

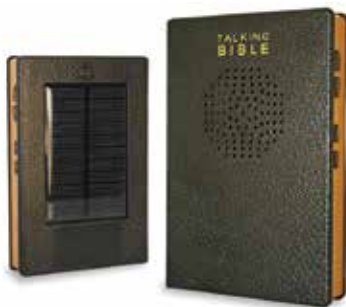
# BANNER

FEBRUARY 2022

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## BY THE NUMBERS

### 2021 Top Reads Online

It's always interesting to see the numbers behind our online posts. Which articles got the most clicks at *TheBanner.org* last year? Here are our most-read stories of 2021. To get a longer list, read "Top Banner Stories of 2021" online.

- » How Do We Know Christianity is the Only True Religion? // [19,396 pageviews](#)
- » Disputes About Masks Reveal Our Cracks in Christ // [15,370 pageviews](#)
- » Why I'm Not A Christian Zionist // [10,453 pageviews](#)
- » The Spiritual Significance of Trees // [10,447 pageviews](#)
- » 5 Helpful Websites for Parents Who Want to Know More // [8,625 pageviews](#)
- » A Christian Perspective on COVID Vaccines // [8,357 pageviews](#)

## WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » Church Worldwide: 24 Inmates Awarded B.A. in Pastoral Ministry to Serve N.C. Prisons as Ministers
- » Book: *Sugar Birds*, by Cheryl Grey Bostrom
- » Children's Book: *The O in Hope*, by Luci Shaw
- » Music: *Perfect Love*, by Lincoln Brewster
- » Read the first few articles in our newest series, in collaboration with The Colossian Forum, *Seeking Shalom in the Midst of Polarization*, which aims to examine the state of polarization in North America and explore Christian strategies to overcome it.

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**BANNER**

*The Banner* is the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church

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**Classified Advertising** 616-224-0725 [classifieds@TheBanner.org](mailto:classifieds@TheBanner.org)  
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Published monthly (except August). Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Mich. Postmaster, send address changes to: *The Banner*, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407. Canadian publications mail agreement #40063614. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: *The Banner*, 3475 Mainway, PO Box 5070, STN LCD 1, Burlington ON L7R 3Y8. Copyright 2022, Christian Reformed Church in North America. Printed in U.S.A. The Banner (ISSN0005-5557). Vol. 157, No. 2, 2022.

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# The Sound of the Gospel

Both Lora and Azami rediscovered their love for God's church through audio programs (see pages 23-24). Your gifts make it possible for ReFrame

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## Russia

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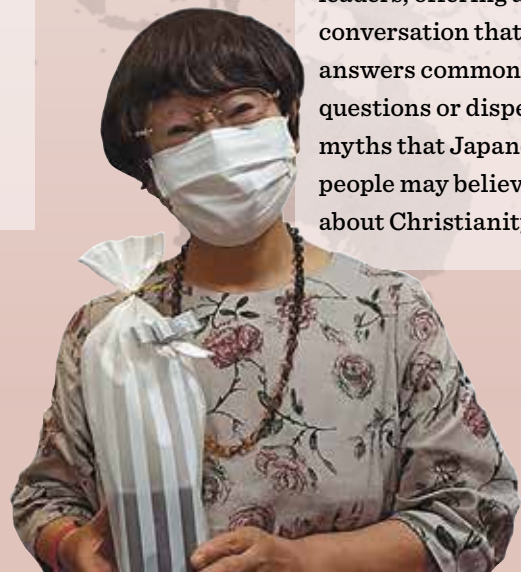
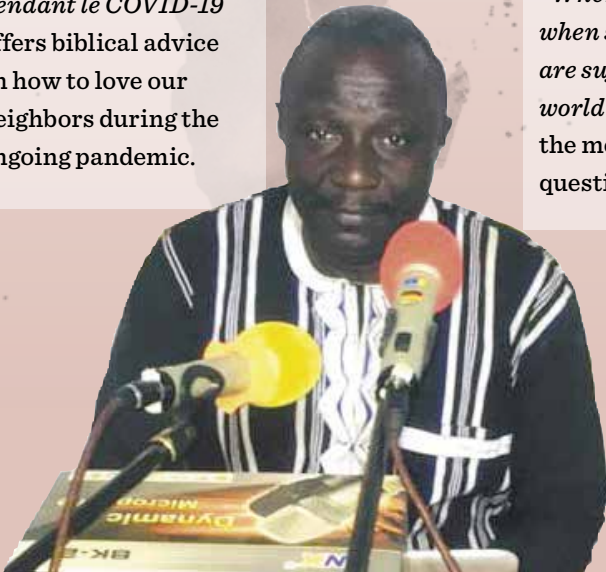
## Japan

In *Smile Talk*, Namiko (pictured) talks with pastors and church leaders, offering a conversation that answers common questions or dispels myths that Japanese people may believe about Christianity.



## West Africa

*Aimer Son Prochain Pendant le COVID-19* offers biblical advice on how to love our neighbors during the ongoing pandemic.



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## Cats or Toasters?

There seems to be an overconfident belief that right doctrinal positions alone will lead to loving people rightly.



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).

**POLARIZATION** is not a new problem. To explore the topic, *The Banner* has completed one article series and is now beginning another. In the “Past Controversies, Present Insights” series that began last fall, Will Katerberg, a professor of history and curator of Heritage Hall at Calvin University, explored some of the Christian Reformed Church’s past conflicts. (Most of those articles are online; two appeared in print, in October 2021 and January 2022.) Next we’re moving to the present with our new series, “Seeking Shalom in the Midst of Polarization.” The first of this series is Daniel Harrell’s “Our Current Polarized World” (p. 32). In effect, we looked at how we’ve dealt with polarizing issues in the past, and now we seek wisdom for dealing with our polarized world today.

Reading through Katerberg’s historical surveys, I wondered if we in the CRC have been guilty of looking at issues—at least initially—in mostly intellectual or abstract ways. It seems we have a historical tendency to approach issues mostly as intellectual problems to be solved even when they involve real, complex people who need to be loved. From baptizing adopted children to dealing with divorce, I see a pattern of lacking the humility and curiosity to listen and walk with people who were or are caught in the crosshairs of those issues.

I am not saying we should stop intellectual analysis. But there seems to be an overconfident belief that right doctrinal positions alone will lead to loving people rightly. Our denomination’s history shows it doesn’t work that way. Right thinking is necessary, but it’s not the only necessary factor in helping people. We also need empathy, compassion, and kindness, among other things. It is not a straight line from right answers to fixing

people’s problems. Real life people and their lives are more complex than abstract puzzles.

Theologian Soong-Chan Rah used toasters and cats to illustrate the difference between simple and complex systems (*Many Colors*, p.191). Fixing a problem with your toaster is not the same as fixing a problem with your cat. Cats are more complex than toasters. They require more than just a correct diagnosis and a mechanical solution. You can’t simply take a cat apart to figure out what’s wrong. You might need to first ease the cat’s pain before you can even start to guess at the root of that pain. And even to do that, you first need to gain the cat’s trust. Have we been guilty of approaching every social or ethical issue as a toaster problem? Are we still making the same mistakes with today’s polarizing issues?

Ever since the European Enlightenment, Westerners have tended to over-rely on reason alone to solve all social ills. Our Western Reformed tradition was not immune from that trend. We should balance that cultural default with other approaches.

Some of us might think that the CRC’s history shows a gradual compromise with cultural trends. Perhaps. But for some issues, I wonder if our evolution stemmed more from a greater understanding of the real-life complexities that comes from actually knowing affected people. Some of these changes might simply have been different pastoral approaches to issues, not different intellectual positions. Maybe we started approaching some issues as cats instead of toasters. **B**



## REPLY ALL

To send letters to the editor, please see our guidelines at [thebanner.org/letters](http://thebanner.org/letters).

### No One Ever Talked About It

I read the column by John Bernbaum with much interest because something similar happened to us (“No One Ever Talked About It,” November 2021). The year was 1971, and my husband applied for a teaching position at Eastern Christian High School. We moved to New Jersey around the same time as the Timothy-Lawndale controversy was taking place in Cicero. (A group of Black families attending local Christian Reformed churches asked to enroll their children at Timothy Christian High School. The board delayed most of the enrollments until it could complete a campus in a more tolerant neighborhood, and white residents harassed the school for the few Black students it did enroll.) Not growing up in the CRC, we did not have a hint of it. We entered our adopted Black child and our two biological white children in school when they were kindergarten age, and they had a number of Black children in their school. But it was years before we heard about the Timothy exclusion of Black children. We have always supported integration but are baffled by this break with biblical norms.

» Pamela Adams // Sioux Center, Iowa

### Light in the Darkness

The December 2021 editorial, “Light in the Darkness,” reported disturbing statistics of theological confusion. I appreciated our editor’s words of encouragement as well as his call to action: “But let us also grow deeper in our Christian faith and wiser in navigating the world.” One small way *The Banner* can help in this regard is to include in every issue a segment that clearly teaches the truths of our confessions. This would also help unify the CRC. *The Banner* must continue to enlighten us on controversial issues, but it would be beneficial to have one page to remind us of the truths we all confess.

» Doug Aldrink // Dublin, Ohio

### Editorials

We wish to thank you for your editorials. We find them topical and thought provoking, and certainly educational. As our society is becoming more polarized and opinionated, we need to be reminded of Jesus’ directives in our lives.

» Rudy and Rita Bot // Abbotsford, B.C.

I am an avid reader of *The Banner*, though not a member of the CRC. My husband and I are active members of the United Methodist Church in Modesto, Calif., and in Bigfork, Mont., living half the year in each place. I grew up in the CRC and believe that the best thing your church does is publish *The Banner*. It is a stellar magazine, by far the best in my opinion. I subscribe to many Christian magazines, but my day stops when *The Banner* arrives. I grab an apple and fall on the latest issue, reading it cover to cover. You and I have many conversations even though you are never present. I remark, critique, and answer your columns, wishing I could hear your replies.

» Mary Swier Bolhuis // Ripon, Calif.

### We Are the Church

“We are the church,” says Colin P. Watson Sr. in his inspiring article in *The Banner* (November 2021). ... Due to the COVID pandemic, our Celebration Fellowship Church services and Calvin (University) Prison Initiative classes at the Richard Handlon Ionia prison were temporarily canceled, but like Paul, we gathered anyway to share the Word, sing hymns, and continue in our college studies in our small, confined yard. Even in the midst of this troublesome environment, God’s presence created a stronger body of Reformed men without a brick building. God used the faithful prayers and corresponding encouragements from school staff and our institutional chaplain, who supported us to press forward. When college classes and partial church services resumed, a renewed realization arose for the CPI program in how we were equipped to be leaders, teachers, caregivers for fellow prisoners, prison culture changers, and (servants) for those God will lead us to serve one day beyond prison walls.

» John Halcomb // Richard Handlon Correctional Facility, Ionia, Mich.

### Refugees

Thank you for including Kurt Rietema’s article “A Massacre in Bethlehem” in the December 2021 *Banner*. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are over 82 million persons who have been forced to flee their homes due to natural or man-made disasters, or 26 million people for each U.N.-operated refugee camp. The world’s richest countries are hosting only about 14% of these, and though the U.S. has long been a leader in providing new homes for refugees, during the past five years our commitment has fallen to record-low levels. Rietema’s account is a wonderful reminder that these people are our neighbors and that we are failing them.

» Frank Barefield // Holland, Mich.



### Four Weddings

God bless you, Pastor Rod Hugen, for your wisdom and servant's heart in conducting the four weddings of your bank friends ("Four Weddings," December 2021). Reading your account convinced me again that evangelism is simply sharing the Word of God by one's words, deeds, and Christ-like attitude of service to others, regardless of their backgrounds or motivations.

» Kenneth Vander Horst // Smithers, B.C.

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)



Find the latest posts from our award-winning blog online at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

- » Collective Grief Is Countercultural—and Essential to Christian Community
- » A Place of Acceptance
- » At the Feet of Jesus

## Inclusive Praise and Worship

**MUSIC IS AN INTEGRAL PART** of worship for all congregants. So why are so many seniors feeling left out?

I grew up with music, especially organ and choral. I have been a choir member most of my adult life, and I even started a choir in our home church years ago. Growing up hearing the congregation singing a hymn, quite often in harmony, was wonderful. Our churches were known for their exuberant singing.

Hymns lend themselves easily to congregational singing and harmonization. The praise songs? Not so much. They are more suited for a praise team to sing to us. Hymn lyrics have stood the test of time, while some praise songs are very repetitive and use only a few words.


Most of us seniors have memorized many hymns. Unfortunately, praise songs come and go. Many praise songs we sang five years ago have been replaced by others. When I have a sleepless night, quite often the words of a hymn will bring me comfort—but not the lyrics of newer praise songs.

We seniors feel as if we are missing out on being able to express ourselves fully in worship. We have been told to accept the praise songs and appreciate them because others appreciate and like them. But should that not be a two-way street? Could we not work a little harder at including both hymns and praise songs in worship? And please don't forget about the organ!

Doug Tjapkes said it so well in his November 2019 Vantage Point article "Don't Throw Out the Organ!":

We seniors feel as if we are missing out on being able to express ourselves fully in worship.

Organs can enhance the sound of praise bands, enrich congregational singing and praise, and, not least, offer pleasing sounds to our Lord! Not only can playing the organ bridge the gap between old-timers who lament the lack or loss of organ music and the younger generation who wonder why we ever used it in the first place, but it also can give new vitality to a blended service.

So what can your church's worship leader do to bridge the gap between us old-timers who want more hymns with the organ and those in younger generations who want praise songs? Might I recommend that each worship service include at least one hymn, with the organ along with the praise team, so that we seniors might feel engaged in the worship service as well? 



Ann Bezemer is retired and lives in Vineland, Ont. She is a member of Grimsby Mountainview Christian Reformed Church.



# Racism and the Bible

By Shiao Chong

**A**s recently as May 2013, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association website had to answer this question: “Is it true that God cursed one of Noah’s sons, who became the founder of the Black race? My uncle is very prejudiced against people of other races, and he uses this to defend his position.” The question was referring to the wrongly named “curse of Ham” in Genesis 9:18-27. It shows the enduring legacy of how biblical misinterpretation can foster racism.

The “curse of Ham” was the most commonly used passage to justify white superiority and the enslavement of Black people. In Genesis 9, Noah became drunk and lay naked in his tent. Ham, one of Noah’s sons, “saw the nakedness of his father” and told his two brothers (Gen. 9:22). Noah, having realized what happened, pronounced the following curses and blessings: “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest

of slaves will he be to his brothers. ... Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend Japheth’s territory; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth” (Gen. 9:25-27). Because Genesis 10 lists Egypt and Put, which were in northern Africa, among the descendants of Ham, it was popularly argued that Black Africans are also Ham’s descendants. Thus the curse of slavery was believed also to apply to them. The Hebrew word “Ham” was also mistakenly thought to mean “black.”

Nineteenth-century Christians used this passage to justify white superiority and the enslavement of Black people. Even the influential Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper believed in the curse of Ham. Writing in *Common Grace, Vol. 1* (Lexham Press), Kuyper noted Noah’s “full blessing for Shem, his partial blessing for Japheth, and his curse on Ham.” He saw Noah’s curse as the reason why “Ham’s descendants never could

achieve significance.” The “curse of Ham” persisted well into the 20th century as the Scofield Reference Bible (1917), one of America’s most popular and influential study Bibles, further popularized it among Christians.

This “curse of Ham” interpretation is wrong for a number of reasons. First, the curse is not on Ham and his descendants, but on Ham’s son, Noah’s grandson Canaan. Thus, literally speaking, the curse applies only to Canaan and his descendants, not on Ham or his other sons of Cush, Egypt, and Put and their descendants. And the Canaanites who lived in the land of Canaan weren’t Black.

But why was the curse pronounced on Canaan in the first place when his father, Ham, was the guilty party? And why single out Canaan among Ham’s four sons? Why not Egypt, Cush, or Put? Genesis 9:25-27 is an etiological story, one that explains the cause of or reason for something. Canaan was the nation occupying the Promised Land prior to Israel’s conquest of it.

That is why Canaan, not the other sons, was singled out. This curse theologically explained for the Israelites their subjugation of Canaan. Some scholars suggest that the Gibeonites' enslavement in Joshua 9 fulfilled this curse. There is nothing here that connects the curse to Africans.

Second, it was a flawed human being—a drunken Noah—who pronounced the curse, not God. Is Noah's curse on Canaan a prescription or a description? Is it recorded as a prescription for subjugating Canaanites in perpetuity, or is it a description to explain why the Canaanites did indeed face subjugation? Most Bible scholars believe that by the time Genesis had its final written form, Israel had already conquered Canaan. Hence, Noah's curse on Canaan is an after-the-fact theological explanation.

Finally, Canaanites no longer exist today as a distinct ethnic group. Hence, even if we took Noah's curse on Canaan literally, it is no longer relevant today.

Yet racial prejudice keeps perpetuating this false interpretation as divine sanction for racist attitudes. There are other biblical passages and injunctions used to justify racism, such as using the Old Testament prohibitions on mixed marriages to ban interracial marriages. But I want to turn now to how the Bible can instead foster anti-racism.

First, Jesus was a mixed-blood Savior, not a pure-blood Jew. Matthew's genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:1-17) interestingly highlights five women: Tamar, who seduced her father-in-law in order to carry on the line of Er (Gen. 38); Rahab the prostitute; Ruth the Moabite; Uriah's wife, Bathsheba; and Mary, Jesus' mother. Only Mary was definitively Jewish. Rahab was a Canaanite, and Tamar was possibly one too. Ruth was a Moabite, and Bathsheba, being the wife of Uriah the Hittite, was likely a Hittite herself—one of those cursed Canaanites. Yet all of them were ancestors of Jesus

**Spiritual  
reconciliation  
to God also  
means social  
reconciliation  
to each other,  
including ethnic  
and racial  
reconciliation.**

the Messiah! There is ethnic diversity in the bloodline of Jesus, symbolizing that he is truly the Savior of the world—of all ethnic groups, not just of Israel. This fact also undermines the use of the Bible to ban interracial marriages.

Second, as the Christian Reformed Church's synodical report *God's Diverse and Unified Family* (1996) explains, "Reconciliation with God and reconciliation with one another are inseparable in God's saving work" (p. 29). This is most clear in Ephesians 2:11-22. It shows that "God's program of reconciliation is not simply vertical (reconciling believers, the world, and all things to himself) but also horizontal (reconciling Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised)" (p. 19). Christ "has made the two (Jews and Gentiles) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14).

Spiritual reconciliation to God also means social reconciliation to each other, including ethnic and racial reconciliation. It's a package deal, as it were. If the church's "main thing" is to reconcile people to God, then it includes reconciling peoples to each

other, including racial reconciliation. Doing anti-racist work is not deviating from the church's main calling. It is part and parcel of keeping the main thing the main thing. "The church's ministry of reconciliation is not just some human idea or political agenda but an integral part of God's program of reconciliation" (*God's Diverse and Unified Family*, p. 18).

This truth is reflected in Christ's Great Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). The word translated as "nations" in the original Greek is *ethnos*, from which we get the word "ethnic." Jesus was commanding his 11 Jewish disciples to make disciples of other ethnicities and nations. The Great Commission was cross-cultural in its DNA. And given the Israelites' history of isolation and even prejudice against Gentiles at the time, cross-cultural discipleship would have required some form of racial or ethnic reconciliation. At the very least, the disciples had to do some self-examination and repent of prejudicial attitudes. Peter, for example, needed to hear God's voice three times in a vision before he would agree to minister to Gentiles (Acts 10).

This brief exploration does not exhaust the Bible's vision for human unity in diversity. But let me end with the vision from Revelation 7:9, where a great multitude "from every nation, tribe, people and language" stand together to worship Christ. Our ethnic or cultural identities are not as important as our identity in Christ. But they are not erased or lost. Even in heaven, those cultural and ethnic differences will remain—but in service to God. **B**



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

## BIG QUESTIONS

### Stewardship

**Our family joined a Christian Reformed church a few years ago. Recently a deacon expressed concern that we were not contributing more to the general fund. It makes me uncomfortable to think that deacons are talking about how much people are giving and whether it is sufficient. Is this what happens in the CRC?**

The giving patterns and expectations of some Christian Reformed churches can seem intrusive to newcomers in the community, especially if communications are handled less than sensitively. But there are reasons for deacons to talk to some members about their giving.

One would hope that when you joined the church the welcome included an introduction to giving opportunities and expectations. In the CRC, the congregation is viewed as a covenant community, with members understanding that they share a mutual obligation to support ministries of the church. This isn't a legally enforceable obligation or a contractual obligation, but it's a communal obligation as opposed to a purely private obligation—at least within the Reformed perspective of the CRC. This communal obligation arises out of a heart of gratitude to God.

One of the deacons' tasks is to tend that communal obligation. They gently polish it so that it stays burnished and bright. They speak of it well so that people embrace it rather than resent it.

So deacons do talk among themselves about giving patterns within the



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohórquez

congregation. There is one other fringe benefit of these discussions—discussions that obviously must be handled with discretion and confidentiality. Perhaps more so in times past, but still today, changes in giving patterns could signal financial hardship for church members. The deacons can play a crucial role in providing assistance to members going through difficult times, perhaps taking initiative with those who otherwise might be reluctant to ask for help from others.

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.

### Church, Bible, Doctrine

**Our church council called a special congregational meeting to vote on calling a chaplain. Is that necessary when the chaplain isn't going to be working at our church?**

Another congregational meeting! Can't the council take care of this? No, for good reasons that reveal two important principles of polity in the Christian Reformed Church.

The first principle is that all ministers—pastors, professors, missionaries, chaplains, church planters, and others—must have a call from a local church council. They are accountable

to their calling council for their doctrine and life, whether employed by that local church or not. Ministerial credentials are held by the local church, not the classis or the denomination, because the local church council is the body that ordains individuals to office, including ministers of the Word, elders, deacons, and commissioned pastors. Why? Because in CRC polity, ordination clings to a specific task or ministry role, not to the person, and because in CRC polity the local church is the fullest manifestation of the church in its purest form—"a complete church of Christ," as theologian Louis Berkhof said. The further things get away from the local church, the more nervous Reformed people get! The church order's strong linkage of ordination, role, and local church reflects strong theological commitments to the local church.

The second principle is the meaningful involvement of the congregation in selecting office bearers. God calls people to serve in office through the affirmation of the church. Individuals sense God's call in their hearts, but that call must be confirmed by the church's recognition of their gifts for ministry. The council, as the governing body of the local church, nominates persons for office, and the congregation votes to affirm those names or to elect between the names presented. Even when drawing lots is

used, the meaningful involvement of the congregation is important, and a vote must occur at some point in the selection process.

So a chaplain needs to be nominated for a call by a local council, and the congregation needs to vote to affirm that person's call to ministry. Instead of viewing this as another meeting to attend, why not see it as an opportunity to hear about God's call on a person's life and to affirm that person in ministry?

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

## Does it matter what kind of company I work for and what kind of values it seems to have?

The Reformed tradition teaches that all work is valuable: the work of an engineer is as beautiful in God's eyes as that of a waitress, and a doctor's work is as valuable as that of a chaplain or a business manager. Through using our gifts and skills in different jobs, we honor God and are part of God's work on earth in all areas of life.

Yet we still need to discern how well our jobs, as well as the companies for which we work, allow us to do work that glorifies God and helps us love our neighbors. This means we should be hesitant about working for companies that manipulate or exploit people or create things that may harm others.

Discerning a company's potential harm can be difficult. A company's vision can sound very Christian: "promoting justice and truth" or "fostering meaning and well-being." Yet the same company can treat minorities

poorly, bully or silence people, or unfairly dismiss some people and their work. If companies do not care about justice and love for their employees, how can we expect them to promote justice elsewhere?

We are influenced by what is happening at a company even if we don't feel as if we have much influence on the company itself. We can learn to ignore people being treated unjustly, come to believe that jobs are primarily about money or advancement, and even forget the place of work in our calling to serve God in our whole life. It takes wisdom and insight from others to determine what situations and places are lifegiving and honoring to God. As you wonder about which companies you should (continue to) work for, I challenge you to talk with others about your concerns and evaluate how these companies help you to participate in "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable" (Phil. 4:8).

Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink is the Christian Reformed chaplain at the University of Toronto. She attends Willowdale CRC in Toronto, Ont.

### Digital Life

## Besides amazingly fast development to test for and combat COVID, has anything good come out of the pandemic technology-wise?

It might be too early to tell as the pandemic is still raging as I write this, but I can think of two things—well, maybe one. My first thought was Zoom, the video conferencing application that allowed office workers around the world to check out each other's houses under the guise of yet another online meeting. We've had videoconferencing for a while, though. The pandemic just forced us to get the right equipment,

pay for a solid internet connection, and maybe learn how to behave in front of the camera.

A better candidate might be voice messaging. I wouldn't say it's wildly popular yet, but it is getting some attention. Unlike a simple phone call, voice messaging doesn't require both parties to be available at the same time. Using the same programs we use to text others, we are able to leave voice messages—yes, our own voices—that can be listened to whenever we want.

With more than 3,500 emojis currently available to communicate our every thought, why would we need to use our voices? Think about it. Researchers tell us that the human voice can express 24 different emotions which, compared to emojis, doesn't sound like much, but think about how you can, say, hear your son's tiredness after he says just a few words, or feel the guilt in a call with your mother in even fewer words. (Kidding, of course. Sort of.) Humans are incredibly fast at decoding what is spoken to them—certainly faster than they are at interpreting the candy-colored cartoon faces marching across our screens.

Communicating in person is best, of course, but barring that option, try voice messaging. You might be surprised how efficient, convenient, and, dare I say, almost human it is.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of the CRC's Ministry Support Services 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).



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.

# Winter Fun, Community Playground Part of Michigan Church's Neighborhood Outreach

## NEWS

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For the second year in a row Beckwith Hills Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., planned an Iditarod-themed winter outdoor fun event as a way of welcoming neighbors to the church.

In 2021 it ran Feb. 6, and in 2022 it was scheduled for Feb. 12. Along with a track where adults race pulling sleds full of children, the event includes fire pits, a food truck, and a prayer station.

Organizer Bob Boersma said of the 2021 event, "It was cold, probably 13 or 14 degrees (Fahrenheit), but there were smiles on everybody's faces. ... It was a really cool community builder."

The church's refocus on outreach efforts, which include this winter fun day as well as plans to build a community playground, was influenced by the church's participation in the Church Renewal Lab, a two-year process facilitated by CRC partner Center for Church Renewal.

"One of the things that the Renewal Lab really encourages churches to do is to get out, connect with your community, talk to your neighbors, find out who they are and how you can serve them," said Rick Pinckney, pastor of Beckwith Hills since 2007. The congregation started the Renewal Lab in June 2018.

Boersma was one of several church members who took on the assignment of connecting with neighbors, police officers, and community organizers. What he heard loud and clear was that the neighborhood needed a playground.

Boersma shared his vision for a playground on church property and got support from the local neighborhood association.



Photo by Abigail Ultrivugt

**With a sled tied to a rope around his waist, a neighbor enjoys the Iditarod-themed family fun day at Beckwith Hills CRC on Feb. 6, 2021.**

"There isn't one that children can walk to, and there are about 800 children, according to a survey from our denomination, that could walk to this (proposed) playground," Boersma said.

The church council and then later the full congregation gave their approval for the project. Pinckney said they are still raising funds for its construction, but he hopes that "by God's grace, we will raise enough over the winter and have it built by sometime next summer."

Pinckney says he's looking at the big picture when it comes to the congregation's outreach.

"We're not doing this just so we can get more people in church," he said. "We're doing this to serve God and to manifest God's kingdom."

—Greg Chandler

## Ontario Communities Support CRC Clothing Ministry



**A volunteer at New Life CRC's Clothing Closet ministry holds up a hand-knit pair of mittens that were part of a large donation last fall.**

The Clothing Closet, a ministry of New Life Christian Reformed Church in Guelph, Ont., that offers free quality clothing to people who need it, got a boost in donated goods last fall thanks to two community efforts.

Spurred by local philanthropist and businessman Jim Estill, volunteer knitters received donated yarn supplied by a Listowel, Ont., yarn shop. They turned the nearly 200 skeins into more than 300 items—sets of mittens, gloves, scarves, hats, and socks. “We have these full bins of all of these things, and we will not run out of mittens this year,” said Clothing Closet coordinator Lisa Burke, who had previously been worried the supply might not last the winter.

While the knitting campaign was running, a teacher in Fergus, Ont., reached out to Estill’s company to ask about ways her seventh-grade class might help in the community. Encouraged to support Clothing Closet, the class collected more than 20 garbage bags full of coats and warm clothing. “The donation we had from the school was the single largest donation I think we’ve ever had here,” Burke said. “It was phenomenal. The kids did an amazing job.”

Burke said this example of community connection was meaningful for the church. “So much of what we do here is about knowing people. ... With all the loneliness these days, that’s really an important thing.”

—Anita Brinkman

## Alberta Woman Transforms Wedding Gowns Into ‘Angel Dresses’ For Grieving Parents

Metha Alberda, a member of West End Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alta., is one of 18 volunteer dressmakers in the province who contribute their handiwork to Alberta Angel Dresses. The group transforms donated wedding gowns into tiny dresses that are then supplied to hospitals and gifted to parents whose babies are miscarried or stillborn or die soon after birth. The parents use the dresses for final photos and/or for dressing their child for burial.

Since 2015 Alberda has sewn hundreds of angel dresses. She became involved after her daughter wanted to donate her wedding gown to a charity. They found Alberta Angel Dresses through an online search.

“I contacted the coordinator to ask about donating my daughter’s gown,” Alberda said. “Due to a large backlog of donated gowns, they weren’t able to accept it. They did, however, need a few more seamstresses.” Alberda said that after she had submitted a few samples made according to the charity’s patterns, she was accepted as a contributing dressmaker.

Each year Alberda transforms about four wedding gowns. “Some have just enough fabric to make two or three angel dresses, but some have full, gathered skirts and long trains, which provide enough fabric to make about 30,” she said.

Alberda learned to sew from her mother, who made many of her clothes when Alberda was a child. “I sewed for myself and my children when they were little,” Alberda said. “Then I moved into sewing quilts, and now I only sew angel dresses.”

Photographs of the original wedding gowns and the angel dresses made from them are posted to the Alberta Angel Dresses Facebook page along with the names of the donor (with permission) and the seamstress. Alberda never personally hears from a recipient. Over the years she has only been asked twice to deliver an angel dress directly to a grieving family who for one reason or another were not offered one at the hospital. “Those were gut-wrenching experiences,” she said.

“What an unbearable heartache it must be for parents who are anticipating the birth of a child to be faced with the loss of that child,” Alberda said. “As I spend time carefully transforming wedding gowns into angel dresses, I am grateful that I am able to participate in this meaningful way so they can know their child is valued, loved, and grieved.”

—Janet A. Greidanus



**This “angel dress” was crafted by Metha Alberda, a dressmaker in Edmonton, Alta., who volunteers her time to gift such dresses to families who experience the death of a baby.**

# Canadian Board for CRC in Canada Looking for Transitional Leader

Directors of the Canada Corporation of the Christian Reformed Church in North America have decided to hire a transitional executive director to serve CRC ministry in Canada for a two-year term. They made that decision at a special meeting Nov. 15, opting to delay an intended search for a permanent executive director–Canada position. It’s one of three senior-level leadership searches underway in the denomination coinciding with organizational restructuring.

A CRCNA announcement of the decision said the Canada Corporation directors “envision a transitional executive director who will ensure the provision of support and leadership to the staff and to the broader church across Canada while also focusing on the required changes.” Necessary skills described in the announcement include that the person “should be pastoral, a skilled diplomat, a godly person, have board governance experience, and be familiar with Canada Revenue Agency charity regulations, while also being a firm and confident leader.”

Compliance with CRA requirements for Canadian charities was the presenting issue for restructuring changes initiated in 2020. In May 2021 the Council of Delegates approved a design described in a report by its Structure and Leadership Taskforce and began working toward its implementation. Search committees for

a general secretary and chief administrative officer were approved in October. The Canada Corporation decided to first host a succession planning workshop to lay the groundwork for their search. That workshop took place Oct. 30, led by three associates of the Canadian executive search firm Nelson/Kraft and Associates.

## Workshop Reveals Misunderstandings

“Before going into the succession planning workshop, the board and senior staff knew that we could not simply hire an executive director–Canada without first examining the history of U.S./Canada relations and past reports and synodical decisions, and considering current issues within the CRCNA, especially as they relate to the relationship between Canada and the U.S. No one wanted to add to the pattern of resignations/ dismissals of former Canadian ministry directors,” the Canada Corporation executive team said to *The Banner* in a written statement. “The succession planning workshop helped greatly in asking the hard questions and considering all viable options in moving forward. The workshop led to a clear articulation of the best course of action.”

Terry Veldboom, interim executive director–Canada for the CRCNA, wrote an email to Canadian staff about the Canada Corporation’s decision. He said discussion at the workshop “revealed that misunderstanding exists across the Canadian CRC over last summer’s decision to release Darren Roorda from his position as Canadian Ministries director, as well as confusion about ongoing structural changes related to Canada Revenue Agency compliance and implementation of the recently approved SALT (Structure and Leadership Taskforce) report.” (See

“CRC in Canada Parts Ways with Canadian Ministries Director,” September 2021.)

The Canada Corporation has received communications from classes (regional groups of churches) and letters from Canadian pastors and ministry leaders with misgivings. Classis Toronto at its Oct. 26 meeting decided to petition synod (the CRC’s annual general assembly) requesting a “pause (in) implementation of the SALT report ... until Canadian churches and members have been well-informed and have had a reasonable opportunity to provide input.” In December, Classis Niagara determined to host a “joint meeting of all Canadian CRC classes,” noting that Church Order Article 44a grants “a classis may take counsel or joint action with its neighboring classis or classes in matters of mutual concern.”

In inviting four delegates from each of the Canadian classes to attend a Jan. 29, 2022, video conference, Classis Niagara said, “Our ‘matter of mutual concern’ is the future of the CRC in Canada.” The meeting agenda includes “hearing concerns and responses” about the SALT report and “exploring alternative pathways.” It’s not clear if exploring alternatives at this stage is tenable. In June 2021 the Council considered requests for a pause to restructuring, acting on behalf of synod because synod did not meet due to the pandemic. At that time the Council said holding off the process was not practical.

## Search Process

In its statement to *The Banner*, the executive committee said it will appoint a search team that will work with the hired consulting firm to complete the search for the transitional executive director. “We envision a committee of five, with at least one being a current board member. Names for possible candidates for the team will be sought from board members and others,” the statement said.



## Noteworthy

As of Jan. 6, Canada Corporation chair Andy DeRuyter said a chair for the search committee would be presented to the board at the Canada Corporation's Jan. 11 meeting, and he hoped to have committee member nominations by that time as well. He anticipated that the formal search would launch that week.

The CRCNA announcement said the goal is to appoint the transitional executive director by mid-March 2022. The statement to *The Banner* said, "The successful candidate will be introduced to both the Council of Delegates and synod at the first available meeting after the appointment."

### Council Meeting Virtually

The Council of Delegates is scheduled to meet this month, but instead of convening in Lombard, Ill., as anticipated, the Council's executive committee decided at its Dec. 8 meeting to convene once again by video conference. That has been the method of meeting since May 2020 due to the ongoing pandemic. Synodical services director Dee Recker said committee discussion leading to that decision included concern about what requirements might be for COVID testing at the U.S.-Canada border in February because of an increase in infections at that time. About one-third of the delegates to the binational Council are Canadian.

—Alissa Vernon, news editor

**The Potter's House High School, a Christian school in Wyoming, Mich., won the state championship in Division 4 boys soccer in November 2021.** Christian schools earned state titles in three of the four school divisions in Michigan. (Photos of the Division 2 and 3 champs appeared in the January 2022 issue of *The Banner*.)



Photo by Michigan High School Athletic Association

**The Wyoming Potter's House Pumas**



Photo by Carfa Solle

**The Sheboygan Christian-Lutheran Eagles**

In Wisconsin, the **boys soccer co-op team of Sheboygan Christian and Sheboygan Lutheran high schools won the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association's Division 4 state championship Nov. 6, 2021.**

Lawyer, activist, and abuse survivor **Rachael Denhollander** was the **2021 recipient of the Abraham Kuyper Prize for Excellence in Reformed Theology and Public Life**, presented by Calvin University on Dec. 15, 2021. Calvin began administering the prize in 2018. Named after Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper, the prize honors a leader who has made outstanding contributions in his or her "chosen sphere" of society that reflect "the Neo-Calvinist vision of religious engagement in matters of social, political, and cultural significance," according to a Dec. 7 news release from Calvin.



Photo by Shanna Simpson Photography

**Rachael Denhollander**

# ‘Ornitheology’: Learning of the Creator Through the Study of Birds

This story, edited for length, is reprinted from Religion News Service according to The Banner’s subscription license. It was published on religionnews.com Nov. 11, 2021, and seemed to complement the volunteer work of Mel and Mary Elgersma (see “Wisconsin Couple Blesses Others Through Their Care of Birds,” p. 19).

Early in the morning in the Great Smoky Mountains, half-asleep Kevin Burrell hears the call of a hermit thrush just above his tent, coaxing him to stay in his sleeping bag for just a few seconds longer. The flute-like tune stops but is promptly followed by the quick chirps of a northern cardinal and the cheerful song of a tufted titmouse.

Burrell, with the skill of an avid bird-watcher, realized these sounds were coming from the same spot above his tent and that, while the calls sounded like they came from many birds, they were really just from one: a northern mockingbird. While some campers might have pulled their sleeping bags higher over their heads, trying to drown out the bird noises so early in the morning, Burrell listened closely and sought a deeper, Christian meaning in the small bird’s mimicry.

For him, the mockingbird is the picture of Christian discipleship, which entails learning about and imitating Jesus. The bird is also a lifelong learner, which is what Burrell said he is called to be as a follower of Christ.

On his blog *ornitheology.com*, Burrell, a pastor at StoneBridge Church Community in Charlotte, North Carolina, recounts



## **Consider the Birds: A Provocative Guide to Birds of the Bible**

past birdwatching trips through biological detail and biblical devotion. The made-up word “ornitheology” is not Burrell’s, however. It was coined by theologian and birder John Stott in his 1999 book *The Birds, Our Teachers*, and refers to the unique blend of scientific study and religious appreciation of birds.

“I think that everybody who takes seriously the fact that God is a creative God should pay attention to some creative aspects of what he’s made,” said Burrell. “And I choose birds.”

Over the years, birdwatching has taken him on trips around the world and in his own backyard. Now 52, Burrell has become most attentive to the birds that are local to his area. He said that as a pastor, he is always looking for metaphors, which he finds plenty of in the bird world.

His post on the northern mockingbird explains the link between the mockingbird and discipleship. He also likens the

unrelenting song of the small Carolina wren to the persistence believers are called to. A post about an encounter with homing pigeons recounts the importance of home—where God has placed you in his creation.

“There’s so much illustrative material in the bird world that teaches us about worship, creativity, development and care,” said Burrell.

## **Birds in the Bible**

Debbie Blue, a founding pastor at House of Mercy in St. Paul, Minn., writes about the significance of different birds of the Bible in her book *Consider the Birds: A Provocative Guide to Birds of the Bible*.

“God hovers over the face of the water in Genesis—the ancient rabbis suggest—like a bird,” writes Blue. “Birds gorge on the flesh of the defeated ‘beast’ in Revelation. They are a currency of mercy—the birds of sacrifice. They bring bread to the prophets. They are food for the wanderers.”

Blue, whose fascination with birds stemmed from her own birdwatching experiences, examines the significance and role of birds in Judeo-Christian narratives while musing on the metaphors and analogies birds provide for Christian faith.

In the chapter on doves, Blue explained the symbol of a dove at Jesus’ baptism. She realized the specific type of dove present would have likely been a rock dove, found in Palestine, and more commonly known as a pigeon.

The pigeon, often considered a pest and hard to get rid of, reminds Blue of the spirit of God. “It seems like a pigeon could be with us in both our worst and most beautiful places—a dirty alley or a Roman piazza,” said Blue.

God can also be found in vultures. Before writing her book, Blue said, she saw this bird as violent, dark and dreadful. But after learning about vultures’ ability to

## Wisconsin Couple Blesses Others Through Their Care of Birds



Photo by Patrice Bouchard from Unsplash.

### Northern mockingbird

cleanse and rid the earth of disease—they have uniquely strong digestive juices that kill bacteria and pathogens—she sees them as purifying.

A vulture is a symbol for “a God that can take everything in and make it clean—a God that can make even death nontoxic,” said Blue.

For Burrell, being a Christian birder means being able to thank someone for the beauty he encounters, whether that beauty is a ruby-throated hummingbird he saw at home in North Carolina or a rainbow lorikeet spotted on a bird walk through Warrumbungle National Park in Australia. Nature is a window that brings him closer to God.

“To me, the beauty is a window that points to a creator of it all. It’s a means to a greater end,” said Burrell.

—Jessica Mundie  
for Religion News Service

Mary and Mel Elgersma, members of Oostburg Christian Reformed Church in Sheboygan, Wisc., have a unique ministry of care in their community. Since 2009 they have helped to care for canaries and finches in aviaries inside of local nursing homes, keeping the birds healthy and cheering the residents.

“The aviaries help combat loneliness,” the couple said, and watching the birds flit around is an easy conversation starter.

“Having an aviary brings the outside in when the weather keeps you indoors and cheers you up when you hear the birds sing.”

Hobby bird keepers since 1981, the Elgersmas met an executive of Pine Haven Christian Ministry after showing their finches and a canary at a 2008 fair. They were invited to take over an aviary in the local nursing home. Since then, Pine Haven has expanded to different locations, and so have the aviaries. There are now eight different aviaries housing 10 birds each, and Mel and Mary take two days each week to provide the birds with food, water, fresh vegetables, and bedding. They also monitor the birds’ health, check nests, and even trim the birds’ nails.

The Elgersmas have raised parakeets, canaries, and finches and have also been chicken farmers. They say that extending their joy in these animals to others has focused their continuing efforts.

“We have grown to appreciate the senior community and love sharing the birds with them,” they said. “We often hear from people how much they enjoy watching the birds and hearing them sing. It makes sharing our hobby with them worthwhile.”

In addition to their work in the aviaries two days a week, the couple is involved in Oostburg CRC’s music ministry, for which they play organ and piano duets. Since becoming members in 1996, one or the other of them has been a Sunday school teacher, deacon, elder, church secretary, choir member, and accompanist.

Yet the Elgersmas say that their work with the birds has remained at the forefront of their commitment to serving others in the name of Christ. “We have to profess what a great God we serve when we appreciate such an intricate creature as an active, colorful bird and wonder at the diversity in such a tiny being.”

—Sarah DeGraff



**Mary Elgersma (left) cleans a window in a Pine Haven aviary while her husband, Mel, removes old millet sprays from a wooden perch and replaces them with fresh seed.**

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Eugene Francis  
Rubingh*

1931-2021

Words from Acts 20:24, “My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace,” shaped Gene Rubingh’s life. He died Dec. 20, 2021, one day after his 90th birthday.

A graduate of Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, Gene received a scholarship to study at the Free University of Amsterdam and in Basel, Switzerland, with Karl Barth. Ordained in 1957, he was a missionary in Nigeria for 11 years. “I was granted the freedom to walk the trails of Tivland and tell the gospel and start schools,” he wrote in one of his journals. “It was the greatest adventure.”

Returning to Grand Rapids, Mich., Gene finished his Ph.D. and went on to serve as executive director of Christian Reformed World Missions and then vice president of translation for the International Bible Society. After retirement in 2000, while he was a member of Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, Mich., Gene poured his energy into the congregation’s mission to local refugee communities.

Predeceased in 2017 by his wife, Darlene, Gene is survived by a daughter, three sons, six grandchildren and their spouses, and two great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## Washington Church Sharing, Repairing After December Flooding

Sumas (Wash.) Christian Reformed Church faced major clean-up and restoration work in December after flooding from the Nooksack River hit its town hard. It was part of widespread cross-border flooding that affected all of the Sumas Prairie area in British Columbia and Washington’s Whatcom County.

Flood waters rose to nearly five feet within the church building and in the adjacent parsonage, which are situated close to the center of town. The congregation is currently without a pastor. A church family that had been renting the parsonage had to evacuate their home.

Deacon Barry Swinburnson said that once the flood water receded in early December, volunteers were able to start removing drywall, insulation, carpet, and other damaged items. They also removed church pews to have them assessed for damage. In a Dec. 21 interview Swinburnson said there had been tremendous support from the community toward the restoration and that the church had received a donation of drywall.

About half of Sumas CRC’s members were directly affected by the flood. But after the congregation helped its own members, it quickly turned to a broader community effort. “The need was so great,” Swinburnson said. “It became clear after the first few days that our efforts were required in assisting the broader community. Everyone needed help.”

Floods swamped many farms in this fertile valley. Sumas CRC members, with support from Classis North Cascades (the regional group of Christian Reformed congregations), joined other churches and charities such as Whatcom Strong to provide food and water and to help clean out flooded houses and barns.

Classis North Cascades convened an emergency disaster response meeting Dec. 2 at Second CRC in Lynden, Wash. J. Scott Roberts, pastor of Hope in Christ CRC in Bellingham, Wash., and the classis’ stated clerk, said members of World Renew’s Disaster Relief Services participated. Attendees heard reports from member churches on their current and future needs, discussed the best way to coordinate resources among the



**Damaged carpet, woodwork, and drywall were among the repairs faced by Sumas (Wash.) CRC after flood waters receded in early December 2021.**

churches and charities, and considered what long-term support could look like.

While there are many immediate needs, Roberts said, just as many long-term needs likely will become visible once rebuilding efforts are able to begin in earnest. “This will not be a month-long effort, not even a year-long effort, but we are looking at multi-year effort at minimum,” he said.

“It has been amazing to see the church be the church,” Roberts added. “As soon as the waters began to rise, the church stepped up just as quickly. While it took a week or so for many of the aid agencies and other organizations to arrive on the scene, for many the first wave of support came from the local church.”

—Dan Veeneman

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# Podcasts for the 'In-Between' Times

By Brian Clark, ReFrame Ministries

**A**zami and Lora might live on different sides of the planet, but they share a common experience. Both have left the Christian church at some point in their lives, and both began listening to online Christian podcasts after they left.

Podcasts have grown in popularity in the United States and Canada. A recent poll from Triton Digital indicates that the percentage of U.S. consumers saying they had ever listened to a podcast has more than doubled over the past decade.

The ministries of the Christian Reformed Church currently have 13 official English-language podcasts offering listeners a convenient way to delve into their favorite Reformed topics. (Find them at [crcna.org/podcasts](http://crcna.org/podcasts).)

“Overall, podcasts offer easy and on-demand listening, and they enable us to reach listeners in those ‘in-between’ moments of their lives—while driving, waiting in line, or working out,” said Robin Basselin, associate director for ReFrame Ministries’ English content strategy.

For Azami and Lora, these “in-between” times also meant the time between when they left the church and when they returned.

### Walking Away

“There was a time when I left the church—from high school to my early 20s,” Azami says.

As a Christian living in Japan, Azami grew up in a minority. By most estimates, only about 1% of people in Japan openly believe in Christ. So when Azami began spending more time with people outside of her family, she started to question her faith.

“I don’t know Jesus; I don’t believe it, I tried to tell myself with a rebellious attitude,” Azami reflected.

In the United States, Lora had decided decades ago to stop attending church despite her upbringing.

“I grew up attending church, but I eventually stopped attending altogether,” Lora shared. “I was out there floundering.”

Lora left the church long ago, but it’s becoming ever more common for young people to disaffiliate. According to a 2019 study by the religious polling group Barna, “Nearly two-thirds of U.S. 18- to 29-year-olds who grew up in church ... have withdrawn from church involvement as an adult after having been active as a child or teen.” For Azami and Lora, though, it was only temporary.

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Christians in Japan sometimes gather for listener events hosted by ReFrame’s Japanese ministry.

**A Familiar Voice**

In Tokyo, where Azami lives, her return to faith in Christ began with a simple memory of a voice. It was the voice of Namiko, a woman of faith who serves with ReFrame's partners in Japan.

With support from the Christian Reformed Church and ReFrame, Namiko records and airs a radio program and podcast called "Namiko no Hohoemi Tōku," which in English means "Smile Talk with Namiko." On the weekly episodes, Namiko has conversations with pastors and helps listeners understand more about the Christian faith.

Azami's memory of listening to Namiko's program prompted her to scan through local radio stations. She was overjoyed to hear Namiko's voice again.

"Memories from being raised in the church from an early age began overflowing," Azami said. "I couldn't stop crying because of that nostalgic voice."

That simple act of turning on the radio eventually led Azami back to her church.

"God didn't let me go," Azami added.


**An Answer to Prayer**

While Lora never lost her faith, she knew she was floundering after leaving her church. She knew in her head that someday she should start attending again, but she simply didn't understand why it was important. So she stayed home and asked God to place a desire in her heart to return.

Then Lora discovered ReFrame's half-hour Bible study podcast, *Groundwork*. One episode in particular answered her prayer, she said.

"It was one of the programs on *Groundwork* that helped me understand that it was important to become a member of a church," Lora said. "I had prayed for this understanding for years, and there it was."

Last year, Lora took the risk to attend a worship service for the first time in more than 50 years.

"I now have my church family," Lora said. "Thank you for sharing and teaching God's Word." 



Azami grew up listening to Namiko (pictured) on the radio, and now she continues to listen to her online programs.

*More Podcasts from Around the CRCNA*

1. *Do Justice*: A conversation starter for new ways to engage in justice work.
2. *Think Christian*: Host Josh Larsen talks with writers for the corresponding *Think Christian* website about the latest in TV, movies, music, and more about the ways popular culture intersects with God's story.
3. *Open to Wonder*: How is our faith formed in day-to-day life? Faith Formation Ministries wonders with episode guests about that question and lots more.
4. *Resound*: A podcast featuring thoughtful conversations among faculty, alumni, and guests of Calvin Theological Seminary about how faith and theology shape our life in the world.
5. *ReWrite Radio*: A podcast featuring recordings from past sessions of the Festival of Faith and Writing at Calvin University.
6. *Public Worship and the Christian Life*: Hear from speakers in diverse areas of expertise and a range of Christian traditions in this podcast from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

A full library of podcasts can be found at [crcna.org/podcasts](https://crcna.org/podcasts).



# Moving Toward Justice as the Body of Christ

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN** to “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8)? Members of the Christian Reformed Church have been exploring this question with the help of the Office of Social Justice.

“On the CRCNA offering calendar, Feb. 13, 2022, is designated as a time to support the Office of Social Justice,” said OSJ director Mark Stephenson. “While pursuing justice is something to grow as a practice every day, this Sunday is a particular moment to reflect on the ways CRC members have joined together to love our neighbors in tangible ways—whether by putting our hands together in prayer, engaging our minds to learn, using our voices to advocate, or ‘praying with our feet.’”

Here are a few ways CRC members have pursued justice as the body of Christ in the past year.

## Climate Vigil

Last fall, CRC members put their hands together in prayer for a Climate Vigil during the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland. Organized in partnership with the Evangelical Environmental Network, Christians all over the world gathered online or in satellite locations to pray for faithful climate action. At the vigil, participants engaged in a time of lament, worship, and prayer for hopeful action in the midst of overwhelming need.

“Our God is a big God,” said a vigil participant from Alger Park Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., “so we can expect big things.”

## Church Between Borders

CRC members have engaged their minds and learned together about current issues that affect our neighbors by participating in Church Between Borders workshops and other online resources.



Members of Alger Park CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., participated remotely in a climate vigil while the U.N. Climate Change Conference took place in Glasgow, Scotland.

After a recent CBB workshop at Hope College in Holland, Mich., a professor shared that the session helped her students understand the history of immigration to the U.S. “The timeline session was instrumental in growing their knowledge and awareness,” she said.

## Blessing Not Burden Partners

Some CRCNA members have used their voices and even their yards to speak truth about our immigrant neighbors. Alison Wabeke of the Association for a More Just Society said that placing sign from OSJ with the message “Immigrants are a Blessing, Not a Burden” in her yard has affected those who visit her home.

“We live at the end of a private drive, so we don’t have a lot of people who see it, and we originally thought that it may not do any good,” Wabeke said. But as Amazon, Uber Eats, and other pick-up or delivery folks visited her front steps, they began to notice.

“Someone picked something up and messaged us saying that they appreciate how the sign made them feel

welcome,” Wabeke said. “Needless to say, the sign is working even at the end of a private drive.”

## In-Person Advocacy

Still others have “prayed with their feet.” These advocates joined OSJ staff to meet with staff of U.S. legislators to ask for improved pathways to citizenship for immigrants and for new legislation to mitigate the impact of climate change.

“While we do dearly hope these pieces of legislation are accomplished,” said Karolyn DeKam, OSJ’s justice mobilizing and advocacy fellow, “we also coordinated these legislative meetings to demonstrate what a Christian perspective on climate and immigration can look like in the public sphere with the understanding that advocacy is a spiritual discipline. When we faithfully proclaim justice for the vulnerable and the oppressed, we are practicing a lived theology that might bring us and the world closer to the kingdom of heaven.” 

—Megan Herrema,  
Office of Social Justice

**The View from Here**

# Information Bits and Bytes

**I GREW UP IN A DIFFERENT AGE.** At times it feels as if I grew up in a different world. In the world of my childhood, information arrived in newspapers, and televisions were often not even present in homes. When they were present, the three networks that existed aired news and family-friendly entertainment in all of their black-and-white splendor.

Our world has changed. In many ways, this change has been for the better. In others, the human side of change has resulted in things we now grieve and lament.

When I was younger, technology was used to broadcast to as many parts of the population as possible. Today, technology has moved us toward “narrowcasting,” or selectively distributing our messages to smaller segments of society who are interested in hearing or reading what we have to offer. As consumers, we can pick and choose which narrowcasted content we want to receive.

Like anything, this change can have negative effects. We’ve seen narrowcasting lead to echo chambers of information. It has hurt our ability to debate and disagree civilly. And it has led to a proliferation of misinformation, polarization, and division.

As Christians  
we are called to  
use all things  
for God’s glory.  
That includes our  
technology.

On the positive side, we can also use podcasts and other narrowcasting technology to reach virtually anyone on the globe with messages of hope, peace, and love as we share the gospel. As people opt in to the content we make available, we can foster their faith, deepen their understanding of specific issues, and motivate them to join us in acts of Christian service.

Whether we use new opportunities and new technologies for better or for worse is a function of who we are as human beings. As Christians we are called to use all things for God’s glory. That includes our technology.

In an age where virtually every message—whether delivered via network television, cable news, social media, or from the pulpit—can be used as a divisive shibboleth, we are called to do more and to be better. As anointed people of God, we should be using technology to reveal the beauty and complexity of creation, to express art in all its forms, and to reach others with the story of God’s goodness and grace. We should be proclaiming God’s Word using all available means.

The ministries of the Christian Reformed Church use technology in a variety of ways around the globe. Podcasting in particular has become a tool that helps us partner with churches and classes for God’s kingdom purposes. You can read about several CRCNA podcasts in this issue of *The Banner*. These articles highlight small ways in which technology is being used to carry our kingdom messages into places where other means are less accessible.

In the United States this is also Black History Month—a month for celebrating and recognizing the many contributions of Black people to our North American culture. The Office of Race Relations, celebrating 50 years this year, is helping the denomination reach its stated vision of being “a diverse family of healthy congregations, assemblies, and ministries expressing the good news of God’s kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide.”

May God grant us his favor as we lean into this worthwhile direction.

To God be the glory!



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

## Families in Eastern and Southern Africa Grow Through New, ‘Playful’ Devotional

**FAMILIES PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE** in the spiritual formation of children, said Resonate Global Mission missionary Megan Ribbens. But for parents, it’s not always easy to know how to talk with your children about the Bible in a fun and engaging way.

*Sawubona Families*, a new interactive devotional, has inspired families throughout eastern and southern Africa to connect with one another and grow as disciples of Christ.

This “playful” study on the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) was developed by Resonate workers in collaboration with local experts. The devotional invites parents and children to read Scripture together and share with one another in a fun and engaging way while tapping into African cultural strengths, such as storytelling, traditional games, music, and African proverbs.

As part of helping families build character as disciples of Christ and grow in the fruit of the Spirit, *Sawubona Families* also encourages families to look outward. Each week, families using the devotional explore and plan ways they can love their neighbors.

“We hoped this would motivate and inspire families to respond with Christ’s love in concrete ways,” said Ribbens.

It did.

Children of one family helped carry groceries upstairs to a neighbor’s apartment. Another family purchased a new mattress for a woman in their community who wasn’t easily able to afford one herself. One family felt moved to minister to a single mother living in an abandoned building with her newborn daughter. The family was able to secure safe shelter and healthy meals for the mother and daughter while building a friendship. Week



*Sawubona Families*, a devotional that Resonate missionaries in eastern and southern Africa created in collaboration with local experts, inspired one family to care for a neighbor in need by purchasing her a mattress.

after week they met together to read and discuss the fruit of the Spirit. One day, the mother decided to give her life to Christ.

Resonate team members who worked on developing *Sawubona Families* were encouraged by participating in the lessons and hearing testimonies from families throughout the region.

“I was surprised and personally challenged at the lengths some families went to see and help their neighbors, especially in a time of social distancing and so many restrictions,” Ribbens said.

Spiritual formation and discipleship ministries do not work well with a

one-size-fits-all approach. It is important to work with context-specific resources.

“We were reminded of how valuable local expertise, resources, and abilities are,” Ribbens said. “Local expertise and the abilities of content consultants, graphic designers, videographers, and children who recorded stories made *Sawubona Families* so very rich.”

—Cassie Westrate,  
Resonate Global Mission

## Not as God Intended

**COVID-19 HAS CREATED** an uptick in gender-based violence that has made it more obvious than ever before that too often women and girls around the world are not valued as they should be as God's image bearers. Worse, they often endure abuse simply because "that's the way it has always been." In many communities where World Renew works, young girls do not have a safe space to discuss the natural development of their bodies or what kind of physical attention is unacceptable.

World Renew is committed to implementing programs that focus on building healthy relationships. Protecting Adolescent Health and Rights is one program that offers young people in Dakar, Senegal's capital, opportunities to learn about positive relationships with friends, relatives, community members, and romantic partners. Geared toward out-of-school tweens and teens, the program also offers a safe space for young men and women to learn about proper hygiene, protecting their health, abstinence before marriage, and recognizing and ending cycles of abuse.

In August of 2021, there was a graduation ceremony for participants who completed the one-year curriculum. World Renew's program assistant Gédéon Weber interviewed the female graduates and was happy to hear that it wasn't only the adolescents who benefited from the program.



Graduates of World Renew's Protecting Adolescent Health and Rights program show off their certificates.

Amy, 18, reflected on how the program helped to improve her relationship with her mother. "The program is important and ... has helped us get closer to our parents," she said. "I did not communicate with my mother (but) I am communicating with her now."

Beyond helping young people build healthy relationships, the program also helps them recognize behaviors that are unacceptable and teaches them not to simply dismiss these behaviors as "the way it has always been." Amy shared, "Before, when I

would be sexually harassed, I didn't tell anyone. But now I am informing my mother."

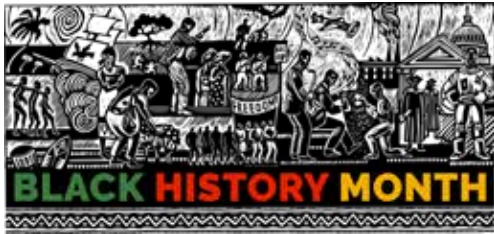
Topics that otherwise would have been considered taboo are now discussed openly. One mother, Mrs. Fofana, said, "When I heard my daughter talk about her (monthly) cycle, I asked her where she learned it, and she told me, 'In the sessions.' I am very happy with this program because a lot of parents are embarrassed to talk about sexuality with their children. My daughter taught me a lot and encouraged me in the education of my (other) children."

With God's grace, this graduating class and their parents will all come to a place of understanding that "the way it has always been" is not necessarily the way God intended.

—Laurisa O'Brien,  
World Renew

## Race Relations Marks Black History Month

**IN 1926**, Black historian Carter Woodson sent out a press release marking the first Black History Week in the



United States. Fifty years later the commemoration was officially recognized when President Gerald Ford encouraged citizens to use the month of February to learn about and celebrate the long-neglected accomplishments and contributions of Black Americans. Woodson had originally chosen February for the event because Frederick Douglass, who had escaped slavery and became a key abolitionist and social reformer, and Abraham Lincoln, who had issued the Emancipation Proclamation, both were born in February.

At the Christian Reformed Church's Office of Race Relations (ORR), we're celebrating 50 years of working to dismantle racism by Christian Reformed churches and the denomination. Recognizing that the CRC is still a predominantly Euro-ethnic denomination, the ORR staff thought getting the insights of white people engaged in anti-racism work might provide unique views on the importance of Black History Month.

Louise Wing is the director of administration at ReFrame Ministries. She said, "By making available more extensive Black history, particularly first-hand experiences, future generations will have a full understanding as they work to create an anti-racist environment for their children. They will be able to end continued injustices."

Rev. Al Mulder, author of *Learning to Count to One: The Joy and Pain of Becoming a Multiracial Church*, commented, "Getting better acquainted with Black brothers and sisters also helps us as white persons to grow in our relationship to Christ. As Christians, Christ is in us (Col. 3:3); his life and love are expressed through each of us. Yet how Christ's life and love flows through us is unique to who we are—family influences, ethnic origins, racial backgrounds, and more. To that extent, the more I can learn from others about the love and life of Christ in them, the more fully I can experience the life and love of Christ in me."

How do you think a focus on Black history can bless the unified body of Christ? We would love to hear your thoughts and stories about Black History Month. Send your comments to [race@crcna.org](mailto:race@crcna.org).

—Kevin Hoeksema,  
Ministry Support Services

## Ministry Encourages Churches to be Quick to Listen

**IN 2022**, Pastor Church Resources is celebrating 40 years of ministry by sharing one of its favorite tools for helping pastors and churches navigate seasons of growth, transition, or challenge: a "talking piece" to help turn challenging conversations into listening circles.

The initiative, called "Quick to Listen," is available online at [crcna.org/pcr/listen](http://crcna.org/pcr/listen). A mailing about it went out in January to all Christian Reformed congregations. "Quick to Listen" introduces and encourages groups such as church councils, Bible studies, and youth groups to try using a talking piece of their choice in at least two meetings this year.

A talking piece can be any physical object easily passed from person to person, such as a stone, a bouncy ball, or a pencil. It can be an object with meaning to the group, but it does not need to be. A talking piece's power is in its simple premise: that only the person holding the talking piece may speak while everyone else only listens.

By passing a talking piece around a room, everyone is invited to speak once and listen a lot. This subtle shift tends to produce noticeable results: less anxiety, wider participation, and increased trust among a group's members.

"Especially in situations where the topic is a difficult one or the emotions are charged, it can be helpful to use a talking piece to make sure every voice in the room is heard," said Rev. Dave Den Haan, a PCR ministry consultant.

Based on the apostle James' instruction to be "quick to listen (and) slow to speak" (James 1:19), this initiative is an expression of the work PCR has been doing for 40 years. Since 1982, PCR's team and its regional partners in classes have found that when things get difficult and anxiety increases, pastors and churches seem to lose sight of the basics. As the pressure builds, we can begin to see those around us as enemies and threats, not fellow children of God. As fear creeps in, we listen only long enough to determine our counterargument, not long enough to understand. In other words, at the moments we need it most, we neglect Jesus' most basic instruction—to love God and one another (Matt. 22).

One of the most concrete ways to love another person is to listen well to that person. As simple as that sounds, says PCR ministry consultant Zach Olson, "Truly listening to what others are saying is hardest right when it is also most necessary."

—Sean Baker,  
Pastor Church Resources

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**AUGUST 3-4, 2022**

# Join Us to Celebrate 25 Years of Women in Office

Join us the evening of August 3 at a banquet for celebration and reminiscing, followed the next morning by a workshop for planning ahead, as we celebrate the gifts of women and men and observe 25 years of women's ordination in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Register now!

This event is designed to thank everyone, both the women *and* men, who have worked to advance the women in office dialogue in the denomination, who have tirelessly advocated for the gifts of all people to be used in the church, and who have counted the cost for their participation. Let's recognize those involved on the front lines as well as their invaluable support persons — spouses, friends, congregants — whose roles have been just as vital.

The *Inspire 2022* gathering will officially begin after the workshop. This year's theme is *Inspired to Be One*, and that is our hope for all.

### Tinley Park Convention Center, Chicago

**Banquet with Ruth Haley Barton:** 6 p.m. — Wednesday, Aug. 3, 2022

**Workshop with Rob Dixon:** 9 a.m. — Thursday, Aug. 4, 2022

### Get More Information and Register Now!

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*joined and held together* —Eph. 4:16  
WOMEN IN ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE

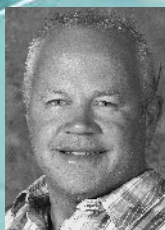
# Water

**WATER IS AN INTERESTING** substance with some very interesting properties. I think God made water special because without these properties, life on earth would end.

Everything in the universe is made of tiny bits of matter called atoms. Most types of atoms can combine to make larger bits called molecules, which join together to create different substances. Atoms and molecules are always vibrating.

Now think about the spacing between molecules: the more they vibrate, the more space they'll need. In my classroom I describe this as an awkward dance party. If a bunch of people squeeze together as tight as they can, they can get pretty close. But when you start the music and they begin to dance, they'll need to spread out a bit. This is the way heat works. We measure heat (vibration) with a tool called a thermometer. The more the liquid in the thermometer vibrates, the more it spreads out, and it rises up the tube. The faster a substance's molecules vibrate, the "hotter" they are.

If you think about it, this explains why things can change from a solid to a liquid to a gas and back again. When things get hotter, molecular vibration becomes stronger than the force that links them together, so with a high enough temperature a solid will melt into a liquid, and when it gets even hotter it will turn into a gas. But as things cool, molecules get closer to each other, becoming denser, or more closely packed together in a given space, so a gas will turn back into a liquid when cool enough and freeze into a solid when even cooler.



Clayton Lubbers teaches science at Byron Center Christian School and has been teaching for over 25 years. He loves the outdoors and commonly meets and sees God while hunting, fishing, and exploring creation.

Because a substance's density changes with its temperature, if you put a block of solid lead, for example, into a vat of molten lead, the solid will sink in the less-dense liquid. This is true for nearly every kind of molecule.

Except water. God made water with a unique structure. Water forms a crystal pattern when it locks into solid form, and that takes up more space than liquid water; it is less dense. This is why ice floats.

Imagine if water sank when it froze. Lakes in northern climates would slowly turn solid from the bottom up in winter. All fish and creatures larger than bacteria would likely die. Water also has a high heat capacity, which means it takes a lot of energy to change its temperature, so not only would northern lakes freeze upward; they would probably never melt all the way to the bottom. Life on earth would end.

But God designed water to be special, to have a different pattern when it cools enough so that its solid form rises to the top. God also designed us to be special, not only as humans, but also as Christians. We can point the way to God by rising above a sinful world.

Be like ice: rise to the top! 

# Our Currently Polarized World

By Daniel Harrell

*Editor's note: This article is the first in our newest series, "Seeking Shalom in the Midst of Polarization." The series, in collaboration with The Colossian Forum, aims to examine the state of polarization in the U.S. and Canada and explore Christian strategies to overcome it. To read more articles in the series right now, visit [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).*

**H**uman divisiveness began in the beginning. With the forbidden deed done, Adam blamed his wife and said to the Lord, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Gen. 3:12). From Adam to Abel to Babel to Bethlehem, a biblical thread of social and relational discord entangles. Jesus arrived to a chorus of earthly peace (Luke 2:14), but soon acknowledged the enmity endemic to the human condition. He says, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three" (Luke 12:51-52), and "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34).

In Corinth, Paul appealed to the Holy Spirit to be power for the post-Pentecost church to cease its divisiveness and "be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Cor. 1:10). But church history records Christians in Corinth and elsewhere resisting unity and ferociously fighting over matters from the nature of God to the nature of nature itself. Churches split and denominations divide about the Trinity, Jesus' identity, baptism and communion, human origins and gender, slavery and race, polity and politics, speaking in tongues, food and drink, drinking and dancing, and

whether worship is better with an organ or a guitar.

In a church I led years ago, conflict over worship intensified to just shy of fisticuffs as an organist shook an angry mitt in my face, declaring that "a damn band will never play in my sanctuary!" Nonplussed about the passion that music preferences incited, I inquired of a wise elder why he thought our congregation couldn't forge some sort of compromise for unity's sake. The elder explained that we don't resolve our differences because of the sordid delight our anger ignites. "Part of the problem with being wrong is that it rarely feels like we're wrong," he said. "More often, being wrong feels like being right. And we love being right."

Despite Jesus' own prayers to the contrary (John 17:11) and the bonding power of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3), Christians descend into the same discordant morass witnessed in American culture at large. Many have sought to make sense of the extreme polarities that seem to dominate our cultural and political lives. In one such attempt, journalist George Packer delineates four narratives that currently compete for America's moral identity in his article "How America Fractured Into Four Parts" (*The Atlantic*, July/August 2021). Drawing and adapting from Packer's analysis of a "Free America," a "Smart America," a "Real America," and a "Just America," I similarly see four kinds of Christianities or churches in America (and to some degree in Canada too) that might shed some light on our own internal divisions.

"Free America" describes a libertarian impulse that places a high premium on personal freedom and small government. "Free Christianity" might best be seen in theologically conservative, independent churches devoid of denominational ties and

led by celebrity-like pastors adept at quick theological adjustments depending on the needs of the moment. Free Christianity churches in growth mode tend to be consumer-oriented, focused on family and personal betterment, and advocating a spirituality of self-improvement more than sacrificial service. Metrics and methodology matter more than doctrinal precision.

I remember launching an alternative service at a traditional church I served in the 1990s. Using the best of current market research, we surveyed the neighborhood, studied demographics, determined our customer base, adjusted our liturgy, and massaged our theology to assure a certain attractiveness that succeeded in filling the sanctuary every Sunday night for years. That so many young people poured into our building to worship demonstrated our savviness and bore witness to our blessedness. Often large, production-heavy, program-driven, and results-oriented Free Christianity relies on what works numerically to determine what's right.

"Smart America" represents people who are left-leaning, meritocratic, college-educated, technologically adept, health-conscious, privileged, posh, and particular. Cosmopolitan and multicultural, "Smart Christianity" likewise values education, merit, and technological swag and is evident mostly in upper-crust congregations and socially conscious urban churches striving for inclusive identities that downplay discomfiting biblical assertions such as judgment or hell or Christological exclusivity. Preachers go to great lengths to square a plain reading of Scripture with evolution and genetics as well as with postmodern thought and literary critique.

As a pastor in university-saturated Boston for many years, I served an extensively educated congregation

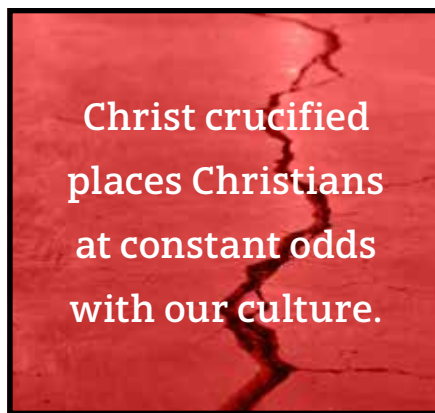


loaded with doctorates sensitive to critiques of Christianity's unreasonableness. Sermons flew over the heads of many, but it seemed better to obfuscate and come off as too academic than sound foolish. Equipped with my own doctorate, I likewise strove to cohere doctrinal truth with scientific discovery only to have the chair of Harvard's physics department lambaste an illustration I once deployed as "sermon science." He told me to stick to Bible stories and leave research interpretations to the professionals. It took me days to craft the right words of response—I didn't want him to think a theologian didn't understand physics! (You can imagine how well this worked.)

"Real America" represents common folk left out by Free America's trickle-down economics, which mostly favors wealthy corporations and individuals. Rural, nativist, populist, and local, "Real Christianity" is hostile to government intervention, modern ideas, and intellectual authority. Real Christianity churches are strong proponents of religious liberty and eager to help out a familiar friend but remain wary of outsiders. Susceptible to conspiracy theories, these folks trust their own research over experts and are averse to any outside opinions.

Working to earn money for seminary, I spent a summer pouring concrete with career laborers who spent their entire lives up to their knees in cement. One faithful man, listening to me go on about issues of biblical interpretation I looked forward to studying, dismissively shook his head over what he called "highfalutin' mumbo-jumbo." "All I need to know is Christ and him crucified," he'd say. When I'd ask what that meant, he'd bark back that it meant what it said.

Lastly, "Just America" encompasses those promised a better life by having



gone to (the right) school and working hard but who instead find themselves burdened with debt, underemployment, racial and economic disparity, and climate catastrophe. For these, white (male) supremacy is the greatest evil.

For years I served as pastor of Colonial Church near Minneapolis, named for its ties to New England Congregationalism. After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, a movement arose to change Colonial's name due to its implied racist and violent ties to European Colonialism. Even years before, during a sabbatical in immensely multicultural Los Angeles, when I introduced myself as a minister at Colonial Church, internationals and racial or ethnic "others" would stare at me with wide-eyed puzzlement and sometimes disdain. I'd insist that we were surely postcolonial, and that our name derived from colonial New England Congregationalists passionate for religious freedom and the gospel. One millennial replied, "Oh, you mean the Congregational colonists who decimated the Wampanoag Indian tribe in Massachusetts and Rhode Island and sold their women and children into slavery?" "No, no, we're in Minnesota!" I'd insist.

Just Christianity self-critiques through the historic grid of white, male dominance of theology and church

structure, calling attention to all the ways Christianity has instigated injustice against women and people of color. But given the perceived perversity of the sin, any resulting repentance proves impermeable to grace. Outrage and intolerance are regarded as prophetic virtues. To have trespassed against the rights and identities of the historically oppressed cancels out any goodness or opportunity to attain forgiveness or make amends. As with Real America's resentment, Just American judgment is an all-or-nothing, take-no-prisoners proposition.

Packer acknowledges that all four narrative slices respond to real problems, but the inability and unwillingness of each to engage with the other presents enormous challenges to ever resolving the problems. Ironically, Packer says, each narrative promotes important values that could contribute to a greater whole: "Free America celebrates the energy of the unencumbered individual. Smart America respects intelligence and welcomes change. Real America commits itself to a place and has a sense of limits. Just America demands a confrontation with what the others want to avoid."

Inasmuch as these four narratives apply to the American church, similar positive contributions likewise emerge from each: Free Christianity stresses the importance of personal salvation and champions spiritual growth and depth. Smart Christianity embraces deep theology and the rich trove of thought that faith has inspired and applies it to real life for the sake of human and cultural transformation. Real Christianity embeds itself in local churches and communities and excels in building family and mutual care and concern. Just Christianity does deeds of social justice and critiques injustice prophetically to promote shalom for the world.

Rather than a Christianity divided, the four at their best could represent a diversity of gifts not unlike what Paul promotes in Corinth to counter the division there. Against the church split into factions based on their relative understandings of identity, loyalty, calling, and gifts, Paul appealed to anatomy as a cure. Paul writes,

There are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other (1 Cor. 12:20-25).

Paul goes on to name the one body "the body of Christ," establishing the heart and head around which each different set of gifts, passions, and perspectives unite. In Christ, the free needs the real needs the smart needs the just. All come together for good in the person of Christ.

Still, Christians diverge even over the person of Christ. Free Christianity paints him as a traditionalist, comfortable with authority and having a CEO leadership style. He's pro-family even though he was never married or had children and seemed antagonistic even to his own blood relations at times (Matt. 12:47-48). Smart Christianity portrays Jesus as progressive, the ultimate intellectual, a clever teacher and storyteller for whom wit and intelligence always win the


debate. Real Christianity stresses Jesus' working-class roots and his love for children and homeland, while Just Christianity cites his minority status and brown skin and relishes his turning over the moneychangers' tables and railing at the religious authorities. If you're asked to describe Jesus in your own words, he'll likely come off sounding a lot like yourself, with your same priorities and values.

This is why my concrete-shoveling companion insisted that any faith in Christ must be in Christ crucified. That Jesus was forced to carry his own cross and hang on it was public shame and condemnation of the worst kind. The cross denounces every attempt to remake Jesus into an idol of our self-interests. Churches affix big crosses to our walls primarily as symbols of victory and sacrifice, but the cross first indicts and destroys our old ways and sin.

Paul's entire religious worldview and goodness as a Pharisee upended on that road to Damascus in Acts 9. In Acts 10, Peter's whole understanding of righteousness came apart as unrighteous after a vision and a Gentile knock at his door. For both, preaching a crucified Christ proved invariably offensive. Jesus deliberately and willfully saves only through suffering and death, somehow turning a horrible thing into a holy thing—holy in that awful and terrifying way that God's grace completely overwhelms and overrules. As the self-assured Saul-turned-Paul would finally and mercifully realize, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Extended to the church, "Christ living in us" is the essence of what Paul means by "the body of Christ."

Christ crucified places Christians at constant odds with our culture. Crucifixion is what makes Christians

opposed to violence and vengeance. Crucifixion defies aspirations of worldly wealth and power. Though the wisdom of God, it is considered foolish and weak (1 Cor. 1:23-24). Hardly provincial, Christ died to reconcile the whole world to himself (Col. 1:20). Undiscriminating, crucifixion makes way for the reconciliation of all things and the healing of division (2 Cor. 5:18).

The cross persists as the supreme emblem of God's love for the world. Its insistence on suffering and sacrificial love for others remains the hallmark of Christian faithfulness. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments," Jesus said (John 14:15, NRSV). And his chief commandment is to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34). Paul famously asserts love as the only antidote to our factiousness (1 Cor. 13). Love bears and endures the worst while hoping and believing the best about everyone. Love never fails. 



Daniel Harrell is a hospice chaplain, author, teacher, longtime Congregational minister, and former editor-in-chief at *Christianity Today*. He holds a doctorate in psychology (Boston College) and lives in Minneapolis with his daughter.

1. Reading the author's "four Christianities"—Free, Smart, Real and Just—which do you find describes you the most? Why?

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## Slinging Dirt from a Mud Pile

We are so covered  
in mud that  
we can't even  
do something  
righteous without  
soiling it.

**WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE** I participated in a mud volleyball tournament. My team arrived and waded into the calf-deep muck for our first game. By the end of the day we were covered head to toe from running, slipping, and diving through the mess that we called a volleyball court. Some of us found that our stomachs took on the most dirt, others their shoulders, and others their backs. While we were dirty in different places, not a single one of us could claim to be anything close to clean. As we walked out of our last game, an equally messy participant pointed us toward some hoses and a rather large bucket of soap.

God is very clear with us as to just how depraved we humans (Christians or not) really are. Romans 3:22-23 tells us, "There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Ecclesiastes 7:20 states, "There is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins." So perverse is our nature that "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). We are so covered in mud that we can't even do something righteous without soiling it. But God is also very clear with us that we have a Savior who can clean us. While Romans 3:22-23 reminds us of our sin, the very next verse tells us that "all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." We as Christians know this and can live in that freedom. While we should be caked in mud from head to toe, never feeling clean again, we have a Savior whose blood can remove any spot, stain, or soil that lives within us.

Luke 18:9-14 perfectly illustrates how we should live in this knowledge as Christians. The parable starts by telling us who Jesus is actually addressing: "some who were confident of their own righteousness." Does that sound

like any comment sections you've seen recently? Jesus goes on to tell the story of a Pharisee who sees himself as good and righteous. He fasts, he prays, he gives, and he is nothing like those evil-doers around him. Christ contrasts this Pharisee with a tax collector who stands at a distance, refuses to look to heaven, and says, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." He humbly sees himself as no greater than any other and leaves justified.

Imagine a nonbeliever looking upon the two of them. The supposed representative of God, the Pharisee, in his boastfulness and his pride stands in his ivory tower hurling judgment and hate on those he sees as beneath him without realizing he himself is just a "whitewashed tomb" (Matt. 23:27). Why would anyone observe him and think that the Pharisee's God had room for someone who couldn't live up to that standard? Meanwhile the tax collector—the sinner, stealer, and cheat—is able to recognize his own sin and walks away forgiven. The beauty of grace is revealed to someone who does not know God simply through a broken man in need of a savior.

We are all sinful and dirty people, each of us fallen in our own unique way and nature. Don't be the person who claims to be cleaner than anyone else. Be the one who shows others to the bucket of soap. Be the one humble enough to recognize one's own sin, and help point others to a Savior who wishes to wash us all clean. **B**



Thomas Beck is a middle school teacher in Kentwood, Mich., and a member of the Christian Reformed Church.

1. The Canons of Dort, a Reformed confession, teach the doctrine of total depravity. Describe in your own words what you understand "total depravity" to mean.

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

## Two Morals for Seminarians

I breathe deeply,  
hold my urine,  
and somehow find  
the right words  
to say—words of  
comfort, words  
of hope—entirely  
off script.



John K. Tuinstra is a former Christian Reformed pastor. He and his wife, Dr. Cheri Tuinstra, live in San Diego, Calif. Visit his website at [tunafisch.com](http://tunafisch.com).

*Editor's Note: The following story is adapted from the first chapter of Tuinstra's recent book Dutch Preacher Boy: Coming of Age in Grand Rapids, Taking Wing Beyond, written under the pen name Tuna Fisch. Copyright © John Tuinstra.*

**EXTRAORDINARY!** An angel of God startles me awake. "Get up! They need you!"

I, a seminarian on his first summer assignment, in Vermillion, S.D., am about to embark on an adventure of a lifetime.

It isn't a typical Sunday where I'd tackle heady issues from the Danforth Chapel pulpit on the University of South Dakota campus. On this 30th day of July, 1967, I had been invited to speak in rural Platte, a 130-mile, two and a half-hour drive west.

Last night, as I had a rousing message ready to go, Platte calls: "We just had two deaths in our congregation. Please bring comfort." I scramble to reread, rethink, rewrite. Weariness sets in. Soon I am fast asleep at my desk.

Then, as if jarred by lightning, my eyes seize on the wall clock: 7:45. Church starts at 9:30. I have exactly an hour and 45 minutes. What do I do? Call and cancel? Not on your life.

I jump into my three-piece suit, grab my Bible and notes, dash to the car, hit the highway, and am suddenly overwhelmed by a stunning double rainbow extending horizon to horizon—a miracle, a sign. God is with me.

In a flash of revelation, I visualize a private plane propelling me to my destination. There must be recreational pilots at the Vermillion airport. No luck! Think! Yes—there's another airport at Yankton, 30 miles north along the Missouri River.

I leap from my vehicle and spot a bystander near the runway. "You know of anybody coming in?"

"Sure do," he volunteers. "There's a single-engine Piper from Nebraska about to land in three minutes." My destined chariot in the sky! I tell him what I need. "Well, it wouldn't hurt to flag him down and ask," he deadpans.

The Piper lands and taxis. I sprint to the aircraft, waving my arms frantically. The pilot hops down. "What's the matter?"

"Listen, I'm late for church; I overslept. They need me desperately. Just get me to the church on time. I'll never make it by car. How much to fly me to Platte?"

He hesitates slightly, then grins. "For you, preacher, 40 bucks."

"Sold! Let's roll." (I have exactly \$41.48 in my billfold.) Who could possibly ask for more? Guardian angel, wondrous sign in the sky, calm weather, smooth ride, gorgeous view.

The little town of Platte comes into view. "Where's the airport?" I query.

"There isn't any. Just the grass strip over there. See the wind bag in that farmer's field?"

"No taxi service? How do I get to church?"

"Sorry, my friend. That one you'll have to figure out for yourself. Now hang on, it's gonna be a little bumpy." He exits the scene with a modest military salute and a "Good luck!" Under his breath, he mumbles, "Angel, rainbow, church ... hogwash!" as he revs up the engine and takes to the air.

It's 9:20. Now I have to fend for myself. I spy the edge of town from the middle of this hot, humid, mosquito-infested field. I navigate the tall grass, elbow my way through corn stalks, jump two fences, jog past chicken coops and



a pigpen. And as I approach a farmhouse, I see a car leaving the driveway. I shout at the top of my lungs, arms flailing—all to no avail!

In desperation, I pound on the front door of the house. No response. Time's running out. "Lord, help!" And from the corner of my eye—would you believe?—I spotted a little kid's bike on the side lawn. "Forgive me, mea culpa, but I've got to steal—no, borrow—this bike, for the greater good."

So, off to the races—pedaling furiously, my knees hitting the handle bars. This is how *The Platte Enterprise* described my entrance into town:

Walking down Main Street, Marv Rasmussen heard an urgent call: "Where's the Christian Reformed Church?" As Marv pointed west, John—without pausing—disappeared around the corner. You can imagine that Marv was somewhat puzzled. Here's a man in a dark suit, perspiration dripping from his face, a Bible under his arm, riding a half-size bicycle as fast as he could

go, who barely had time to wave his thanks as he zipped around the corner headed for the church.

It's 9:40. I lean the bike against a wall. An elder is busy leading the congregation in an improvised hymn sing, praying that the neophyte would soon appear. I open the back door, hoping to find a bathroom and freshen up a little. But lo and behold, I find myself standing on the podium in full view of the congregation. What an entrance!

Mouths are agape. Before them stands a sweaty, disheveled green-horn seminarian. The elder looks greatly relieved. Not missing a beat, I intone "Let us pray" (no explanations, no excuses). I breathe deeply, hold my urine, and somehow find the right words to say—words of comfort, words of hope—entirely off script.

Doxology completed, I scamper to the bathroom and return to shake hands with the congregation. At this point, no one is yet wise to what happened, when all of a sudden a little boy shouts to his mother in earshot of everyone,

"Mom, what's my bike doing over here?" That really gets things buzzing.

I have to fess up and tell them the entire story. "And that, young man, is how your bike ended up against the wall of the church." It's amazing how the gravitas of that morning turns at once into a lightness of being. The boy's parents come up to me. "You poor soul, you missed us by just seconds!"

A little later, the boy's father, Junior DeLange, playfully taps me on the shoulder, "By the way, Pastor John, somebody was home—my elderly mother. But she was too frightened to open the door to that wild stranger. And guess what? There's one thing you probably missed—our garage door was unlocked; there's a Jeep inside, with keys in the ignition."

Whoa! After composing myself, I respond, "The Lord works in mysterious ways, but never would I take your Jeep!"

That day in Platte, we had a good cry. Afterward, we had a good laugh. Tragedy and comedy—such is life.

At summer's end, the new school year commenced at a wooded retreat, as was customary. The tale was told of the ill-fated but miraculously sustained tenderfoot—a tale passed on for many years with hearty laughter and two morals for seminarians: "Sleeper, awake!" and "Never give up." I was properly roasted. This would be a tough one to live down! **B**

# The Extraordinary Life and Legacy of Ida B. Wells

## IDA B. WELLS IS ONE OF MY HEROES.

Seriously. I have a portrait of her on my office wall. Who is she, you ask? Well, how much time do I have? I know more now after reading *Ida B. the Queen: The Extraordinary Life and Legacy of Ida B. Wells*, by Michelle Duster and Hannah Giorgis.

Ida B. Wells Barnett is an icon in the fight for justice. She was born in 1862, the year before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln, and grew up during the Reconstruction era, supposedly a time when the evils of slavery would be redressed through social development and when the Southern states would be reintegrated into the Union. But rebuilding a nation and pursuing racial reconciliation was not an easy task. Resistance was everywhere, and one of the most egregious forms of resistance was the lynching of Black men and women. Lynchings were a way to keep Black people “in their place,” to incite fear, and to remind Black people that being “free” didn’t mean they were equal to white people.

Wells was arguably the most famous Black woman in her time. She wrote

pamphlets and newspaper articles and spoke at rallies to raise awareness of the prevalence and horrors of lynching. Her advocacy marked her as an agitator. There were many threats to her life. In the late 1910s the Federal Bureau of Investigation wrote, “(S)he is considered by all of the intelligence officers as one of the most dangerous negro agitators, and it would seem that her case should be considered very carefully before she is given a passport to the Peace Conference.” This was because she dared to tell former slaves that they were worthy of dignity, respect, and justice.

Michelle Duster, the author of *Ida B. the Queen*, is Wells’ great-granddaughter. Her book is intimate, filled with personal stories and historical accounts. The writing is complemented by photographs, original artwork, and excerpts from official documents and newspapers. Surprisingly to me, only about half of the book is specifically about Wells while the other half is about her legacy. I was expecting a biography of someone from the past. I got that, but I also got an overview of contemporary Black people who have raised their voices to protest racial inequality and violence. They are Wells’ legacy. I would have preferred more storytelling and fewer history lessons, but the history lessons do give context for the stories.

If you are looking for something good to read as part of your observance of Black History Month, I highly recommend this book. (One Signal) **B**



## Therapy for Black Girls (Podcast)

Reviewed by Michelle Loyd-Paige

Dr. Joy Harden Bradford, a licensed psychologist, began podcasting in 2017 and now has produced 235 episodes of *Therapy for Black Girls*. What I enjoy most is the variety of topics, including self-care, mental health, how we think about ourselves, and body image. Some topics get very personal, such as “How Our Sex Lives Changed During the Pandemic,” “What Not to Do When Co-parenting,” and “Transracial Adoptions.” The podcast features laughter, personal stories, vulnerability, and a healthy dose of practical yet professional advice. The insights provided are not just for Black women. This podcast is a reminder to all who find themselves caring for everyone but themselves that they can’t pour from an empty cup.



Michelle Loyd-Paige is the executive associate to the president for diversity and inclusion at Calvin University, a member of Maple Avenue Ministries, and the founder of Preach Sista! ([preachsista.org](http://preachsista.org)).

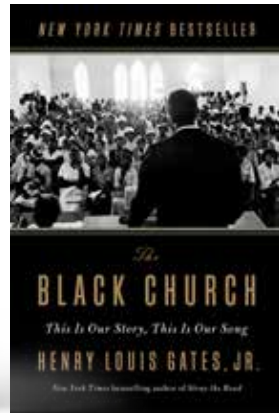


**The Side B Podcast**

*By the C.S. Lewis Institute, hosted by Jana Harmon*

Reviewed by Kayleigh Fongers

Why do people believe in God? Why do some not believe? These are the kind of questions explored in this story-driven podcast from the C.S. Lewis Institute that helps listeners examine their own beliefs and diligently seek after truth. Each episode features an interview with a former atheist about how that person came to Christianity. Borrowing from musical language, the name of the podcast refers to the traditionally less-popular songs on a record’s B-side. The show’s tagline—“How skeptics flip the records of their lives”—brings that idea full circle. Because of its commitment to exploring truth, this podcast is one that can motivate skeptics and Christians alike.

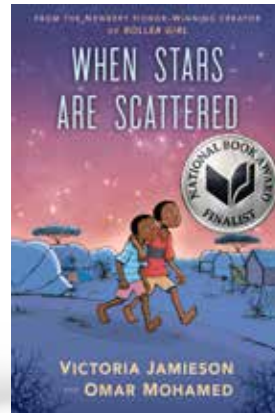


**The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song**

*By Henry Louis Gates Jr.*

Reviewed by Reginald Smith

*The Black Church* is a companion book to the PBS series of the same name. This trip through almost 400 years of history of the Black church provides color, emotion, and much appreciation of how Black people adopted and adapted the very religion that enslaved them into a powerhouse for citizenship, voting rights, and social justice. This beautifully made book offers readers in our denomination an understanding of the essential role of Black people in the American church at large or even in the Christian Reformed Church, as well as the value they bring with them: an array of gifts to bless all of God’s people. (Penguin Random House)



**When Stars Are Scattered**

*By Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Based on the true story of Somalia-born Omar Mohamed, this graphic novel for middle school readers offers a stirring, disquieting window into the desperation, hunger, and poverty of refugee children while also depicting their enduring hope, humor, and resiliency. *When Stars Are Scattered* touches on themes that might be foreign to North American children, including child marriage, war, disturbing attitudes toward people with disabilities, educational challenges faced by girls in refugee camps, and substance abuse. Christian parents and teachers who share this book with children have a unique opportunity to talk about these themes and about how Jesus wants us to live with love, justice, and mercy in a broken world. (Dial Books)

**The Lowdown**

**Celebrating Black Youth:** *Young, Gifted, and Black* gives voice to the real-life stories of Black millennials and younger adults. Sheila Wise Rowe goes beyond the common narrative that focuses solely on their successes or struggles. Her stories of celebration and lament point toward hope, joy, and healing. (IVP)

**Hercule Poirot:** In *Death on the Nile*, Agatha Christie’s fictional Belgian detective is played by the film’s director, Kenneth Branagh. Poirot must solve a murder while on vacation in Egypt. (20th Century Studios)

**The End of This Is Us:** Since 2016, millions of fans have cried and laughed along with the Pearson family through all their loves and losses, including a transracial adoption when a triplet died at birth. The series, planned for just six seasons, launches its sixth and final season of eighteen episodes in early 2022. (NBC)

**Zora Neale Hurston:** In *You Don’t Know Us Negroes and Other Essays*, readers will experience Hurston’s revolutionary writing spanning three decades. (Amistad Press)

## Why Are There So Many Denominations?

Christ's church is wonderfully diverse and sinfully divided.

**THERE ARE SO MANY** denominations because of sin: Christians have let our “fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, (and) factions” (Gal. 5:20) shatter the united body of Christ. Yet there are also many church denominations because of God's grace in creating a wonderfully diverse world. These two things must be held in tension, however difficult that might be.

When I was studying to become a Presbyterian minister, several of my classmates were from Korea. They wished to see a distinct Korean Presbyterian denomination in North America that would embody in worship, language, and tradition all that was distinct and good about Korean culture. I was impressed with their case for how a church denomination could echo the ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of God's creating Word. But one of the students admitted in class that personal conflict and doctrinal hairsplitting had birthed a hundred different Korean Presbyterian denominations! So much for making “every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3).

Christ's church is wonderfully diverse and sinfully divided. It's not always easy to differentiate the two when confronted by the myriad church denominations in the world.

For a long time theologians in North America considered the very existence of denominations as evidence of Christian failure to overcome the sins of social class, racial division, and pettiness, citing Mark 3:24: “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.” These critics rightfully drew attention to how a church divided against itself compromises its witness to the reconciling work of Christ in a world divided against itself. As such, they celebrated movements to unite denominations—including Reformed

denominations—that created the United Church of Christ (1957), the Church of North India (1970), and the Uniting Church in Australia (1977).

Some recent voices, however, speak less of the sin of denominationalism than of the good of the diversity it protects. The New Testament often speaks of groups of churches in particular places and peoples (e.g., Acts 9:31; 1 Cor. 16:19). Perhaps different denominations have special insights into the gospel due to ethnic, social, geographic, or historical factors—insights that might be flattened or lost in a more uniform church. The recently formed Protestant Church of the Netherlands (2004) seems to take this approach, seeking to preserve rather than blur the distinct Reformed or Lutheran traditions and beliefs of its constituents.

Folks in the Christian Reformed Church probably can appreciate aspects of both approaches to thinking about denominations. Our classical confessions insist on church unity as a gift of Christ that must be visible among his people. And because the church is spread around the globe and isn't confined to certain places or certain people (Belgic Confession, Art. 27), we should be ready to receive gospel insights from outside our own denomination. At the same time, we should be challenged by two prophetic Reformed confessions of the 20th century that bravely struggled with the unity of the church: the Barmen Declaration (1934) and the Belhar Confession (1982). Each in its own way, the Belhar and the Barmen make clear that seeking unity between denominations (and within a denomination) can be costly and risky and is only ever genuine if it is unity rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ, “the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death” (Barmen, 1). **B**



Todd Statham is the Christian Reformed Chaplain at the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus.



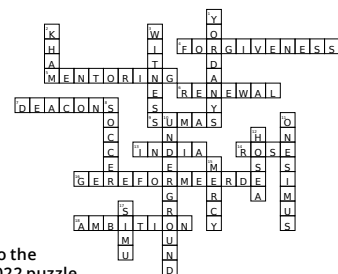
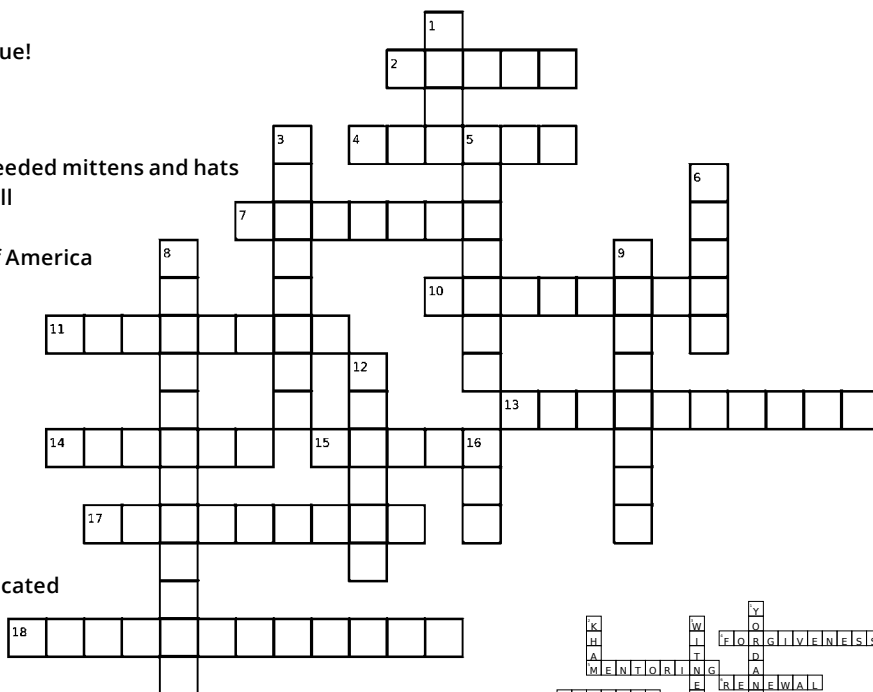
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!

**Down**

- 1. They are more complex than toasters
- 3. Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_ used donated yarn to create needed mittens and hats
- 5. Podcast \_\_\_\_\_ for *Black Girls* offers insight for all
- 6. Only about 1% of its population is Christian
- 8. Daniel Harrell writes how different narratives of America can show us different versions of this
- 9. The river that flooded the town of Sumas, Wash.
- 12. Rachael Denhollander was the 2021 recipient of the \_\_\_\_\_ Prize
- 16. There are many denominations because of this

**Across**

- 2. The name of one writer's wife, who died after seven years of marriage
- 4. Michelle \_\_\_\_\_, author of *Ida B. the Queen*
- 7. A seminarian uses this for the last leg of a complicated journey to a guest-preaching gig
- 10. An interactive devotional for families in eastern and southern Africa
- 11. Jesus contrasted a tax collector to this person
- 13. Metha Alberda is a volunteer \_\_\_\_\_ in Alberta
- 14. "Quick to \_\_\_\_\_"
- 15. Many congregants want church praise time to include these kinds of songs
- 17. The graphic novel *When Stars Are \_\_\_\_\_* tells story of hardship
- 18. A made-up word that refers to the "scientific study and religious appreciation of birds"



Answers to the January 2022 puzzle



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- Engineering - Computer/Electrical
- Music (Choral, one year)
- Philosophy
- Social Work

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Application reviews will begin immediately. Qualified persons committed to a Reformed, Biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to follow the faculty application procedure at the link below.

[www.dordt.edu](http://www.dordt.edu) — About Dordt — Job Openings

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### Available for Call

**AVAILABLE FOR CALL** The council of Fellowship CRC in St Thomas, ON is pleased to announce that Reverend Marcel Kuiper, having completed his pastoral term, is eligible for a call as a minister of the Word.

### Church Positions Available

**1ST CRC DEMOTTE INDIANA SEEKS FULL TIME YOUTH DIRECTOR** Job description and contact information are on our website: [www.1stcrcdemotte.org](http://www.1stcrcdemotte.org) under the About tab.

**FULL-TIME YOUTH AND WORSHIP DIRECTOR:** Tacoma Community CRC seeking youth/worship director to be part of our team. For more information and to apply visit [www.tacomacrc.org](http://www.tacomacrc.org)

**LEAD PASTOR** - Aylmer CRC is prayerfully seeking a Lead Pastor to join our ministry team. The Lead Pastor we are seeking would ideally be self-motivated, compassionate, devoted to providing engaging preaching, passionate about nurturing spiritual growth, and able to equip us for community outreach. If you would like to live and work in the beautiful, thriving town of Aylmer, Ontario, conveniently located near the shores of Lake Erie and close to larger urban centers, we would like 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. Housing is available if needed.

**LEAD PASTOR** East Saugatuck Church, located just south of Holland, MI, is seeking a full-time lead pastor. The ideal candidate will be gifted in Biblical preaching and have a heart for discipleship, community outreach, and congregational care. To learn more or access our church profile, visit [espoint.org](http://espoint.org). Send questions and resumes to [search@espoint.org](mailto:search@espoint.org).

**LEAD PASTOR NEEDED IN HAYWARD, CA** (SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA) Christ's Community Church (CRC). We are a multicultural church with exciting worship and warm fellowship looking for someone to lead us into our next chapter. For more info contact [CCCPastorSearch21@gmail.com](mailto:CCCPastorSearch21@gmail.com)

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**PASTOR OF EDUCATION** Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Brighton, ON is seeking a qualified, spirit filled man to be our full-time Pastor of Education to lead the educational ministries of our church with a special focus on the younger generation. Please visit [brigh-toncra.org](http://brigh-toncra.org) for the current job description. Application deadline is Feb. 28, 2022.

### Congregational Announcements

**BRADENTON CRC WELCOMES WINTER VISITORS AND VACATIONERS!** Our Florida church is diverse in ages and interests but united in passionate service to our Savior. Sunday services at 10 A.M. and 5 P.M. Weekly Bible studies are available in person or on Zoom. We also offer various other events and gatherings. [www.bradentoncra.org](http://www.bradentoncra.org)

### Denominational Announcements

**AGENDA FOR SYNOD 2022** Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the office of the executive director of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda: a. Overtures, communications, and appeals to synod are due no later than March 15, and must first be processed through the local council and the classis. b. Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the Credentials for Synod form, as well as the completed information form for each synodical delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes and the appointed delegates as soon as possible, but no later than March 15. Materials will be included in the Agenda for Synod if received before the synodically established deadlines. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director of the CRCNA

**ANNUAL DAY OF PRAYER** Synod has designated the second Wednesday in March (March 9, 2022) as the Annual Day of Prayer. All CRC congregations are requested to take this opportunity to ask for God's blessing upon the world, our nations and communities, crops and industry, and the church worldwide. U.S. Councils, if it is judged that the observance of the Annual Day of Prayer can be more meaningfully observed in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer (U.S.), you have the right to change the date of a special service accordingly (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 578). The National Day of Prayer (U.S.) is Thursday, May 5, 2022. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director of the CRCNA

### Birthdays

#### BIRTHDAY 102 YEARS

**HILDA MANTING (VAN MEETEREN)** of Holland, MI celebrates her 102nd birthday on February 4th. She continues to be a blessing to her family and friends, and her faith is an inspiration to all who know her.

#### BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

**CATHARINA RYPSTRA (TALEN)** celebrates her 90th birthday on Feb. 2, 2022. We thank God for his faithfulness. Children: Brenda Loman, Jim and Vel Rypstra, Fred and Irena Rypstra, Don and Theresa Rypstra, 12 grandchildren and 22 great grandchildren. Her address is 176 Venado Way, San Jose, CA 95123

**CHESTER VANDERZEE** will celebrate his 90th birthday on 2-2-22. His wife Betty, their four children and their families are thankful for the life that God has given him. Well wishes can be sent to 816 Samara Ave, Volga, SD, 57071.

### Obituaries



**BOSMAN, Carolyn J., nee Todd**, age 77 went to be with her LORD on December 12th, 2021. 1002 Saylor Ave, Elmhurst, IL 60126. Beloved wife of George Bosman; loving mother of Shari (Jack) LeGrand, Barb (Bob) Stoll, David (Jody)

Bosman, and Kristi (Steve) Vander Wal; devoted grandmother of Kari (Steve) Krygsheld, Kelli LeGrand, Tyler LeGrand, Kacie (Trent) Vande Kamp, Rachel Stoll, Sarah Stoll, Anna Stoll, Atikilt Bosman, Zinabu Bosman; Ben Vander Wal, Abby Vander Wal, and Jake Vander Wal; great-grandmother of Jaycee Krygsheld; fond sister of Bob (Mary) Todd, Marcia Wolff, Susan (Tim) Herwaldt, and Glen (Kathy) Todd. Memorials to Lampstand Ministries, P.O. Box 5611, Villa Park, IL 60181; Timothy Christian Schools, 188 W. Butterfield Rd. Elmhurst, IL, 60126; or Ebenezer Youth Ministry, 1300 S. Harvey Ave. Berwyn, IL, 60402.

**DE BOER, Jacob "Jack"**, age 80, of Burr Ridge went to be home with his LORD on December 14th, 2021. 6389 Blackhawk Trail, Indian Head Park, IL 60525. Beloved husband of the late Sandra, nee Vellenga; faithful father of Tricia (James) Koning and Trent (Kristen) De Boer; loving grandfather of Emma, Jacob, and Samuel De Boer; brother of the late Gordon (the late Ardella) DeBoer; uncle of many nieces and nephews.

**DE BOER**, Verna (Kortenhoeven), age 70 of Kapowsin, WA, entered the presence of Christ the LORD on November 23rd, 2021. The fourth daughter of Harry & Virginia, wife of Jay, mother of Pastor Aaron, Rebecca (Travis Ball), Andrew & foster son, Cody, grandmother of LucyElla, Mabel & Rosemary. What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD.

**HALMA**, Barbara, age 66, of Hawthorne, NJ, passed on to her Heavenly Home on December 11, 2021. She was preceded in death by her parents, Neil and Helen Halma, and by her sister, Linda. She is survived by her siblings, Neil Edward Halma and his wife Deborah of East Hanover, NJ, Ruth Halma of Prospect Park, NJ, Joan Vander Haak and her husband Bob of Lynden, WA, and brother-in-law Michael McCoy of Gaithersburg, MD. Also cherished nieces, nephews, great-nephews and great-niece.



**HELDER**, John S. age 91, of Kentwood, MI passed away peacefully on September 14, 2021. He was the loving husband of Gertrude (deceased) for 65 years. He was the loving Dad of Karen Helder, Ron Helder, Jim Eaton, Mary Van Noord and

Bob and Cathy Helder; dear Grandfather of Lisa and Matt De Haan (Emily and Kaitlyn), Jonathan and April Van Noord (Owen and Alaina), Elizabeth and Jordan Wheeler, Andrew and Nora Helder, and Jessica and Curt Jennings. He is survived by several brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephews and nieces. John loved, encouraged and served his colleagues and friends at Mills Paper Company, WJBL Radio, The King's Choraliers, the founding Board of Sunset Manor, Zondervan Singspiration, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, North Bay Resort at Big Star Lake, the City of Kentwood, and the Churchmen's Luncheon at New Community Church. We are thankful for his life of inspirational solos, creative service, positive perspective and encouragement as John sang often that "His Eye is on the Sparrow" and he knew that God watches over all of us.

**HOOGSTRATEN**, Jennie (Munk) predeceased by her husband Bob, passed away November 30, 2021 at 90yrs old. She will be missed by her children: John and Susan, Anita and Ken, Nancy and Brian, her 6 grandchildren, extended family and friends in both Chicago, Florida and beyond. We now celebrate her rest in Jesus.

**HULST**, Louise (Jacoby), died December 4, 2021, Pella, Iowa. She was born November 25, 1930, to Thurlow and Nina Jacoby in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Louise met her husband, John, while both were attending Calvin College, from which she graduated in 1951. Following John's graduation from Calvin Theological Seminary, the couple served CRC churches in Ireton and Or-

ange City, Iowa, and Jenison, Mich. With John's move to Dordt College (now University) in Sioux Center, Iowa, in 1968, Louise began a 24-year career in the Dordt library, which has since been named in John and Louise's honor. The couple enjoyed travel for work and pleasure, visiting six continents. Louise was preceded in death by two infant boys and by John, who died in 2013. Louise is lovingly remembered by daughters Lizbeth Hulst, Susan Hulst DeYoung (James), and Mary Hulst (James Saunders), seven grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. Memorials may be made to the John and Louise Hulst Scholarship funds at Dordt University and Calvin Theological Seminary.



**KUIPER**, Robert J. "Bob", age 78, went to be with his Lord and Savior on Thursday, December 30, 2021. Bob was the beloved husband of Marjorie (Pessman) Kuiper for 56 years. A wonderful father to Dean, Dwayne (Deb), Darrell

(Kim) and Dawn Lyle. A cherished grandfather to Megan (Jesus) Bustamente, Melissa (Gabe) Doran, Natalie (Matt) Eriole, Rebecca Kuiper, Olivia (Cody) Rozeveld, Christopher Lyle, Paige (Jake) Romanack, Angela (Kyle) Robinson, Shannon Kuiper, Brian Lyle, Benjamin Kuiper, Austin Kuiper and Jadya Kuiper. Great-grandfather of Isaiahs, Esmeralda, Rowan, Eliot, Caspian, Isabella and Cadence. Dear uncle of many nieces and nephews. Bob was born on September 5, 1943 in Grand Rapids, Michigan to James and Betty Kuiper. Brother to Jim (Cook), Steve (Sandi), Tom (Donna) and Ken (Betty). Bob graduated from Calvin College and Kuyper College. He was an active member of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church where he served as Deacon, Sunday School teacher and speaker at their local nursing home ministry. He was also involved in the Gideons, Operation Blessing and the Southside Pregnancy Center. Bob had multiple jobs over his lifetime but his true passion was telling others about Jesus. His latest job was selling cars at VanDahm Lincoln Mercury where he liked meeting new people every day. Since retiring, Bob volunteered with Child Evangelism Fellowship. He loved working with children and sharing God's Word with them. He loved to spend time with his family. We want to thank Alden Estates and Home Hospice for all the love and care they showed. Condolences may be sent to The Kuiper Family, 5715 Park Place, Unit J1, Crestwood, IL 60418.

**NYHOF**, Hermina 93, took up her heavenly residence December 21, 2021. Hermina graduated from RBC (Kuyper College). Survived by three sisters, five brothers and many nieces and nephews. She spent 17 years with Home Missions in New Mexico (Church Rock and Rehoboth), ten years as secretary to three RBC presidents. Hermina spent many years volunteering with Bibles for Mexico Thrift Store, Friendship Ministry, and Prison Fellowship Ministry.



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Apr 8 – Apr 16 or Apr 15 – Apr 23

*Bruce & Judy Buursma*

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May 7 – May 18 | *Ellen & George Monsma*

#### PASSION PLAY TOUR:

#### SOUTHERN GERMANY & AUSTRIA

May 15 – May 24 | *Rev. Jim Pollard*

#### GERMANY: LUTHER, BACH, AND THE PASSION PLAY

May 22 - May 31 | *Pastor Chris Lane with Dick & Candice Wallace*

#### PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS IN TURKEY:

May 23 – Jun 4 | *Dr. Jeffrey Weima*

#### IRELAND PAST AND PRESENT

Jun 16 – Jun 25 | *Debra Freeberg*

#### EUROPEAN HANDBELL FESTIVAL

Jun 18 - Jun 29 | *Deborah Rice & Keith Cole*

#### PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

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Aug 20 - Aug 28 | *Bruce Buursma*

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**ROELOFS**, Cynthia, 93, of Byron Center, MI, passed away on Dec 23, 2021, following a short hospice stay in Cape Canaveral, FL. She was born in SW Minnesota and married Harlan Roelofs after they met when she taught in Prinsburg, MN. Together, they were a ministry team to CRC churches in Kansas, Iowa, California, and Western Michigan. She enjoyed teaching junior high music and history, playing piano and organ, and leading women's bible studies. Harlan passed away in 1997 after which she often volunteered with World Renew-Disaster Response Services and mentored prisoners through Crossroads Ministries. Cynthia is survived by one brother and two sisters along with children Lyle (Lau-

rie) Roelofs of Berea, KY; Karl (Vicki) Roelofs of Wyoming, MI; Marilou (Steve - dec.) Richardson of Merritt Island, FL; and Evan (Sue) Roelofs of Byron Center, MI. Cynthia was a member of LaGrave Ave CRC. A celebration of life ceremony is planned for early Spring.

**TERPSTRA**, Jacob, age 94, of Grand Rapids MI, passed on November 30, 2021. Preceded in death by his parents, Jake, and Effie Terpstra, his 5 siblings, and his wife of 67 years, Martha. He leaves behind his three children, Mark, Jack (Anita), Jeanne (Bob) Katerberg; 10 grandchildren; 8 great grandchildren; sister-in-law Ella Terpstra; and many loving nieces and nephews. Jacob served in an engineering battalion in the US Army at the end of WWII. He graduated from Calvin College and then attended the University of Michigan where he received a master's degree in Social Work. After many years of serving communities, he retired in 1997; he continued to be active, including speaking in several state and other countries and continued writing articles and a book on child welfare, "Because Kids are Worth It". He was a member of Plymouth Heights Christian Reformed Church.

**Vanden Bosch**, Norma E age 87 of Lakewood, CA passed through Heaven's gates on Oct 12, 2021. Predeceased by daughter Lynn Kooiman and son in law C J Oliver, survived by husband Ron Vanden Bosch and daughter Rhonda Oliver, 4 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren.

### Employment

**SCHOOL PRINCIPAL** New Era Christian School in western Michigan is seeking its next principal to provide comprehensive leadership to our PK-8 Christian School. The position will begin July of 2022. It is a full-time position that includes part-time teaching duties. More details at [newerachristian.org](http://newerachristian.org).

**TRUCK DRIVERS** Zeeland greenhouse looking for motivated CDL A & B drivers for deliveries. Get paid well by the HOUR, not the mile! Drivers rewarded for dedication & hard work. Full time position for April & May, and into June, also opportunities in the fall. Be home on Sunday, some Saturdays may be required. All expenses - trucks, fuel, tolls, hotel (if required), are covered by the company, not the driver. Retired? Great extra income if you have a current CDL, medical certificate, and good driving record. Contact Amy: 616-875-7211 for info or @ Meadowridge: 8952 Tyler St. in Zeeland

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## Surviving After the Death of My Wife

If she were still here, she would tell me, “Paul, pull up your pants and live life. You can do it.”



Paul Delger is a long-time professional writer and inspirational speaker to young people. He lives in Kanawha, Iowa.

**MY WIFE, KARIN**, died suddenly of a heart attack in July 2020. I found her lying on the floor in her sewing room. I never had the chance to say goodbye.

My life changed drastically that summer night. I was now a widower with an unknown future. We were planning to move from Iowa back to her former home of Wisconsin. I was uneasy about that move and often prayed, “Lord, if this isn’t your will, please blow it up.” I never imagined he would blow it up with Karin’s death.

We were married for seven years and knew each other for 10. I was a bachelor until age 56; Karin had previously been married. She was a planner, and I would often joke with her by saying, “Well, Karin, what do you have planned for July 4, 2025?” But plans came to a quick halt. No more trips, no more grocery runs, no more doing life together. I was devastated. I was alone.

The first few days after Karin’s death, God gave me a song. The group I Am They wrote a piece titled “Faithful God,” where part of the lyrics states, “I know my story; it isn’t over.” I thought, “Karin’s earthly journey is over, but my life continues.” Through many tears while listening to that song, God gave me hope when I desperately needed some.

My grief journey has been difficult. I lost oneness with Karin. When the Bible says a husband and wife are one flesh, it is correct. You realize that more when it is taken away.

Although the grief process has improved, I still have moments of despair. Recently I suffered a long bout with a sinus infection. That triggered feelings of major fear and loneliness. Karin wasn’t there to soothe me with her encouraging words, hold my hand, or give me a hug. Grief blindsides me at other times too. For example, I can shop in the produce section of a

grocery store, where a memory will be triggered, and I’ll feel the tears start to well up.

I have tried to look at my grief rationally. Karin is with the Lord, so why am I so sad at times? As much as we would like to deal with death from heaven’s side, we cannot. We are still on the sin side of life dealing with loss, pain, suffering, and the negative consequences of this broken world. I yearn for the day when that ceases.

I hope to build on Karin’s legacy of quiet service. She was a social worker and mental health therapist for more than 30 years. Karin loved people who were poor, disadvantaged, or society’s outcasts. She was the most giving person I have ever known. Whether she was providing a meal for someone in tough circumstances, sending a card or gift, buying a meal for a stranger in a restaurant, or encouraging someone with words, Karin displayed the hands and feet of Jesus.

Another thing I appreciated about Karin is that she overcame much in her life. She endured a childhood with difficulties that bled into adulthood. Karin was not a quitter, and she simply persevered on numerous occasions.

Karin had her faults, too. She was opinionated, extremely driven, and at times laser-focused. But overall she was a great lady, and many people loved and appreciated her.

Karin had a profound impact on my life. She loved me, took care of me, and encouraged me. If she were still here, she would tell me, “Paul, pull up your pants and live life. You can do it.”

When I think of that, it makes me smile. My grief is replaced with hope. God still has a mission for me here. **B**

## Hear Our Cry

Maybe the words  
were incorrect,  
but they were the  
right words for me.


**I SANG AS I TRUDGED** across an icy, deserted church parking lot, an all-too-common sight since COVID-19 showed up and lockdowns followed. I sang, not loudly—at least I didn't think anyone could hear me: "Come, thou Fount, come, thou King," and on and on. Lost in thought, I wasn't concerned whether or not I sang the correct lyrics. It wasn't until later, after my encounter with the letter carrier and when I looked up the lyrics, that I realized I did get the words wrong. Instead of "Hear your bride," I sang, "Hear our cry, to you we sing. Come, thou Fount of our blessing."

Maybe the words were incorrect, but they were the right words for me. I was filled with a cry for a man in our church family who was sick with COVID-19 and pneumonia and was on a ventilator. I also was filled with soul-sick sorrow for all the elderly people dying of COVID in long-term care, and pained because every day seemed to be an interminable avalanche of bad news. And then there was the personal stuff, such as not being able to see my kids and grandkids who live far away and not being able to worship in person or visit friends.

I glanced up and saw a letter carrier standing by the open trunk of her car, where she was getting her mail bag sorted out. She stopped what she was doing and looked at me, smiled, and said, "That sounded lovely. What were you singing?"

I was taken aback, and without giving it another thought, I started to sing. Of course, I sang the wrong words, but they were the right words for me: "Come, thou Fount, come, thou King; Come, thou precious Prince of Peace. Hear our cry." That's as far as I got before the tears welled up, and I finished off with a weak, but sincere, "To you we sing. Come, thou Fount of our blessing." When I finished

singing to the letter carrier in the most unlikely setting of an icy church parking lot during a pandemic, she reached out her arms to me in a virtual hug, and I told her that God is so good no matter what is happening in the world. Her smile told me she was open to that truth.

I said goodbye, dried my tears on my mitten, and continued my walk, filled with a burst of joy and amazement at the divine, delightful absurdity of what had happened. Had I just sung a song of faith to a letter carrier I didn't know and probably would never meet again? In my inner being, I heard the Holy Spirit speak: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15). The reason for my hope—even during a pandemic as I mourn for those who are experiencing the loss of health and life, miss family, and ache for the world—is that the Fount of every blessing, the King, the precious Prince of Peace, hears our cry, hears his bride, and promises to never leave or forsake us (Deut. 31:6). 



Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer and a member of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ont.



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