to meet God in prayer.

#### **How to Get Alone Time with God**

The thought of being alone might not be easy if we do not like to be alone.

Being alone with God means we must temporarily disconnect from our family, friends, and coworkers, our ordinary situations, and our possessions. Some people put in their calendar an event called “Meeting with God” or “Quiet Time.”

For this to happen, our family, work, and school responsibilities must be covered by someone else. Hopefully a relative or close friend will see the value of this time away and graciously meet our needs.

Our laptops and cellphones must be powered off and out of sight—no peeping on social media or reading the news. We do not need to feel guilty about “unproductiveness” or doing what seems to be nothing.

When I was pastor at Immanuel CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich., our council went away for a one-and-a-half-day planning retreat. For some it was a challenge. Several of us worked a full day before arriving at the Hermitage Community retreat center in Three Rivers, Mich., in time for a 5:30 p.m. dinner together.

As the retreat facilitator, I asked everyone to practice silence from dinner-time until our first meeting the next morning. The intent was to give us time to disconnect from our busy schedules and to have time alone with God.

When told about this arrangement, one person was upset. This person worked in a critical care environment and was looking forward to great conversations at the dinner table and late into the night. But we followed the original plan.

The next morning all of us gave testimonies about how we needed this time of solitude. The person who was initially upset was now grateful.

In her book *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, Ruth Haley Barton talks about getting in touch with what’s true about us.

“Most of us are more tired than we know at the soul level,” she writes. “We are teetering on the brink of dangerous exhaustion, and we really cannot do anything else until we have gotten some rest.”

We do not easily disconnect from patterns and practices that have become so much of our life. But

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purposefully connecting with God—speaking, listening, and being silent in God’s presence—can be an adventurous, reverential, and liberating experience.

God does not communicate with everyone in the same way. God connects with us through Scripture, circumstances, and the Holy Spirit. We must intentionally engage God’s Word and place ourselves in a position or posture to receive.

Jesus prayed during in-between times of a typical day of ministering to others and teaching the disciples; he intentionally went off by himself to pray. He was free at the moment! We must trust the Spirit and do the same, showing up before God as we are. We need not worry about anything; it is a safe place.

Purposefully connecting with God might involve going alone to a particular place that has meaning for you, such as a lake, a nature trail, a mountain, or a retreat center. I live about 45 minutes from beautiful Lake Michigan. Sometimes I am drawn to the lake—even in winter!—because it is one of my quiet places to meet our God.

If you decide to stay at home, you might choose a comfortable chair, your crafting corner, a designated prayer closet, or somewhere else for a private time in prayer.

During these times of quietness, we grow in knowing God and ourselves. When we struggle with something, or when illumination or conviction happens based on a recent sermon we heard, the Spirit might prompt us to pray. Dallas Willard describes it this way in his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*: “In solitude, we confront our own soul with its obscure forces and conflicts that escape our attention when we are interacting with others.”

These matters might influence the intensity of how we pray and what we pray for.

Being alone in prayer might mean being in a position of vulnerability in which we open ourselves to God. We get real with God about what we think and feel without mincing our words. God knows what is in our hearts and minds. We carry our thoughts, experiences, pain, and emotions with us. Life can be hard at times. There is value in bringing our reality to the Lord in prayer:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

In Psalm 63:1-8, David describes his times of trouble in the wilderness. He is thirsty and longing for God in a barren place away from his home and place of worship. Yet he seeks and depends on God.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we might have felt depleted, tired, alone, and unable to go to our place of worship. We went to secret closets or quiet places, seeking comfort and assurance of God’s help.

None of God’s people are exempt from hard times. The key is knowing to whom we belong and from where our help comes. There are some things in life no one but God knows about, and God is the only one who can turn the situation around. Thanks be to God!

Jesus faced his most vulnerable and intimate moments in Gethsemane, a familiar, quiet place to be on his knees, alone with Abba, his Father, in hope of another way. He “prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke

22:44). Jesus rested in knowing his Father’s will.

It is God’s will for us to make time to be alone with him in prayer. We might struggle, but it will not be a struggle one day when we least expect it. Our struggle will become a longing to be with our God, who loves us and whom we love.

May God help each of us, our families, and our churches to make room for regular quiet times in prayer.



Denise L. Posie is a diversity, equity, and inclusion discipleship coach at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich. She is the author of *Consider a Greater Purpose: Esther, Vashti and the Courageous Women Who Followed*.

1. Have you struggled to find time to be alone with God? If yes, why? If not, how do you find the time and sustain the practice?
2. Share your experiences of prayer retreats or what you know or have heard about them.
3. Are you comfortable with silence? Why or why not?

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## The Great Renew

If you and I walk  
in the ways  
of the Lord,  
God will make  
everything new.



Frank DeVries enjoys reading, writing, making up songs, and being with his wife, Celia. He attends Fleetwood Christian Reformed Church in Surrey, B.C.

**“SEE, FRANS? HERE. SEE IT?”** my father asked, outlining the letter “M” in the lines on the palm of my right hand. “And here is the other one,” he said, tracing the same letter in my left hand. “Two Ms. They stand for the Latin phrase *memento mori*, meaning ‘remember someday you will die.’ God put them there so you would never forget that!” This is how, at the age of about 8, I became acquainted with the concept of death.

We all are familiar with death. When family members have died, we usually like to think of them as having gone to heaven. We have a vague notion that heaven is somewhere “up there,” but more likely it is located well outside of our sense of space or even time. Sometimes we wonder what heaven is like. Through two separate accidents we lost our daughter, Margaret, and our 13-year-old son, Ronald, a student in my own eighth grade class, and I well recall the unrealistic yet pressing need to peek around the corner of heaven to make sure they were OK.

Although Scripture has little information about heaven, we have been given some pretty good hints about it. In Luke 23:42-43 we read that one of the crucified criminals begged of Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom!” to which Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Jesus likens heaven to “paradise.” We also know that, once there, we will have transformed yet real bodies like Jesus’. (Remember Thomas’ interaction with the resurrected Jesus in John 20?) Other passages in Scripture point to this too. In Revelation 22 some are even described as wearing robes, and Job asserts, “In my flesh I will see God” (Job 19:26).

In heaven, everything is perfect and good. In God’s immediate presence, how else could it be? How struck we’ll be, too, by the all-pervading joy

we’ll suddenly experience! And how could we possibly miss the overall feeling of anticipation not unlike that at a great celebration where the guest of honor is expected at any moment? This, of course, is because of the wait for the great resurrection event at the end of time, a topic much discussed in Scripture. One example is found in John 11. When Martha hears Jesus was coming to see Lazarus, who had already been dead for days, she is annoyed and confronts Jesus with, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus replies, “Your brother will rise again,” to which Martha in turn responds, still a little tartly, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Of course, when Jesus reminds her of who he is, Martha quickly and humbly acknowledges his authority.


In the revelation John saw when he was in exile on Patmos, God gave him a vision of what soon will be:

“Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth.’ ... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, ... and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes’” (Rev. 21:1-4).

If you and I walk in the ways of the Lord, God will make everything new.

There will be no more death or mourning, crying or pain.

Instead there will be singing, dancing, and making music, and we’ll be doing the things we liked to do, but now doing them perfectly. And for all eternity our lives will be lives of joy.

Praise! Praise! Praise! Praise! 

1. What do you think heaven is like, or how have you heard it described?

2. What biblical passages can you find that tell us about heaven?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)



# The Body and Blood of Motherhood

Even though  
Jesus is the Savior  
of the world,  
he was nursed,  
probably scraped  
his knees, and  
definitely made  
dirty diapers.

**I RECENTLY GAVE BIRTH** to my fifth baby, and my body knows it. My soft middle remembers the way it slowly stretched to accommodate the lives that grew inside it. The little red mole above my lip sprouted while carrying my first child, and I have four similar markings from my other children. I've had to learn how to cope with and medicate a roller coaster of hormones that have resulted in seasons of postpartum depression. Even my knees testify to multiple pregnancies with the stretch marks they wear. And that is just the short list of long-term side effects I've personally experienced during childbirth.

## The Weight of Motherhood

There is a certain weight to being a parent, and that doesn't apply only to those carrying extra pounds from pregnancy. The physical toll of nurturing life lasts long after a newborn cries out with their first breath, whether or not someone gave birth to the kids they are raising. There are babies to bounce, diapers to change, toddlers to chase, and spills to wipe up. There are muddy pants to launder, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to prepare, and games of pretend to play. There are sibling fights to break up, discipline to carry out, and "owies" to kiss. By 7 o'clock most nights, my body is tired, and there is a large spot of spit-up on my shoulder.

I don't always carry this weight well. In moments of self-pity, I want to scream that I'm tired of working a 24-hour job while only being paid in my children's bodily fluids. My attitude is worse when my kids act out or seem ungrateful. I want to show them the stretch marks and moles and hours of sleep I've lost and say, "Can't you see all that I've sacrificed in order to give you life?"

Although it's not considered polite to describe the gory details of childbirth

and daily motherhood, this is the way Jesus chose to come to us. The labor pains that ripped through his mother's body were the same as the pains women experience today. Even though Jesus is the Savior of the world, he was nursed, probably scraped his knees, and definitely made dirty diapers. His daily life involved the same hunger and fatigue shared by all human beings. And his death that we closely examine during this season of Lent was excruciatingly physical too.

## The Weight of the Cross

When I was in middle school, my teacher read out loud an in-depth description of how Roman floggings and crucifixions took place. It was the first time I heard the words "Jesus died on the cross" and listened with more than spiritual ears. My entire body cringed. What I've read in the Bible is enough to grasp the big idea of salvation, but learning historical context has helped the physical cost of my salvation sink deep into my heart. For example, it's enough to know that "Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged" (John 19:1). Still, it's impactful to learn that Roman soldiers used whips made of leather tipped with pieces of lead or bone to tear the skin along a victim's shoulders, back, and legs. I knew Jesus' death involved torturous pain and blood loss, but I didn't know that while hanging on the cross Jesus couldn't breathe.

As the crucified hung from the nails in their wrists, the muscles in their chests were paralyzed and unable to push air out of their lungs. They had to push against the nails in their feet—rubbing against nerve and bone—in order to lift their bodies up the cross beam so their chests could compress and their lungs could exhale. Their legs would severely cramp as they held their body weight, forcing them to give up and hang by the nails in



Kendra Broekhuis lives in Milwaukee, Wis., and is a member of City Reformed Church. She is a mom of five and the author of *Here Goes Nothing: An Introvert's Reckless Attempt to Love Her Neighbor*. You can find her on Facebook and Instagram @kendrabroekhuis.



Photo by Larry Crayton for Unsplash

their wrists again. These movements up and down the cross in order to breathe became less frequent as the victim's body wore out. Their oxygen levels would fall, and their hearts would become so compressed that they could no longer pump blood through their bodies (paraphrased from the online article *A Physician's View of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ*, by Dr. C. Truman Davis).

Pilate "handed (Jesus) over to be crucified" (Mark 15:15), but it's hard to stomach that this meant Jesus endured more than six hours of his flesh ripped

apart, his nervous system tortured, his bones disjointed, his muscles cramped, his thirst enraged, his lungs slowly suffocated, his heart literally broken.

All because Jesus chose to carry the weight of our sins.

#### **The Weight of Glory**

The physical sacrifices of parenting are not equal in any way to the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. However, the weight we bear as caregivers points us to the weight Christ bore for us. As his children, we can examine his scars and come to our own

conclusion: look at all he sacrificed in order to give us life! The beautiful thing is that, unlike the exasperated way I sometimes approach my children, Jesus' goal isn't to keep score. In fact, when he showed his disciples the nail marks in his hands and the place where the spear pierced his side, he said, "Peace be with you!" (John 20:19).

This truth doesn't make me less tired as a mom, but the way Jesus endured a heavy cost in order to give me life helps me frame the physicality of motherhood with eyes of purpose instead of martyrdom. Jesus' blood motivates our bodies. Love costs us, but at the same time we rejoice that the sacrifices we make are for the sake of building up the church (Col. 1:24). Our bodies are indeed wasting away, but our grief and everyday trials are "achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor. 4:16-17).

The physical nature and death of Jesus matters. As the Heidelberg Catechism reminds us in Q&A 16, Jesus had to be truly human (and truly righteous) because "God's justice demands that human nature, which has sinned, must pay for sin; but a sinful human could never pay for others." This physicality also matters because it reminds us that the obedience God asks of us in our daily lives does not consist only of activities seen as "spiritual," such as reading the Bible and attending church.

The mundane moments of our days that only God sees are opportunities to worship him too. When we kneel down to pick up cereal from the floor or change diapers, we are bowing to Jesus as we care for the most vulnerable among us. **B**

# The Surprising Presence of Jesus in Persian Poetry

*Editor's note: Recently I read the best-selling book *The Stationary Shop*, by Marjan Kamali. Set in Tehran, the book centers on a shop selling not only pots of jewel-toned ink, but also volumes of poetry by the great Persian poets. Reading this gem opened my eyes to the wonder of Persian poetry, and a few days ago I spotted this golden quote from Hafiz on Instagram: "Fear is the cheapest room in the house. I would like to see you living in better conditions." That Hafiz is quoted in this long-ago-planned article by Sylvie Charliekaram, an Iranian Canadian and Christian Reformed elder, is the icing on my Persian poetry cake. I hope you will be as touched and inspired as I am by Sylvie's revelations.*

**AS A CHRISTIAN WOMAN** growing up in Iran, I was always fascinated that the name of Jesus Christ was mentioned in many poems by famous classical poets in Persia (Iran). At school, we used to study many of them as part of our Persian literature class and memorize the poems to be recited in front of the whole class. After so many years, I can still recite many of those poems from memory.

Iran is a land rich with culture and traditions that date back thousands of years, an ancient civilization with a long history of art, literature, and poetry rooted in the very existence of its being.

Many Persian poets are well known to the Western world. Famous Persian poets such as Rumi, Ferdowsi, Saadi Shirazi, Hafiz Shirazi, Attar Neishaboori, Nezami Ganjavi, Nasser Khosrow, and Omar Khayyam have been translated into English and other languages. Their influence on literature has traveled far and wide.


*Jesus Christ in the Literary Works of Persian Poets* is a book in Farsi, the Persian language, by Rev. Allahiar Mirzaei, one of my beloved pastors

from my church in Iran. Mirzaei is now 103 and lives in Canada. His genuine love for Jesus Christ and for Persian poetry inspired him to spend many years gathering the poems in this book, which I hope and pray will one day be translated into English.

He gathers 280 poems by the best-loved Persian poets. Each poem reflects upon different aspects of Jesus' life: the miracles of his birth, healing the sick, and bringing the dead back to life; his crucifixion; and, most significantly, his resurrection from the dead. The love, compassion, humility, and simplicity of Jesus' earthly life, and above all the life-giving breath and miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, are woven throughout these poems.

How meaningful for me to describe how the love and ministry of Jesus Christ have profoundly influenced the work of many Persian poets in an Islamic country! By the work of the Holy Spirit, these references to Jesus will continue to touch many more hearts in the future.

One poem by the world-renowned Persian poet Hafiz has always inspired me to live by the fruit of the Holy Spirit and seek his guidance even through the darkest and most discouraging experiences of my life. The verse says, "And if the grace of the Holy Spirit guides us once more, others would also perform what Jesus did."

To him be all the power and glory. Amen! 



Sylvie Charliekaram was born in Tehran, Iran. An elder at Willowdale CRC in Toronto, Ont., Charliekaram is a senior manager at the nonprofit Working Women Community Centre. She is the cofounder of Spiritual Growth Ministry, ministering to Farsi speakers in Toronto and beyond.



## The Enneagram for Spiritual Formation: How Knowing Ourselves Can Make Us More Like Jesus

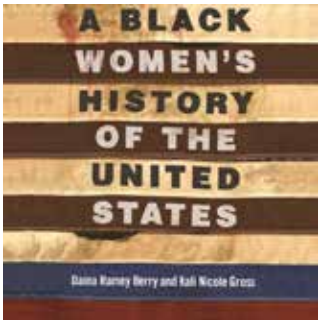
By AJ Sherrill

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

In this wise and insightful book, AJ Sherrill offers readers an advanced course in the Enneagram, a personality theory with ancient roots that includes nine different personality types. He goes beyond the basics to unlock new ways of viewing identity, personality, discipleship, evangelism, and the Bible.

One of the most fascinating and helpful aspects of the book is how Sherrill connects each type to a biblical character, for better or for worse. Every personality has a healthy, bright side and a darker, more problematic side. We are all fallen creatures. Sherrill helps us "excavate" our darker sides to reveal more and more of our true identity as children of God. "To be made in God's image," he says, "is to be *agapetos*—beloved." (Brazos Press)





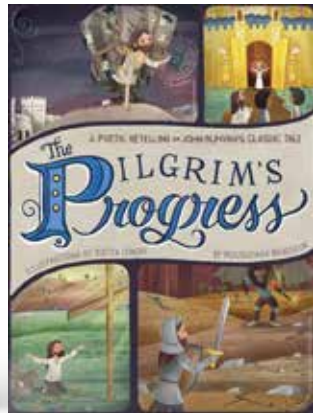
## A Black Women's History of the United States (Audiobook)

*By Diana Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, narrated by Janina Edwards*

Reviewed by Michelle Loyd-Paige

Did you know that Isabel de Olvera, a woman of African heritage, explored much of North America in the early 1600s as a free woman? That was news to me. I didn't know there were women explorers in the 1600s, let alone free Black women explorers. Most of my classes on Black U.S. history started with slavery. But we were not always slaves.

This book is a history of the U.S. from the 1600s to 2000—but one in which Black women and their contributions are on full display. Janina Edwards' narration is arresting and comforting, whether she is narrating the brutality of slavery or the wonder of discovery. I see God's hand of grace and mercy on the lives of Black women in the United States. (Not recommended for young listeners. Audible, 10 hours, 2 minutes)

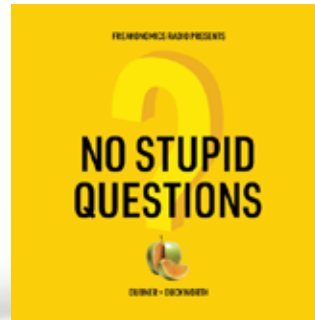


## The Pilgrim's Progress: A Poetic Retelling of John Bunyan's Classic Tale

*By Rousseaux Brasseur, illustrated by Katja Longhi*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In 1678, John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegory depicting the Christian life. Since then, the novel has been translated into more than 200 languages and has never been out of print. In this poetic retelling of Bunyan's work, Rousseaux Brasseur makes the tale accessible to a young, modern audience. The narrator, Christian, experiences trials and temptations as well as companionship and refreshment on his journey from the City of Destruction to the Cross and then to the heavenly City of Glory. The book is recommended for children ages 8-12. Its allegorical content and spiritual meaning will be better understood and appreciated with adult guidance. Katja Longhi's bright, animated illustrations enhance Brasseur's rhyming couplets. (Harvest House Publishers)



## No Stupid Questions (Podcast)

Reviewed by Kristen Parker

Which gets you further: talent or effort? Is optimism a luxury or a good? How much do your friends affect your future? All of these questions and more are talked about on the *No Stupid Questions* podcast.

Author Stephen Dubner (*Freakonomics*) and research psychologist and author Angela Duckworth (*Grit*) use this podcast to create an environment in which they can ask each other anything, because there are "no stupid questions." Their casual conversations are interwoven with intellectual insights.

*No Stupid Questions* leaves the listener feeling like a fly on the wall listening in to two people chatting over coffee. It can be found on Apple Podcasts, Good Podcasts, Spotify, and other podcast streaming services. Each episode is under 40 minutes.

## The Lowdown

**Posting Peace:** Author Douglas S. Bursch offers practical ways to model online peacemaking and reconciliation. (IVP)

**The Princess and the President:** A friendship forged in war is beautifully portrayed by Kyle MacLachlan as U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and Swedish star Sofia Helin as Norwegian Crown Princess Martha in *Atlantic Crossing*, based on a true story of passion and politics. (April 4, PBS)

**Godzilla vs. Kong:** It's the showdown we've been waiting for since 2014's *Godzilla*. Director Adam Wingard helms this climactic entry in Warner Bros.' MonsterVerse series. Who will win when the giant ape takes on the lizard king? (PG-13, Warner Bros., March 31)

**Malcolm Gladwell's Latest:** In *The Bomber Mafia*, Gladwell ponders how technology and people's best intentions collide in the heat of war while examining the bombing of Tokyo during World War II. (April 27, Little, Brown and Company)

## Was the Resurrection of Jesus a Myth?

Jesus' resurrection story went against conventional ancient Jewish resurrection beliefs.



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

### THERE HAVE BEEN ALLEGATIONS

that Jesus' resurrection was a myth, a story the apostles and gospel writers invented to support their claims that Jesus was the Son of God. Let me give you three reasons why I think the resurrection of Jesus was not made up by early Christians.

First, if the gospel writers made it up, why did they make women the first eyewitnesses to the empty tomb? In that first-century world, women were regarded as less-than-credible witnesses. From ancient Roman law to Jewish rabbinic law, women's testimony was treated as unreliable. Yet all four gospels consistently described women as the first eyewitnesses. In our day, this would be like using the testimony of a drunk person to back up claims of a miracle. That's not very smart if I want people to believe my story. Similarly, it wouldn't make sense for the apostles to use women as primary witnesses to the central event of Christian faith unless it was true, as embarrassing as it might have been for them.

Second, Jesus' resurrection story went against conventional ancient Jewish resurrection beliefs. Most first-century Jews believed that bodily resurrection only happens on the last day, on Judgment Day. That is what Martha assumed Jesus was talking about in their conversation outside Lazarus' tomb in John 11. As Martha said, "I know he (Lazarus) will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (v. 24). This Jewish belief means that everybody altogether will be resurrected at the end time—a large-scale resurrection. Nobody thought the Messiah was going to be resurrected first, all by himself, many years or even centuries before Judgment Day. In fact, most Jews weren't expecting the Messiah to die, let alone be resurrected!


Furthermore, although most ancient Jews were not clear as to what resurrected bodies might look like, many drew from Daniel 12:3 and believed those new bodies would be glorious, shining like the stars. But the gospels make no mention at all of a shining body. Jesus' resurrected body was transformed, but not shining. So if the disciples made up Jesus' resurrection, these unconventional factors might make their account less believable.

Finally, if early Christians made up the resurrection of Jesus, why did their religious opponents not produce Jesus' body to refute their story? It's easy to prove Jesus did not rise from the dead: just produce the body—unless the Jewish religious authorities didn't have a body to show.

Matthew's gospel describes how the religious leaders bribed the soldiers who guarded the tomb to spread a lie that the disciples stole the body (Matt. 28:11-15). Yet people still believed the resurrection story.

Perhaps those who knew the disciples knew they were not likely to overpower a group of fully armed soldiers to steal a body.

Furthermore, even if they did steal Jesus' body, why would they take time to unwrap it before taking it away? The gospels note that the linen used to wrap the body was left in the tomb (Luke 24:12; John 20:5-7). It doesn't make sense to unwrap the body first if you are in a hurry to steal away. It's an unusual bit of storytelling detail, isn't it?

Given these facts—and more I haven't mentioned—it seems unlikely Jesus' resurrection was simply invented by his disciples. 





**DEADLINES:** 4/5/21 for May; 5/3/21 June. Subject to availability. Details online.

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**Denominational Announcements**

**NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER (U.S.)** In May 1988 the President of the United States signed into law a bill establishing the first Thursday of May as a National Day of Prayer. This year the National Day of Prayer falls on Thursday, May 6. The synod of the CRC has urged churches in the United States "to observe faithfully any national day of prayer which the United States President publicizes to the nation" (Acts of Synod 1969). "Our churches must be open to our congregations and our fellow [citizens] on such occasions, when God in his providence leads those in civil authority to call our citizenry to pray. We must pray for and with our country" (Acts of Synod 1958). Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director of the CRCNA

**Announcement of Candidacy**

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

**Available for Call**

The council of Emden Christian Reformed Church is pleased to announce that the **REV. JOSEPH KIM**, having completed his Ph.D in Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University on 12/11/2020, is once again eligible for a call as a minister of the Word. May God use this training to further his kingdom.

**Church Positions Available**

**DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES** - CrossPoint Church in Chino, CA is seeking a Director of Children's Ministries to lead and maintain our dynamic and growing children's programs while nurturing faith and belonging in our youngest members and visitors. See the opportunity profile at [www.crosspointchino.org/employment](http://www.crosspointchino.org/employment).

**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](mailto: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](mailto:maranathacrcsearch@gmail.com)

**PASTOR** First CRC in beautiful Thunder Bay, ON is seeking a full-time pastor to lead our congregation. Please email your resume or inquiries to [search@fcrctbay.ca](mailto:search@fcrctbay.ca).

**YOUTH AND WORSHIP LEADER.** Christ Community Church in Sheboygan, Wisconsin is searching for a full-time ministry leader who is in love with the Lord, humble, Spirit-led, relates well to all generations, has a heart for prayer, youth, appreciates contemporary and traditional worship, and is ready to join us in following the Lord to reach our community in bold and creative ways. This person must be ready to work hard and embrace our family just as we will welcome this person with open arms for what we expect will be many years of growing together. Interested Candidates please send resume to [jimriemersma@gmail.com](mailto:jimriemersma@gmail.com).

**Birthdays**

**BIRTHDAY 105 YEARS**

**MINNIE (DE LEEUW) STOLK** will celebrate with joy and thanksgiving God's blessings for her 105 years on April 30. Birthday greetings are welcomed and can be sent to The Laurels of Hudsonville (3650 Van Buren St. 49426)

**BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS**

**HILDA HOOGENBOOM (FORMALLY DE BOER)** will celebrate d.v. her 100th birthday on March 21, 2021. She is the oldest charter member at Ebenezer CRC Jarvis, Ontario. She resides at # 106 - 98 Talbot St E Jarvis ON NOA IJO. Her family thank God for His many years of faithfulness in her life.



**JAYNE FEENSTRA VANDERMALE** of 3600 E. Fulton SE Apt DC 209, Grand Rapids 49546, will celebrate her 100th birthday May 1. Jayne enjoyed 64 years of marriage to Bud before he passed away in 2010. A joy and blessing to her daughter and husband, Anne and Stephen Tuuk, daughters-in-law Mimi and Kathelene and

their husbands, eight grandchildren, 17 great grandchildren, sisters Marjorie Farhat and Gloria Vos, many nieces and nephews, and countless friends, we all praise God for your long, rich and exemplary life.

**JOHANNA (KOOY) KONYNENBELT**, oldest resident of Nobleford, Alberta and lifelong member of Canada's first CRC, celebrates her 100th birthday on April 19. Her children, grandchildren, great- and great-great-grandchildren thank God for her love, faith and many contributions to her community and church over the years.



**MARGUERITE (PEG) KNOLL** celebrates her 100th birthday on April 23. Thanking God for her loving and caring heart, prayers, and faith are her children, Robert [Ruth]. Patricia [John] Timmerman, and Randall [Marijo], her 10 grandchildren, and 24 great grandchildren. She feels so blessed for all these years the Lord has given her. Peg resides at 2121 Raybrook SE, DeVos 355, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

**BIRTHDAY 95 YEARS**

**GLENN WYNGARDEN** of 500 Parkside, Apt. 137, Zeeland, MI 49464 celebrated his 95th birthday on March 13. Glenn (Lefty) enjoyed 71 years of marriage with his loving wife Marge before her death in 2018. He is a joy and blessing to his children Rob & Sally Petroelje and Doug and Sandy Holtrop, to 15 grandchildren/spouses and 21 great-grandchildren. We love you!

**Obituaries**

**GRIEDE, Albert "Al"** Age 90 of La Mesa, CA Went home to be with Jesus on February 14, 2021. Son of Jacob and Reka Griede Beloved husband of the late Esther Griede (Meines). Loving father of Cyndi (Ken) Boss, Sharon Houtman, Jack (Gayle) Griede. Grandfather of 12; Great-Grandfather of 11. Brother to Annamae Gorter; Marilyn Van Kalsbeek (deceased). [www.facebook.com/albertgriede](http://www.facebook.com/albertgriede)

**LIGTENBERG, Verla** died peacefully in her sleep Feb 7 at 97. Daughters Sheri Ligtenberg & Candy (& Glenn) Ornee are thankful for her rich full life. Grandchildren, Jamie Gilliland & Danny Ornee, great grandchildren, Alana, Kaden & Brooke Gilliland, & many loving nephews & nieces honored Verla with a memorial service at her church in Santa Barbara. Vern

& Verla met & married in Bellflower, CA in 1946 at Bethany Christian Reformed Church & were married 65 years. After retiring they moved to Santa Barbara in 1995 where Verla lived in their home until the last 3 months of her life. The joy of the Lord was their strength!

**NYENHUIS**, Grace G. (Jongsma), 95, of Whitinsville, MA, went home to be with her Lord on January 18, 2021. Predeceased by her husband John, grandson Neal, and brother Harold, she is survived by her children: Ellen Fowler, Edward Nyenhuis, Rhonda Adams, Paul (Karen) Nyenhuis, and daughter adopted in love, Brenda Kasper and former husband Tom Kasper; as well as 5 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren. She is also survived by brothers Rev Allan (Joyce) Jongsma and Robert (Helen) Jongsma, as well as her many Nyenhuis brothers and sisters. She leaves behind a legacy of faith and love for the Lord. Memorial contributions can be made to the Whitinsville Christian School.

**OSTERHAVEN**, Bruce, age 84, of Grand Rapids, MI, was called to his eternal home on January 27, 2021. He is survived by his wife of more than 68 years, Shirley Faye (Herweyer); children Paul and (Linda) Sue Osterhaven, Keith and Lori Osterhaven, Terry and Dianne (Osterhaven) Flynn, and James and Melissa Osterhaven; 15 grandchildren; and 28 great grandchildren.

**TRIEZENBERG**, LaVerne C. (Pruim), 88, of Kalamazoo peacefully passed on to heaven on January 26, 2021. She was preceded in death by her husband Henry J. Triezenberg with whom she celebrated 50 years of marriage. She was also predeceased by her parents, Henry and Martha Pruum, her sister Beverly Dood, and son-in-law Tom Morgan. Celebrating her life are her children, Dan and Paula Triezenberg, Cindy and Tom Nanninga, Steve and Laura Triezenberg, Larry and Christina Triezenberg, and Heidi Morgan, 11 grandchildren, and 8 great grandchildren. LaVerne was a woman of deep and abiding faith in the Lord and a lifelong member of the Christian Reformed Church. She and Henry valued Christian schools, loved to share the zoo with their grandchildren, and in retirement volunteered for a year at Rehoboth Christian School. She knit prayer shawls for many going through difficult circumstances. Memorial contributions to ReFrame Ministries, Rehoboth Christian School, or Zuni Christian School.

**VAN DRUNEN**, Milton of Lansing, IL went to his heavenly home on January 30, his 96th birthday. Beloved husband for 72 years of AnnaMae (nee Huizenga) and father of the late Milt (Rita) Van Drunen, Kathy (Bill) Dykstra, Deb (Jim) Panozzo, Steve (Deb) Van Drunen, Joel (Carol) Van Drunen. 18 grandchildren, 44 great grandchildren. We are thankful for his example of faith and service.

**VAN HUIZEN**, Henk. On February 4th, 2021, the Lord took Henk van Huizen home. He was

born in the Netherlands in 1932. He immigrated to Canada in 1952, and married in 1959. He studied Education at UBC. He was involved in the Christian school movement in BC his whole career. He leaves behind his wife, Willy, and 4 children: Kathy, Arnie, Jacqueline and Christine and their spouses, 12 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren. Henk loved the Lord and lived his faith out well.

**VANDENBERG**, Lester, age 92, of Edgerton, MN, died peacefully on Jan. 22, 2021. Born on Dec. 1, 1928 to Teunis and Elizabeth (Nicolay) VandenBerg, Les is survived and cherished by his wife of 43 years, Beth (DeBoer/Fey), children Duane (Rosann) Vanden Berg, Peter Vanden Berg, Joann (Darwin) Schelhaas, Melvin (Brenda) Vanden Berg, Eugene (Thelma) Vanden Berg, Janette (Grant) Clausen; stepchildren Rick (Karen) Fey, Roxanne (Al) Nieboer, Randy (Jan) Fey, Rolland (Cheryl) Fey, Rosemari (Dennis) Kroll; many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and sister Johanna Sankey. Les was predeceased by his first wife, Janette (Gelling) and granddaughter, Tonya VandenBerg, as well as siblings Grace Schuit, Henrietta Elbers, Jim, Jake, Henry, Art, and Rich VandenBerg. He served in the Korean War 1951-1952, and was a life-long farmer and church member, volunteering many hours of service to Hope Haven Wheelchairs ministry and M2 prison ministry. Psalm 91:1-2.

**VANDERBILT**, Eloise passed away on 2-25-21. Born in Rehoboth NM, she was the daughter of Cornelius and Lois Kuipers, missionaries and teachers in Zuni NM. She married Maas VanderBilt in 1950; they spent 30 years as missionaries in Japan and the Philippines. In retirement they attended Hope Fellowship in Flagstaff and West Valley Christian Fellowship in Sun City AZ. She was preceded in death by her husband and her daughter Cori Fordice. She is survived by her children Lori VanderBilt, Monty and Lori (Broersma) VanderBilt, Lois VanderBilt (Ash Marquart), Deb VanderBilt (Bill Soleim), Joni VanderBilt (Breen Smith), son-in-law Tim Fordice, sisters Carol DeVries of Salt Lake City and Darlynn and Tom Pettinga of Holland MI, 13 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren. She lived a life full of joy, generosity, and love, her legacy to her children and all who knew her.

**VANDERLAAN**, Marcia, 94, a resident of Alameda, CA passed peacefully on January 15, 2021. Born in Nicaragua, she was preceded in death by her husband Dirk in 1991. She is survived by her children Dirk, Harold, Robert and Jenneke and their spouses; and 5 grandchildren and their spouses, and 1 great grandchild.

**ZYLSTRA**, David B., 96, of Grand Rapids, passed peacefully from one life to another on December 30, 2020. Preceded in death by his wife Carolyn (Mulder), and survived by his wife Beatrice (Grotenhuis), David leaves a profoundly Christian legacy with his 6 children, 2 stepchildren, 20 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren. His joy remains contagious.



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Sep 19 – Oct 3 | *Jeff & Karen Blamer*

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## Anniversary

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS

**KOSTER, Al & Carol** (Falmouth, Michigan) will celebrate 60 years of marriage on April 7. Their children, the late Gary & Diane Koster, Vicki & Dave Ebels, Greg & Karen Koster, Vonda & Greg Dreyer, Tonya & Tim Plaisier along with 13 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren give thanks to God for the love, faithfulness, and legacy of our Christian parents. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 50 YEARS



**GRITTER** - The children of Dr. Kenneth and Marianne (Vander Woude) Gritter are pleased to announce their parents' 50th wedding anniversary. Ken and Marianne were united in marriage on February 26, 1971, at Maple Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Holland, MI. They have been blessed with 2 children: Joel (Jennifer) and Brad (Ariel); and 5 grandchildren: Erica, Anne, Hope, Will and Clara. They have been members throughout the years at Fuller Ave. CRC and LaGrave CRC in Grand Rapids, MI and Bethany CRC in Muskegon, MI. They have a close relationship with Christ and have passed that love on to their family. God has blessed Ken and Marianne with 50 years, and they have been a blessing to their family, friends and community that entire time. You are invited to participate in a belated card/email "shower" to celebrate 50 years of God's blessings in marriage! Ken and Marianne's address is 1919 Boston St. SE, Apt. C313, Grand Rapids, MI 49506, and their email address is [marigrig@gmail.com](mailto:marigrig@gmail.com). We love you dearly, Mom and Dad!

## Employment

**NANNY WANTED** Nanny in Tinley Park Fall of '21, 9 hrs/day, M-F. Christian values & dog-friendly are a must. If interested, please call Jon for an interview @ 708.878.7442

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## Finding Points of Connection

It might be hard to see, but there are young people experiencing anxiety, loneliness, and hopelessness in our congregations.



Adam Vanderleest is in his final year of medical school at Western University. He loves experiencing God's creation. He and his wife, Katherine, worship at Talbot Street Church in London, Ont.

**YOUNG PEOPLE AREN'T GROWING UP** in the same world their parents and grandparents did. They are less active and spend less time outside. Many kids own a cellphone before high school and are always connected to their peers via text and social media.

Modern technology allows for constant communication, which for some young people leads to thoughts of hopelessness. Some deal with bullying at school and find the harassment continues online when they get home. Or consider a student who strives for high achievement. Whenever she logs onto social media, she views the achievements proudly posted by her peers as a constant reminder of her own inadequacies.

COVID-19 has hit youth hard. While the death rate is certainly much lower in this age group, the virus and our attempts to slow its spread have had other effects. Those looking for employment saw a shrunken job market. Many classes became virtual. Young adults looking to nurture new romantic relationships had fewer options for getting to know each other. Statistics from Toronto's Centre for Addictions and Mental Health show that Canadians aged 18-39 have been more likely to experience anxiety, binge drink, feel lonely, and be depressed during the pandemic than older Canadians. Loneliness and anxiety in particular differentiated this age group from the rest. It doesn't take much imagination to understand that constant anxious thoughts during isolation can quickly lead to feeling hopeless.

As Christians, we are called to serve the least of these, and our churches do an excellent job serving some. When I was growing up, my church's Sunday bulletin included the names of church members in the hospital, recovering from an illness, or grieving. These

people would receive cards, flowers, meals, visits, and phone calls. This beautiful practice reflects the actions of the early church (Acts 2:42-47).

But our idea of who might need such compassion could be expanded. It might be hard to see, but there are young people experiencing anxiety, loneliness, and hopelessness in our congregations. They are also "the least of these." Caring for a struggling young person might include assistance with a college application, helping make employment connections, or finding tangible ways to treat young, single individuals as equal members in the body of the Christ.

One way to start is by simply approaching an individual after church (or, in a time of pandemic, reaching out via text) asking questions around how school or work is going and offering help where appropriate. Leaving the conversation by handing out your email address can help continue the relationship.

Our tangible care should grow from the hope that is fundamental to our Christian worldview—something we can share with our youth. We can express that we are children who are tenderly loved by the God of the universe. We can share that God is always renewing and redeeming his creation, including those he created on the sixth day. We can point to countless moments in Scripture where humanity's failures and pain are followed by God's covenantal love, which causes God to reach out to retrieve his hopeless, lost sheep.

Some people's situations make it difficult for them to relate to the hope we have in Jesus. That's OK. They might be ready to hear only that "all who are weary and burdened" can find rest in Jesus. Sharing this message and being like Christ simply with your presence might be all that's required. **B**

# The Agony of a Son

Darkness surrounds you in your bed alone,

takes over your body, feelings, and soul.

You cringe in great pain and loudly you groan;

a wounded spirit that longs to be whole.

Abandoned in darkness as in a cave

without old Fingal's music to relieve

the strains of roaring, crashing, white-topped wave

crushing your vessel; they won't let you leave


for gentle pools in an ocean of calm

that pacifies the buffeted temper;

you cry for the One who anoints with balm

that soothes your total being's distemper.

Appearing most absent, he is most near,

holds you to his bosom, a son most dear. 



Habib Steele, previously known as Bill Steele, is a retired Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Christian Reformed Church. He served as a missionary with Christian Reformed World Missions in the Republic of Guinea, West Africa. He is a member of New Life CRC in Guelph, Ont.



➔ Share

# Christ's Resurrection Story

West Africa can be a difficult place to share a message of salvation. Still, ReFrame's partners there are ready to share the hope of Christ's resurrection with their fellow French speakers this Easter. And many of them are celebrating that hope because of gifts from Christian Reformed individuals and congregations.

Naomi shared her powerful testimony in ReFrame's youth video series on Facebook and YouTube. Born into a Muslim family, Naomi first heard about Christ while attending church with her aunt.

"As someone who had not experienced much love in their life before, I was moved to give my life to someone who loves us unconditionally."



See Naomi's video and help others in Burkina Faso hear the Easter story this year at [ReFrameMinistries.org/Easter](https://ReFrameMinistries.org/Easter)

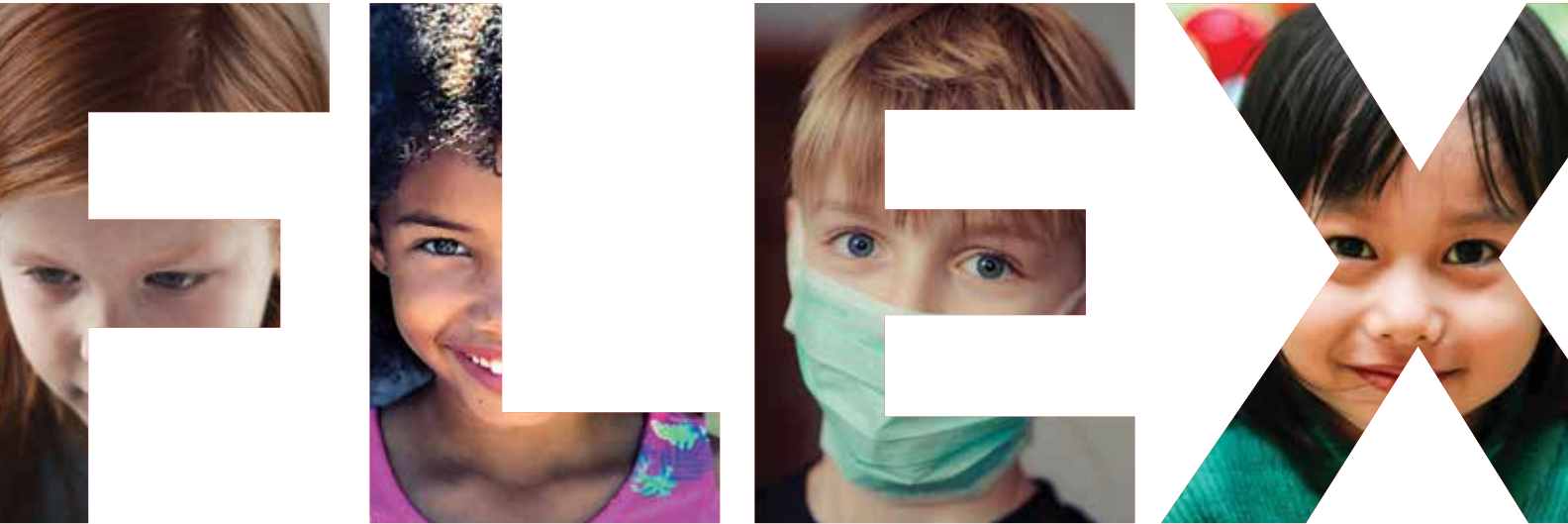


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