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WHAT'S ONLINE

Looking for more? Here are just a few of the stories you'll find online at thebanner.org.

- » Church Worldwide: Refugee Resettlement Groups Advocate Amidst Immigration Change
- » CRC Directors Sign Statements on Poverty, Racism, Refugees
- » Movie: *Black Panther*
- » Television: *Living Biblically*
- » Book: *The Financial Diaries: How American Families Cope in a World of Uncertainty* by Jonathan Morduch and Rachel Schneider
- » As I Was Saying: Now Is the Time
- » As I Was Saying: Nine Ways to Be a Better White Anti-Racist

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Calling all college students! Enter our writing contest; see the ad on page 46 for details.



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BANNER

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- Editor** Shiao Chong
- Associate Editor** Judith Claire Hardy
- News Editors** Alissa Vernon, Gayla R. Postma
- Mixed Media Editor** Kristy Quist
- Art Director** Dean R. Heetderks
- Designers** Pete Euwema, Frank Gutbrod

Contact Us 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407 info@TheBanner.org
Address Changes and Subscriptions 800-777-7270 or visit TheBanner.org
Classified Advertising 616-224-0725 classifieds@TheBanner.org
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Faith and Gun Culture

[Questions about gun culture] are spiritual questions for which the Christian Reformed Church should give guidance to its members.



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

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

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

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

AFTER THE PARKLAND, FLA., high school shooting, someone asked me, “Is it time for the Christian Reformed Church to have an official position on gun control?” After researching, reflecting, and praying about that question, I think what we need instead is an official position on gun culture. By gun culture, I am not thinking of hunting culture or other appropriate gun ownership and uses.


Even though people also need to wrestle with the hard questions on gun violence, I think it is more urgent for the church to decide whether the North American gun culture is compatible with or opposed to our calling as Christ-followers. That is a spiritual question the church is equipped to answer—and should answer. Only when our moral compass is properly calibrated by that answer can we navigate policy debates about gun control as Christ-followers rather than as political partisans.

I am in favor of an overture to form a study committee to outline and explore gun culture—with “culture” defined as a social group’s beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors—from a biblical and Reformed perspective. I hope, however, that such a study would avoid politically partisan positions and talking points.

I certainly hope such a study would explore whether the gun culture in North America harbors any idols that Christians must reject. It should analyze the ethical effects on society and on Christians. And it should answer, in light of Jesus’ teachings and example, our confessions, church history, and Reformed thought, the question of whether Reformed Christians should transform or reject this gun culture.

Here are some examples of gun culture. When National Rifle Association Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre argues that the constitutional right to bear arms “is not bestowed by man, but granted by God to all Americans as our American birthright,” it sounds like a belief. When Liberty University’s president, Jerry Falwell Jr., encourages students to carry guns in order to teach terrorists or shooters “a lesson” if they ever show up on campus, it shows an attitude and behavior. I hope the study committee can help us definitively answer John Piper’s question: “The issue is about the whole tenor and focus and demeanor and heart-attitude of the Christian life. Does it accord with the New Testament to encourage the attitude that says, ‘I have the power to kill you in my pocket, so don’t mess with me?’” And how does this gun culture align with the fruit of the Spirit, which includes love, peace, patience, and gentleness? (Gal. 5:22-23).

Do our Reformed confessions shed light on this? Or lessons from the early church? And have we properly understood Christian just war theory, in both its principles for just *causes* for violence and just *means* of carrying out violence? Can we apply its principles for relations among nations to interpersonal self-defense? What can we learn from our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ around the globe, many of whom are willing to suffer and risk their lives for love of God and neighbor?

These are spiritual questions for which the Christian Reformed Church should give guidance to its members. I fear that such an overture may face resistance. But if we cannot even explore these questions, then we have clearly been infected by idolatry. 

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

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REPLY ALL

Black History

Regarding "Making Black History in the Christian Reformed Church," Feb. 2018): The Cleveland and Akron churches will always remember the ministry of Rev. Emmett A. Harrison, who served this area in the late 1990s until 2010 or thereabouts. Please include him as an African American to be honored in Black History Month.

» Fred and Sandra Wybenga // Tallmadge, Ohio

Reggie Smith's article "Making Black History in the Christian Reformed Church" is an engaging read and long overdue. I regret, however, that he does not mention Rev. Clarence Presley, pastor of Word of Truth Ministries in Seattle. Pastor Clarence's personality, vision, and masterful preaching have influenced many. His sports ministry has influenced the whole city.

» Harry Weidenaar // online comment

What a great article on African Americans making history in the Christian Reformed Church ("Making Black History in the Christian Reformed Church"). The article would have hit home a little stronger if the pictures of the individuals were identified with their names.

» Andrew Ottevangens // Surrey, B.C.

Editor's note: The names of the eight individuals pictured on the cover and with the article were identified in the Table of Contents of that issue.

Double Dipping

In the communities I have served, funeral directors usually recommend that the pastor be given an honorarium

and sometimes suggest a range ("Big Questions," Feb. 2018). Caring for grieving loved ones and preparing for an excellent funeral can be very time consuming. Compared to the thousands of dollars a family will spend on funeral arrangements, a modest gift to the pastor can be a fitting way for the family to thank him or her. I have always enjoyed receiving gifts; I trust many grateful mourners also received some joy in their giving. Over the years, the symbolic value of these honoraria has meant more to me than the actual amounts.

If the pastor were charging a fee, I would agree with your word choice of "double dipping." But I believe I am speaking for most of my colleagues when I say that we do not *charge* mourners, but we do gratefully accept the gifts offered by thankful families.

» Bryce Mensink // Terra Ceia, N.C.

In answer to the question of paying pastors for the funeral service ("Big Questions," Feb. 2018), Henry De Moor writes, "Your question totally baffles me. I had no idea such a practice existed anywhere within our denomination." In southeast Iowa the funeral directors have a list of expenses that the family can set. The amount and stipend for the minister is on that list. The family can say they do not wish to pay the minister, and the minister can express a wish not to be paid.

» Royce Spoelstra // Oskaloosa, Iowa

I agree that a pastor should not be "requesting" payment to perform funeral or wedding services ("Big Questions," Feb. 2018). But as a pastor I want parishioners to understand two things: One, pastors usually spend a lot of additional time and

heart on these responsibilities; meanwhile, our other responsibilities do not go away because of an upcoming wedding or funeral. Two, the modest honorarium we often receive (in the range of \$100-\$200) for performing these services is often used by pastors to invest in quality time with spouses/families. Honoraria are not about "feeding on" the flock; they are a demonstration of gratitude for the pastor's additional time and investment in the pastor's family. If there is financial hardship, please don't pay the pastor anything.

» Nicholas Van Beek // Lansing, Ill.

Editor's note: The author responds:

I'm listening carefully. It's good to have this conversation ("Big Questions," Feb. 2018). Please read the question carefully. I was not asked whether a pastor might receive a spontaneously offered gift without feeling guilty about it, nor whether a funeral home (that doesn't listen to my request not to do it) might send me the regular fee it charges on behalf of the officiant. I was not asked whether a family might send a stipend to an organist or pianist or decorator. I was asked whether it is OK for a pastor to set and exact a fee for performing a funeral service when the deceased is a member of the church he or she serves and to inform the family of this while they're grieving and making arrangements for the funeral in the meantime. I am aware of cultural differences in this regard. But I took the opportunity to say that it is not OK for a pastor to do this specific thing I was asked and told exactly why I felt that way.

» Henry De Moor // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Mission in 3-D

So well said ("Mission in 3-D," Feb. 2018): For a fully effective mission, we need communion, community, and

Reconciling with Our Indigenous Neighbors

commonwealth. As I see it biblically, fellowship together with unity in Christ, love our neighbors in Christ and disciple the nations, and accept and promote the lordship of Christ in all areas of life. We need a balance of all three. I have often seen an imbalance and even an absence of Christian justice and action or only soul-winning. At times, reaching out to the lost would be belittled or discouraged, or Christian action would be highly promoted. And I have seen those in one camp be very critical of those in the other camp. May renewal, unity, and love flow through each of our missions in three dimensions.

» John Van Hemert // Lynden, Wash.

Sing to the Lord!

Very interesting article ("Sing to the Lord!" Feb. 2018), especially for someone like me who loves music and singing! Those statistics about the birds and their singing are amazing! I had no idea that songbirds have two-sided voice box! I think I will share this article on Facebook!

» Willem Tensen // *online comment*

READ MORE ONLINE

SOME PEOPLE may wonder what we as Canadian members of the Christian Reformed Church have done that requires reconciliation with Indigenous people. This question is extremely important. Left unanswered, it leaves a formidable barrier to improved relationships with North America's original inhabitants. I would like to suggest a few reasons why we need to reconcile with our Indigenous neighbors.

The heritage of many CRC members is from the Netherlands, a country that established colonies in North America over 400 years ago. At that time, our ancestors made a historic pact with the local Indigenous people. They agreed, as recorded by the two-row wampum belt, to share North America's resources without interfering in Indigenous ways of life. Instead of honoring that agreement, they have benefited from hoarding those resources and at the same time have allowed Indigenous people to be suppressed in numerous ways.

We have silently watched our governments force Indigenous people onto reserves located on what were thought to be useless pieces of land. As members of the Christian community, we stood back as churches collaborated with governments to confine young Indigenous children in residential boarding schools. Those children were separated from their families and culture so they could be forcibly educated in Christianity. As residential schools began to fall out of favor, we supported the development of a new government initiative. Under the guise of protecting Indigenous children, this welfare program removed them from loving homes and placed them with non-Indigenous families around the world.

Over 400 years ago, our ancestors made a historic pact with the local Indigenous people.

We currently allow our governments to default on treaty agreements that are already heavily slanted to our advantage. We build up our retirement funds by investing in oil and mining industries that fervently resist revenue sharing with Indigenous communities while ignoring Indigenous health concerns. We vote for governments that waste millions of dollars fighting laws that were specifically put in place by courts to protect Indigenous rights. We reject task force recommendations to educate church members on the Doctrine of Discovery, which has been and still is used to justify the dismal treatment of Indigenous people. Most important, we need to be reconciled for believing that, because we kept our hands clean by allowing others to do the dirty work, we in the church are innocent of any wrongdoing.

It's high time we accept responsibility for allowing past injustices and begin showing true Christian love to our Indigenous neighbors. **B**



Gary Rekker is a member of Maranatha CRC in Bowmanville, Ont. He is a student of Indigenous studies at Trent University in Peterborough, Ont.



Xinhua / Alamy Stock Photo

Song of Redemption

by Felix Fernandez

Growing up in a Dominican home in Miami meant that when dinnertime rolled around, I could expect a plateful of rice and beans with a serving of news headlines from the Spanish television network Univision. While my mom was working her magic with sazón in the kitchen, getting ready to feed what seemed like an army of 50 soldiers, my dad was recuperating in front of the television after a long day's work at the auto-body shop. Looking back, I'm not exactly sure how well the Federal Communications Commission regulated Spanish television

programming back in the 80s and 90s. One news program was called "Primer Impacto" ("First Impact"); it specialized in showing things you would never see on any other network.

One of the images that's stuck with me after all these years happened every year during Holy Week. Inevitably, on Good Friday, "Primer Impacto" showed people throughout Latin America marching through the streets of their cities and carrying large crosses on their backs as a way of reenacting the sufferings of Jesus Christ. I remember once asking my mom where the person with the cross on his back was going. She responded, "They are going to tie that man to his

cross and crucify him in front of everyone." Though no one was actually put to death, the practice continues today. Some participants are flogged prior to the procession and then are nailed by their hands and feet to the crosses they have carried.

In Luke 9, when Jesus shared with his disciples that he would be crucified and then resurrected, he followed the revelation with a declaration that all who would come after him must deny themselves, take up their crosses daily, and follow him (v. 23). For those of us north of the U.S.-Mexico border, this graphic portrayal of crucifixion in Latin America during Holy Week forces us to consider what the apostle

Paul meant when he wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ . . .” (Gal. 2:20).

As followers of Christ, we must recognize that the crosses we have been called to carry are much heavier than the weight of two wooden beams. These crosses may come in the form of a struggle with seizures, the loss of a child, a mental illness, a chemical dependence, or a besetting sin. Our procession with them may last an entire lifetime.

Yes, as followers of Jesus Christ, we have been called to deny ourselves and follow him. But let’s explore how the cry “It is finished” shapes our posture as we carry our crosses.

“It is finished” comes from Psalm 22. The evidence indicates that Jesus may have been reciting Psalm 22 in its entirety while he laid down his life on Good Friday. Though Jesus quotes other psalms from the cross, consider the following statements from Psalm 22 and their connection to his crucifixion:

- » “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (v. 1).
- » “All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads” (v. 7).
- » “All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me” (v. 17).
- » “They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment” (v. 18).

While it is difficult to determine with certainty what prompted the psalmist to write these words that eventually made their way to the lips of our Lord, we can profess that no prophecy is of private interpretation. The prophets spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

One thing is certain: The sufferings of the psalmist of Psalm 22 prepare us for and find their fulfillment in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. As we reflect on the death and resurrection of our Savior, let us never forget what Jesus was doing while he hung on the cross: He was singing! Please resist the temptation to separate the lyrics

from the melody in Psalm 22. The psalms were meant to be sung, and Jesus was no doubt singing the melody as he recited this psalm from the cross.

We could take it one step further and call the entire ministry of Jesus, from Bethlehem to Calvary, the Song of Redemption. The birth of Christ was filled with the sounds of a choir: Zechariah sang, Mary sang, and the

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angels sang. Jesus was born to the sound of music! But saying “Hallelujah” when a child is born is one thing. Still having a melody in your heart as you descend into the valley of the shadow of death is a miracle. But this is exactly what happened to Jesus. We know that the Messiah sang with his disciples on the night he was betrayed. And the Bible says that after the institution of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn before they went out to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. The psalm in that upper room was then followed by the song on the cross.

On Good Friday, Jesus masterfully selected the perfect psalm to serenade his sheep. The movement of Psalm 22 is powerful. The song begins as a lament but concludes with praise. In verse 1, the psalmist cries out, “My

God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” but concludes by shouting, “He has done it!” (v. 31)—in other words, “It is finished.” Verse 22 marks a major shift in the tone and pace of this song as the psalmist declares, “I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.” The song Jesus sang on Good Friday is a source of incredible hope for every believer.

Consider for a moment what may have caused the psalmist to modulate his song from lament to praise. Perhaps God opened his heart to see a divine power that works all things together for good and transforms a curse into a gift. We know that Jesus endured the weight of the cross because of the joy set before him. The point is that both the psalmist and Jesus never stopped singing—and neither should we.

Our journey may be marked by pain and agony, but it will not be defined by these things. No, the end of the song on Good Friday marks a new beginning for the redeemed because it shows us that the Messiah accomplished what we could not do for ourselves: the forgiveness of our sins and the redemption of his world. Jesus came to save us, and he calls us to follow him by carrying our crosses daily.

It’s been years since I’ve tuned in to “Primer Impacto,” but I can still see my mom in the kitchen and my dad on his favorite chair. This Good Friday I’ll be leaning in to listen for another voice—the voice of a Savior who invites all of those who are following him home to join the Song of Redemption. 



Felix Fernandez is pastor of South Kendall Community CRC, Miami, Fla.

BIG QUESTIONS

Vocation/Calling

What if I make the wrong career choices? Is it possible I have missed my calling?

Those who are deeply anxious about this matter may believe there is a job out there with their name on it. They may also believe that God's callings operate within a rigid, highly detailed blueprint for one's life.

But God's providence is much more creative, responsive, and innovative than the blueprint model implies. God's sovereign providence overrules even our wrong choices. If, like Jonah, we reject or evade what we know God has called us to do, God has a way of overruling our rebellious and resistant ways. As the Joseph stories in Genesis make so clear, God uses both our good and evil choices to fulfill God's purposes. This does not excuse our wrong choices, but it does put them in a larger providential context.

Sometimes a spiritual conversion or renewal causes us to wonder about the choices we made in light of our earlier priorities. Perhaps we've entered a profession to gain wealth or social status and later realize that these are bad reasons to choose a profession. In that case, we should first discern the possibilities for serving our neighbors in our current profession; it's possible to reorient our professional work to serve others.

In other cases, it may be better to choose a different occupation that better aligns with our newly discovered moral and spiritual values. If concrete opportunities to enter a new profession are possible, it may be wise



Céline Malépart

to strike out on a new path. After prayer, reflection, and consultation with wise and trusted friends, you may discern that God is calling you to embark upon a new career path.

The specific career choices we make are important, but they are not the most important part of our Christian lives. The most important thing is Matthew's counsel: "Seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [we are so anxious about] will be given" to us as well (Matt. 6:33).

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

Digital Life

As a Reformed Christian, I believe everything is redeemable. But I'm starting to wonder about social media. Facebook, in particular, depresses me. Or is it just me?

With more than 2 billion users worldwide, what could possibly be wrong with Facebook, the free social media service invented to bring us closer to each other? Quite a bit, actually. We're letting it change us and how we relate to each other.

You know that Facebook is about making money, right? It does so by delivering content—and ads—tailored specifically for you so you can safely

wander all day in your own universe of like-minded people.

Research indicates that 15.4 percent of American Facebook users said they "greatly" or "somewhat" dislike using the product. And more than 10 percent of respondents described Facebook's effect on society as "very negative."

Even the folks at Facebook have gone public with their misgivings. They found when people spend a lot of time passively consuming information—reading but not interacting with people—they report feeling worse afterward.

You know that feeling. The one you get when your friend displays pictures of his fabulous vacation—a vacation you know you'll never take. Multiply that feeling times a thousand as you scroll through happy people winning races, losing weight, building amazing storage solutions, and eating fabulous breakfasts.

Researchers call this "negative social comparison"—our habit of comparing ourselves to other people and wanting more.

What's a person to do? Abstaining from Facebook is one option, but perhaps not very realistic if it's your go-to place for sharing news with family and friends. But here are some tips for managing your use of social media:

» If you're worried that your use of Facebook (or online gaming or porn or shopping) has reached addiction

levels, find something better to do. Get professional help.

- » Unfollow people you wouldn't normally choose to go to lunch with.
- » Follow people and organizations who help you learn something new.
- » Combat the divisive nature of social media by adding your own original thoughts and ideas, written constructively. Leave room for further discussion.
- » Engage in thoughtful two-way conversation after thinking about your response offline for a bit.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the Christian Reformed Church and art director of *The Banner*. He is a member of Covenant CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Church/Bible/Doctrine

A friend of mine in hospice care was obviously struggling when he mentioned the devil and the guilt he felt. I told him: "Andrew, in Jesus your sins are forgiven." Ever since, I have been puzzling over this. I am not a member of the clergy. But may I, as a fellow Christian, pronounce to my friend, *in extremis*, that his sins are forgiven? Is this not, in effect, administering the last rites?

In this situation your instinct guided you, and I'm very glad you acted on it. Your friend was not only anxious about dying but also—perhaps even more so—about what the Judge might say when the Book of Life is opened. You pointed to Jesus' forgiving grace.

The last rites are one of seven sacraments in the Roman Catholic tradition. They are commonly administered by the priest and sometimes are referred to as the act of absolution. You should be aware that even in that tradition lay persons are allowed, *in extremis*, to administer the sacrament in times of great need. A nurse, for

example, may baptize a newborn child who, humanly speaking, is not likely to live. Most Protestants will recognize the validity of such a baptism.

In Protestant thought, however, there are only two sacraments specifically instituted in the New Testament: baptism and the Lord's Supper. We do not administer last rites. But we do stand at a deathbed with the gospel of grace and are perfectly at liberty to proclaim it there. The ordained do so, and so may the non-ordained. It is not a sacrament; it is speaking biblical truth.

We often urged seminary students not to pronounce the benediction until they were ordained. To do so as students, complete with the raising of the arms, was not well-received by an older generation who thought it the height of arrogance. Instead, we had them paraphrase the Aaronic benediction as a prayer: "The Lord bless you and keep you. . . ." That way the non-ordained acted without presumption yet clearly spoke words of Scripture. That's what you did. Well done!

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

Stewardship

Every October our church has a Stewardship Sunday with a sermon about giving money to the church. The deacons always put in a plug for meeting the church budget. Sometimes I think it should be called Fundraising Sunday. I know some people who don't attend church that Sunday because they dislike the tone and pressure. Should churches be having Stewardship Sundays?

I have been in churches that held an annual Stewardship Sunday, although not all churches do. The first time I led

a Stewardship Sunday, I must admit that I did not relish the prospect. I understood the reason—it came near the end of the church's fiscal year, and the leadership wanted to be sure everyone in the community thoughtfully considered their part in contributing to the work of church and kingdom. But it did feel a little like "Money Sunday," on which we were doing a fundraising pitch like the local public TV or radio station.

Three things changed the way I thought about Stewardship Sunday. First, I let the deacons talk about budget, giving, church support and kingdom work. I preach on stewardship in its many-splendored forms: of time, of creation, of gifts and talents. The whole scope of the stewardship project opens up as possibility.

Second, I found that the Bible is full of texts that speak about humans responding extravagantly to God's goodness and grace in different ways. Instead of the dreaded "Let's be good stewards and meet our pledge" sermons, why not invite listeners to find extravagant responses to God's grace in their lives?

Finally, I realized that many people, especially young adults, are looking for direction on how to steward their lives, including money. These last 16 years, I've pastored a church in a campus ministry setting. Occasional sermons that include the nuts and bolts of stewardly giving frequently result in words of thanks and comments like "I didn't know that's how it was done" or "I always wondered how people made those decisions." Stewardship is a pattern that is passed on from generation to generation; regular attention, whether yearly or not, supports that pattern.

Rolf Bouma is pastor of academic ministries at the Campus Chapel in Ann Arbor, Mich., and teaches in the University of Michigan's Program in the Environment.



Adaptation of 'God's Trombones' Shares the Gospel

NEWS

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Madison Church, a multisite Christian Reformed congregation in Grand Rapids, Mich., performed an adaptation of James Weldon Johnson's 1927 book *God's Trombones* in February.

Johnson, an NAACP activist, educator, lawyer, diplomat, and songwriter wrote the collection of seven poems as sermons that outline the message of the gospel. The title comes from his memories of the "old-time" Black preacher. He described the trombone as "the instrument possessing above all others the power to express the wide and varied range of emotions encompassed by the human voice—and with greater amplitude."

For Audrey Laninga, church member and codirector, *God's Trombones* was "a vehicle through which we could tell a sin, salvation, and redemption story clearly; one that could be spoken, danced, and sung."

The production was a multicultural and intergenerational endeavor involving approximately 100 volunteers, including a 35-voice gospel choir and a cast of 11.

Along with Laninga, church member James Abney codirected the performance, which depicted five of the book's seven poems. An estimated 700 church and community members attended.

LeMarr Jackson, Madison Church's youth director, who played the role of the Prodigal Son, noted how humbled he was to be part of a performance that portrayed the gospel with the richness of Black culture. "The art of Black culture has not been pushed heavily throughout our history," Jackson said. "It's been really inspirational and uplifting to be a part of that."

Madison's production of *God's Trombones* was an outreach effort to spread the message of salvation; it concluded with an invitation for audience members to accept Christ or rededicate their lives to him. "We really did this all for the Lord," Laninga emphasized, "that folks would give their lives to him. To see that happening was very much God's anointing on our work."

—Lori Dykstra



Poem 1: God Creates the World



Poem 2: We Turn Our Backs on God: The Prodigal Son



Poem 3: God Saves Us: Crucifixion

Illustrations by Madison Church member Michael Harris, used with permission.

Classis Renewal and More Actions by the Council of Delegates

At the second meeting of the Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church, held in February, delegates dove into a lengthy agenda. [The council acts on behalf of the CRC's synod, the church's annual leadership meeting, when synod is not in session.]

The council heard about the momentum in Faith Formation Ministries (below). It received a paper discussing the biblical theology of church planting and renewal (see p. 18) that included a list of resources available to congregations. And it talked about desired ministry priorities in the face of tough budget issues (see p. 16).

Classis Renewal

The council took note of the establishment of a classis renewal advisory team to help classes address challenges and develop ministry plans. The council recommended that Synod 2018 ask each of the 48 classes (groups of churches) to develop and share a ministry plan with the advisory team so that it can provide a summary of the plans to Synod 2020. It also recommended that Synod 2018 adopt a change in the Church Order (Article 39) to include the following statement: "A classis is a group of Christian Reformed churches that come together to seek, discern, and submit to God's will, offer one another mutual support and accountability, find ways to live out a collective calling within their region, and allow for a healthy and sustained connection to the wider denomination."

In Other News

- » Ministers who are deposed, released, or dismissed from CRC ministry will now be noted as such on the denomination's website, rather than just noted as withdrawn, to be consistent with the CRC Archives website.
- » The Mercy and Justice committee of the council asked staff to coordinate a time of learning and conversation regarding LGBTQ+ issues.

- » Back to God Ministries International director Rev. Kurt Selles noted a new memorandum of understanding with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Synod of the Nile, for media ministry in Arabic. With the retirement of Spanish-language ministry leader Rev. Guillermo Serrano, BTGMI is looking to relocate that ministry in a Spanish-speaking area.
- » The renovation and expansion of the Burlington, Ont., office of the CRC is nearing completion. The Canadian finance team is addressing a projected overrun of \$77,000 on the budgeted \$2.5 million.

Tasks Given By Synod 2017

1. A face-to-face visit initiated by the executive director between Classis Minnkota (a regional group of churches) and representatives from the CRC's Centre for Public Dialogue and the Office of Social Justice to discuss issues raised by the classis about the *Do Justice* blog took place February 28, 2018.
2. Footnoted comments to the Belhar Confession to provide biblical and confessionally grounded clarity to the parts of the Belhar that are widely recognized to cause disagreement and alarm are completed. Translations to Korean, Spanish, and Chinese are still in process.

—Gayla R. Postma

Faith Formation Ministries Gains Momentum

Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) of the Christian Reformed Church is gaining momentum in its work just a year after the denomination's Board of Trustees approved its curriculum proposal but said there was little money to fund it.

Within the past two months, Syd Hielema, team leader of FFM, has secured approximately \$65,000 in funding from a foundation and other donors to continue the work of the ministry, including updates to curriculum.

With that new funding, the ministry is going ahead with much of the program proposed a year ago, including a children's ministry toolkit, developing curriculum guidelines for churches when they evaluate their curriculum options, and hiring a children's ministry catalyzer. Still on the to-do list: refreshing the *Dwell* curriculum and adding a *Dwell at Home* piece to complement it.

Hielema said in an interview with *The Banner* that significant emphasis will be on helping congregations equip parents. "We are discerning that traditional modes of



Mimi Larson, Faith Formation's children's ministry catalyzer, offers coaching and support to leaders working in children's ministry.

exercising faith formation in the home are falling by the way." As fewer families eat together, dinner devotions don't happen.

"I believe we are in a post-programmatic context," he said. "We don't cancel programs, but programs alone can't do the job. We need . . . multiple places during the week where significant reminders of what it means to follow Jesus are part of our environment."

—Gayla R. Postma

Ministry Priorities, Budget Realities



High on the agenda of the Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church at its February meeting in Grand Rapids, Mich., was the topic of ministry priorities. But that conversation was framed by budget realities: the ministry shares rate (money from congregations to support mutual ministry) has been frozen by synod since 2015. The staff salary scale has been frozen for the past three years. Congregational Services, the group of ministries that primarily serve congregations, has had its budget reduced by \$2 million since 2014-2015.

When Synod 2016 declined to grant the ministry shares increase recommended by what was then the board, it mandated the Board of Trustees (through staff) to list and prioritize all the existing denominational ministries, with the goal of reducing the denominational footprint.

The same synod affirmed the ministry shares system as the most efficient for raising the needed funds. It also asked the board to “reimagine” the ministry shares system.

Everything Is a Ministry Priority

The denominational staff followed instructions, producing a detailed chart of all the denominational ministries, which was subsequently presented to Synod 2017. It conducted surveys and discussions before and during that synod

Cascade Fellowship CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., hosted the February meetings of the Council of Delegates.

to determine which ministries were considered a priority by church members and presented that report to the council. Among the many findings are the following observations:

- » There are really no ministries that significant portions of the CRC identify as lacking priority.
- » There is a lot of overlap between the various work of the agencies, which perhaps reflects a need to merge the work of various groups and then find a way to prioritize within each agency.
- » There is a high value of education, including Calvin College . . . this says that we prioritize faith formation for our upcoming generations.
- » No one is willing to say a specific ministry should be scaled back or discontinued.
- » Young people were much more interested in matters of social justice; older folks were more interested in established ministries (e.g., BTGMI, *The Banner*).

The council received the report from staff and instructed the executive director to “find ways to significantly curtail physical plant costs in Grand Rapids through exploring alternatives

such as (a) alternative energy sources, (b) renting existing space to other nonprofits, (c) encourage remote/home office work, (d) significant reductions of building square footage, and the like, and to provide a report and recommendations to the COD (and potentially synod) by October, 2018.”

Budget Reality

Even as those surveyed want to keep all the ministries, and even as the council and staff work toward reducing expenses, the amount churches are paying toward shared ministry continues to decrease.

Council delegate Don Draayer expressed his frustration with the situation. “Cut, but don’t cut, reduce the footprint, but keep doing more,” he said of the work being asked of the council. “Our people have become disconnected from where the money is going.”

The CRC’s director of finance and operations, John Bolt, told *The Banner* that the total requested ministry shares from the churches is approximately \$38 million. That would be the amount received if every church gave \$339.48 per adult member, as asked. The reality is that only \$22.9 million was received in fiscal 2017, just under 60 percent of the requested amount.

Bolt reported that in the current fiscal year, ministry shares income is running above budget and above the same period last year.

Congregational Services Hard-Hit

Hardest hit are the ministries in the Congregational Services cluster. These are the ministries primarily directed toward congregations, including Safe Church, Faith Formation, Worship, Race Relations, Office for Social Justice, Pastor Church Resources, and the like.

Colin Watson, the denomination’s director of ministries and administration, noted for

delegates, "We have reduced the annual expenditures for this group of ministries by about \$2 million since 2014-15." These ministries are almost entirely dependent on ministry shares. In the current year, the budget has a shortfall of \$450,000.

Ministry Shares Increase Coming?

Budgets for fiscal year 2019 are in preliminary stages, but one item under consideration is an increase of \$7 to the ministry shares amount to support Congregational Services in the long term. A special fundraising effort is being made to support those ministries in the short term.

—Gayla R. Postma



Shared on *The Banner's* Facebook page: Minnie Mulder, 106, a member of New Holland (S.D.) Christian Reformed Church, enjoys her copy of *The Banner* where she lives at the Good Samaritan Nursing Home in Corsica, S.D. Her family believes she is the oldest living member of the CRC.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Carl J. Reitsma

1927-2018

Carl Reitsma, who was born on Reformation Day and loved the Reformed faith, passed away on January 7 at the age of 90. He began ministry in 1955 at Collingwood (N.J.) Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), having studied at Calvin College, Theological University of Kampen in the Netherlands, and Westminster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania.

He served Calvary OPC in Cedar Grove, Wisc.; The Reformed Church of New Zealand in Wellington; and Sharon OPC in Hialeah, Fla.

For 17 years, Reitsma taught Bible at Timothy Christian School in Elmhurst, Ill. He was ordained in the CRC during that time and served several Christian Reformed churches as guest preacher or interim pastor. In 1990, he accepted a call to Calvary CRC in Lowell, Mich. He retired in 1994.

Reitsma was known for "loosening his clerical collar" during school and youth events and on tours through Europe. He and his wife welcomed hundreds of guests into their home and were host parents to many foreign students.

Reitsma leaves behind Dorothy, his wife of 65 years; six children and their spouses; 11 grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

—Janet Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Seung Jai Kang

1937-2018

Seung Jai Kang, 80, was a dedicated and energetic pastor who lived his life in service to local ministries, church planting, and teaching.

After completing an M.Div. at Chong Shin Seminary in Seoul, Korea, in 1967, he served churches and taught at various seminaries in Seoul. In 1986 he came to the U.S. as a Korean Christian Reformed pastor. Congregations he served included Korean Church of Orange County in Westminster, Calif.; Kalamazoo (Mich.) Korean CRC; and Yung Kwang CRC in Las Vegas, Nev. He earned a doctorate from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and was a mentor to local pastors and a leader in his classis. He also served as interim editor for *Voice of the Reformed*, a monthly periodical published by the CRC Korean Council, and offered leadership as synodical deputy and in the ministry of Race Relations.

Kang will be well remembered as a warm person devoted to Christ's mission.

Kang passed away on January 11 from pulmonary fibrosis. He is survived by his wife, Byung Sun; five children and their spouses; and six grandchildren.

—Jonathan Kim

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

Church Renewal Requires More Than Strategies and Resources

A team asked to compile a list of denominational resources related to church planting and evangelism has offered the Council of Delegates a document outlining the religious and biblical context of church renewal as it relates to evangelism and church planting, in addition to providing the requested list. The authors expressed the hope that the paper will “prompt the kind of reflection, discernment, and painful yet creative change that will truly bring renewal in the [Christian Reformed Church].”

The request for the list came from Synod 2017 (the annual leadership meeting of the CRC) in response to a discussion about the denomination’s membership decline.

“We appreciate the spirit and tenor of the recommendation, which emphasizes the value of a well-stocked ‘ministry toolbox,’” wrote the authors, including Moses Chung, Zachary King, Kevin Schutte, Cory Willson, and Jeff Bos. “However, we must be sober enough to realize that a ‘list of current resources’ cannot, in and of itself, grow our churches. If it were so, the answer to church renewal through evangelism and church planting would only be ‘a click’ away via an Internet search for ‘resources for church renewal.’”

Experiencing a renewed evangelistic focus only happens through prayerful, Spirit-led discernment and costly change, they said. It is an act of the Holy Spirit and not the application of the correct tools by ministry professionals.

They noted that for spiritual renewal to happen, the church must stop separating and compartmentalizing mission tasks like evangelism and church planting from worship, preaching, and discipleship. “This model worked in the now-defunct world of ‘Christendom’ or ‘churched culture,’” they wrote, “but does not work in the current context where biblical and ecclesiastic memory is rapidly disappearing from our society.”

While many may lament this, they wrote, those who are concerned with renewal for church planting should see it as a new opportunity.

However, in a quote from missiologists Dwight J. Zscheile and Craig Van Gelder, they also noted that “unless churches provide new ways of connecting with people where they are and of bringing them together meaningfully, they will continue to struggle and decline.”

That struck a chord for delegate Sam Cooper from Mississauga, Ont. “I wonder if we are being drawn to a new ecclesiology. The days of a concentric church are over. Just over,” he said. “Our younger members are out there. They refuse to be drawn to the center any longer. [This report] may get us to get out there and serve them where they are.”

The authors also pointed out that any denomination that remains majority white and middle class will, by default, tend to decline in numbers and influence.

The report asserted that particular methods, tracts, and tools of evangelism go in and out of vogue. “Especially in uncertain times and seasons of church decline, we can become gripped with fear about the future of the church and become attached to evangelistic methods and tools that promise numerical results.

“Whatever evangelistic, renewal, or mission strategies are pursued, it is the work of discipling all Christians to engage in Christian mission that is essential.”

The authors said that the Lord must breathe life into the dry bones of his church (Ezek. 37) and give it a passion for evangelism and church planting. The question, they ask, is, Do we want it? “Such a movement of renewal will be messy in our current church culture.”

The Council of Delegates endorsed the report and will forward it to Synod 2018.

—Gayla R. Postma

Highlights of Recent Classis Meetings

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, a regional grouping of churches. Here are the highlights of classis meetings of the past several months.

Several people were welcomed into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church, including seminary graduates Tara Foreman, Rafik Kamel, Hope Lee, Allen Pontarelli, Ricardo Tavarez, Mark Van Anandel, Michelle VanDenBerg, and Michael Westerveld. Brad Close was declared eligible for call.

Ministers transferring in from other denominations were Revs. Phil EuBank, Hong Youn “Daniel” Kim and Yoojeung Kim.

Minister released from a congregation: Rev. Andrew Zantingh.

Rev. bc Cumings’ release under Church Order Article 17a was not implemented by classis.

Released from ministry in the CRC: John Matias.

Tim DeVries was deposed.

New Ministries and Ministry Changes

An emerging church does not have its own council and is under the care of a council of a neighboring Christian Reformed church. An organized church has its own council.

Family Fun with Annual EGG-stravaganza

Saturday, March 24, marked Goshen (N.Y.) Christian Reformed Church's fourth annual EGG-stravaganza, continuing the event after a greater-than-expected turnout in 2017. Families are welcomed to enjoy games, crafts, activities, and a giant Easter egg hunt. A video presentation of the story of Jesus' resurrection has been shared each year as well.

The church has spread word of the free family event with signs in local businesses, advertisements in the local newspaper, and 6,000 flyers sent home with kids in public schools. After the 2017 event, Samuel Sutter, pastor of Goshen CRC said, "Events like our EGG-stravaganza have started to help us form



Families enjoy the activities at Goshen CRC's EGG-Stravaganza, 2017.

stronger bonds in our community and become more accessible to folks who come from different traditions."

For many years, locals have referred to Goshen CRC as "the Dutch church on the hill." This event is just one of many efforts the church is making to reverse the perception that the church is separate and out

of touch with the community. "[The nickname] remains a longstanding reminder of the need to change and re-engage with the community to bring the gospel to people," said Alida De Boer, an EGG-stravaganza volunteer.

"We're working really hard at being the sort of church that is welcoming and accessible and that reaches out into the community where God has us," Sutter added.

—Lori Dykstra

El Buen Samaritano CRC in Miami, Fla., was declared emerging.

Lakeside CRC, Ludington, Mich., San Jose (Calif.) Ark Church, and Immanuel CRC, Wyoming, Mich., disbanded.

Leadership

Classis Ko-Am decided that female ministers wanting to transfer to Ko-Am from other classes will be accepted.

Synod 2018

Classis Georgetown will offer an honorarium of \$600 to the elder and deacon who will be its delegates to synod.

Classis Eastern Canada is asking Synod 2018 to rename classes as regional assemblies.

Classis Pacific Northwest wants Synod 2018 to direct denominational leaders to call the entire denomination to intentional prayer for reconciled relationships, with a special focus toward those who have left the CRC for various reasons.*

*Full overtures will be included in the *Agenda for Synod 2018*.

—Banner Staff

Good Friday Cross Walk

In Brockville, Ont., each year, hundreds of Christians meet downtown to remember the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the Community Walk with the Cross.

The Walk has continued for more than 15 years and involves 11 churches from the local ministerial organization. Bethel Christian Reformed Church is a participating congregation.

At each of 11 stops, part of a cross is built—from assembling the beams to adding the crown of thorns, spikes, and other key objects mentioned in Scripture. The walk includes a narrative of the Passion story and a time of responsive prayer as printed in the distributed programs. In 2017, Jack Van



In 2017, members of Bethel CRC help carry the cross from City Hall to the Cenotaph.

de Hoef, pastor of Bethel CRC and chair of the Brockville Ministerial, hung the sign "King of the Jews" on the cross. After a prayer, members of the church, young and old, carried the cross to the next stop where another church took its turn with readings and carrying the cross.

"We are a small community, so it is so nice to get together as churches," said Bea Wallace, a member of Bethel CRC who did one of the Scripture readings in 2017.

Taking place throughout the city streets, the walk offers Christians a chance to demonstrate their unity to onlookers. "It's a real blessing for our churches, but it is a true witness to our community," said Wallace.

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Richard Diedert
Sytsma*
1920-2018

A man of prayer with a passion for spreading the gospel, Richard D. Sytsma was one of the pioneer missionaries to Japan in the early 1950s when the Christian Reformed Japan Mission began. Sytsma died on January 14 at age 97.

While serving in the U.S. Navy in World War II, Sytsma felt the call to ministry. On a visit to Yokohama after the war ended, he saw Japan's need to know Jesus' love. Following graduation from Calvin College and Seminary and ordination in 1952, he returned to Japan, where he served for 31 years. He planted six churches in cooperation with Japanese pastors and was involved in many projects with the Reformed Church in Japan. After retirement in 1984, the Sytsmas returned to the U.S., where he served as interim pastor in several churches.

An extrovert, Sytsma was known for his sense of humor, optimism, infectious love of life, and his love of travel and the outdoors.

Sytsma was preceded in death three years ago by his wife, Dorothy, and predeceased by their daughter, Kathy. He is lovingly remembered by his five children, 20 grandchildren, and 21 great-grandchildren.

—Janet Greidanus

News Digest



Ben Glenn and his chalk art.

Chalk Artist, Youth Speaker Visits Iowa

Ben Glenn, also known as The Chalkguy, visited Western Christian High School in Hull, Iowa, with his live art talk about God's plan for our lives and living with ADHD. About 175 students and youth leaders, including those from Calvary CRC in Orange City and Hope CRC in Hull, attended the event.



Illinois Church Builds Gym in the 'Middle of Everywhere'

Grace Valley Christian Reformed Church in German Valley, Ill., opened a new gym with family drop-in play and weekly men's basketball in January. "We draw from a 30-mile (48 km) radius from 13 different communities, so it's important for us to find avenues to connect," said Jake Ritzema, the church's pastor. Funds from the church's budget and loans from Classis Northern Illinois funded the project.

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



Photo: Rachel Cook

Ada Cook, 12, at the Ontario Prayer Breakfast.

Ontario Student Shares Prayer Breakfast Table with Premier

Ada Cook, 12, a member of First Hamilton (Ont.) CRC, led in prayer at the annual Ontario Prayer Breakfast, held in Toronto in February. The event, which is 50 years old, invites Christians of various political and denominational stripes to join together in prayer for all levels of government. Cook joined guests of honor, including Premier Kathleen Wynne, at the head table.



Alex DeWaal, Joey DeKoekkoek, Bryan Keeley

Youth Pastors Swap 'Pulpits' to Share Stories

Bryan Keeley of Third CRC, Joey DeKoekkoek of Grace CRC, and Alex Dewaal of Westwood CRC, all in Kalamazoo, Mich., switched youth groups for two meetings in February. They hoped to teach unity in the larger church, show that Christians can be better together, and hear from voices other than their own.

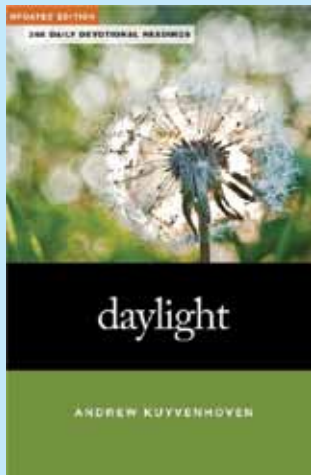
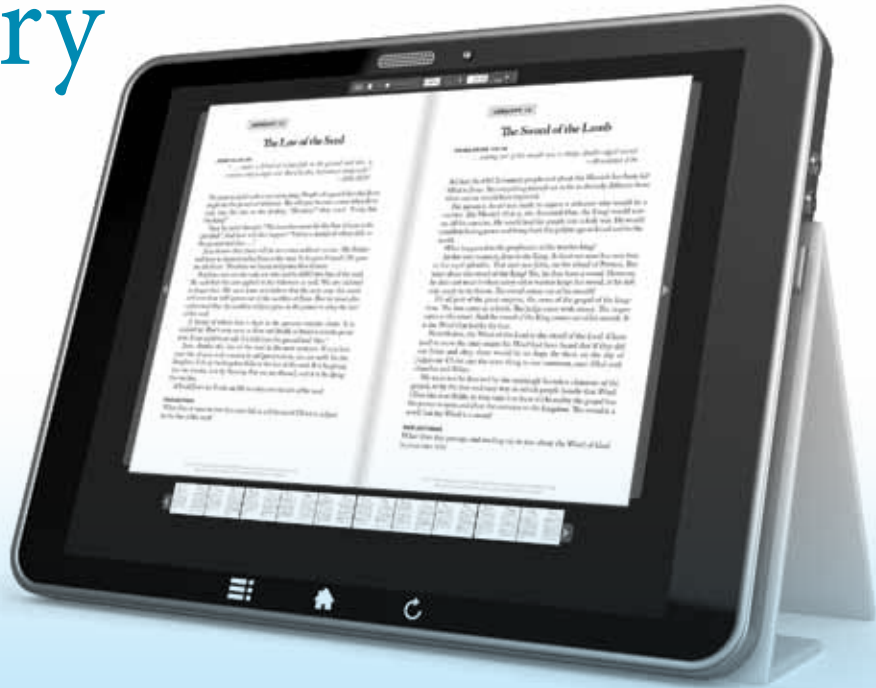
—Banner Correspondents

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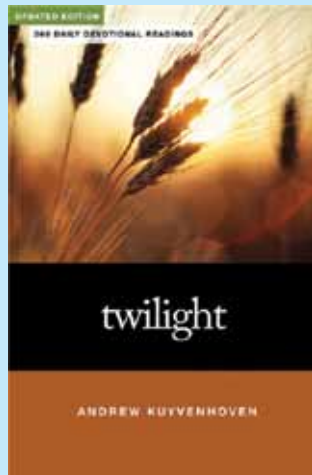
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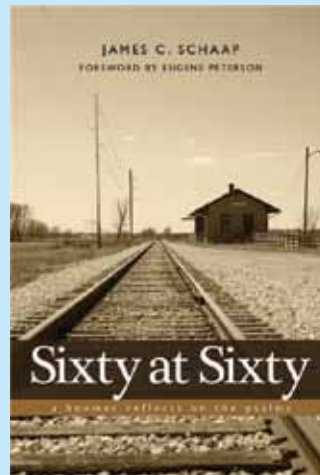
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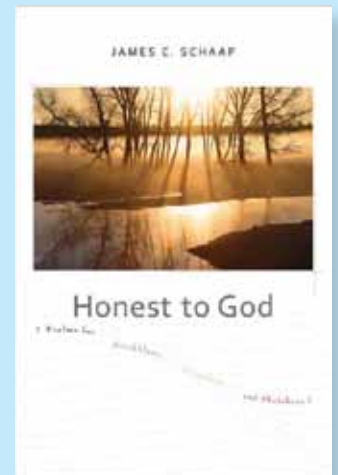
In this classic devotional book, updated with contemporary examples and questions for reflection, Kuyvenhoven uses Scripture to shed light on what it means to live in the presence and promises of God.



This updated companion to the bestselling *Daylight* devotional guide leads readers through an entire year of meaningful moments with God. Each month's meditations follow a book of the Bible or a biblical theme.



At his storytelling best, James Schaap presents a collection of 60 devotional readings based on the psalms. Written especially for his fellow "baby boomers," Schaap's meditations are a blessing for anyone looking for the hand of God in everyday life.



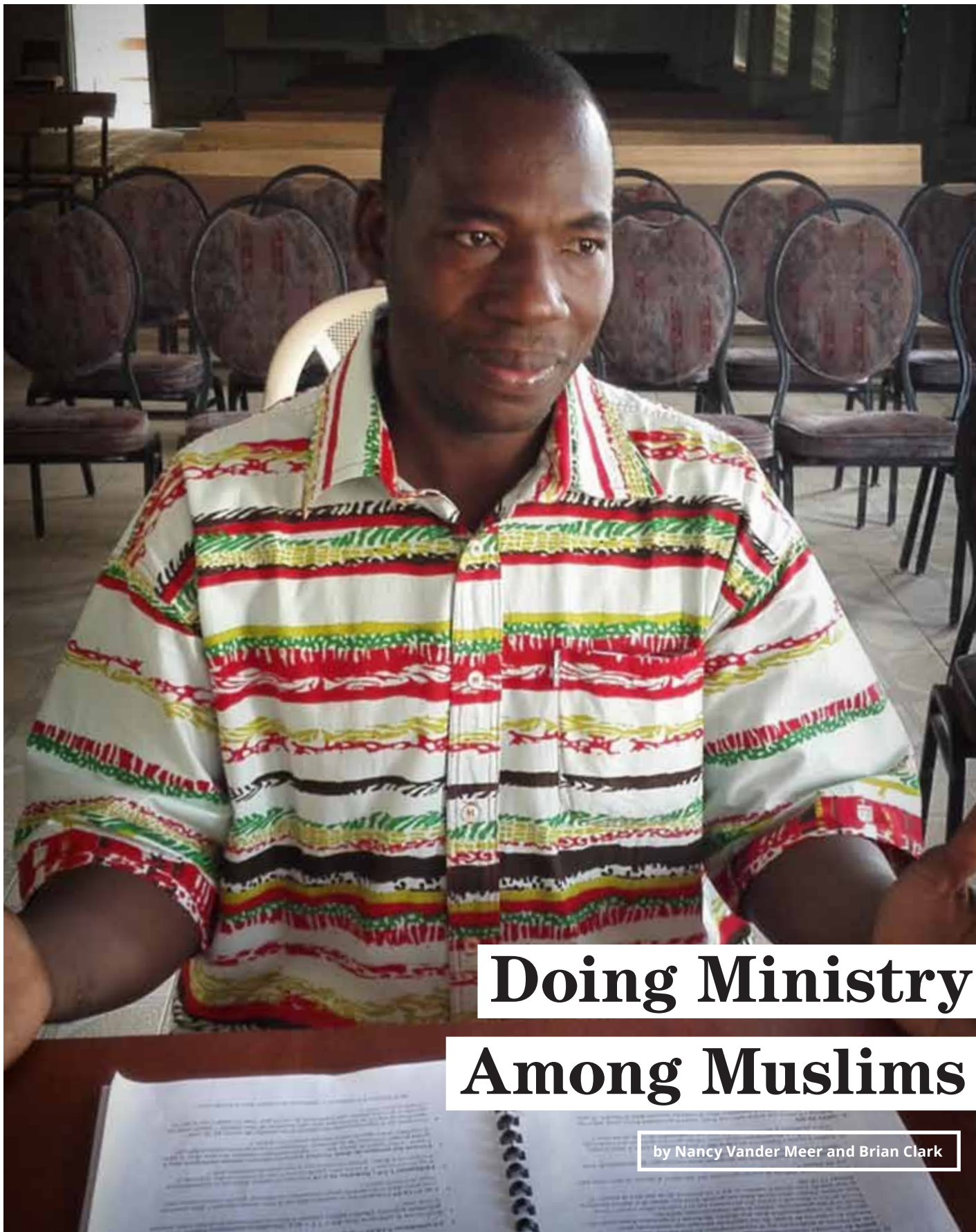
In this devotional guide, James C. Schaap delves deeply into the psalms, leaving space for readers to respond by journaling or drawing. *Honest to God* is an inspiring daily faith exercise—and a thoughtful gift for the creative people in your life.



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Doing Ministry Among Muslims

by Nancy Vander Meer and Brian Clark

Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in the world. In fact, recent research by the Pew Research Center shows that in the next half century, Islam will likely surpass the Christian faith as the world's largest religion.

This trend affects our churches. Whether in North American communities or in places around the world, the reality is that Christian Reformed churches can't ignore their Muslim neighbors. But what does this mean in practice?

How can we as a church meet Muslims where they are and walk alongside them in a way that gives testimony to our Reformed tradition? Sometimes this can mean simply being a neighbor, such as when World Renew provides disaster response assistance in a primarily Muslim community. Other times it means sharing the gospel and helping people come to know Christ personally.

We share a few stories that reflect the joys and challenges of Christian Reformed agencies as we try to do ministry among Muslims.

Loraine's Faith

Loraine's life journey is a strong witness of Christ's love in her Muslim community in Burkina Faso.

"I was born into a Muslim family," said Loraine, who asked that we not use her real name. "In 2008, I became a Christ-follower through a friend. She kept telling me about Jesus. That same year I met my husband, who was also a Christian. He encouraged me to join the church he attended."

Life soon became very difficult for Loraine.

"In general, when a Muslim gives herself to Christ, relationships with the family become complicated," explained Rev. Marc Nabie, French-language ministry coordinator for Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) in Burkina Faso. That was true for Loraine.

"When my father realized my conversion, he beat me and forbade me to go to church," said Loraine. "Still, I went. My father whipped me and put his hand in my eye sockets to put out my eyes so I wouldn't know the way to the church. The neighbors managed to save me, but I was badly wounded. They had trouble removing the clothes I was wearing, since my whole body was sores."

Rev. Marc Nabie is the French-language ministry coordinator for Back to God Ministries International.

Even today Loraine still has scars on her back and in her right eye.

"Stories like Loraine's are why some people hide their faith from their family. In some cases, they can attend church but quite discreetly. Where that's impossible, they remain in contact with the faith through Christian media like ours," said Nabie.

BTGMI seeks to develop healthy relationships in Muslim countries, to lift up Christ rather than speak against Islam. It began its French ministry in Burkina Faso in 2015, partnering with Timothy Leadership Training Institute (TLTI). TLTI already had an established ministry with local leaders in the capital city, Ouagadougou.

Under Nabie's leadership, BTGMI began producing radio broadcasts to complement Bible lessons being used by local TLTI-trained leaders. The broadcasts and lessons focus on living lives shaped by God's Word.

The media outreach has expanded to three radio programs broadcast throughout four regions, and the ministry team has added a website and Facebook outreach. Nabie also consults with a new BTGMI French media outreach begun in 2016 in Niger, which is 99 percent Muslim and where Christians and Muslims live in peace.



Loraine's experience converting from Islam to Christianity helps her counsel other Muslim women.

People, including Muslims living in the area, are responding to the gospel messages.

Loraine, who now works with Nabie in the Ouagadougou ministry center as an office assistant, often meets with listeners who come to the center for prayer and encouragement. She has special understanding and empathy for Muslim women seeking Christ.

"God gave me grace," she noted.

Radio Outreach Encourages Muslim Converts

"Loraine's testimony is representative of what a young converted Muslim woman can face," said Nabie, explaining how discipling new believers in this context takes special consideration.

After BTGMI expanded its French-language broadcast into Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso's second largest city, Nabie received a call from a listener there.

Rasmata,* an 18-year-old student, said that she had learned about Jesus through a local church. But as soon as her parents found out, they confiscated her Bible and forbade her from attending church. "Even the pastor was threatened," said Nabie.

"The pastor and Rasmata agreed that she should stay at home but would build her faith through our radio broadcasts," he added.

Rasmata felt God's presence and testified that she knew that Jesus was the way of salvation. She asked us to pray with her that one day she would gain her independence in order to live her faith.

Thank God that this young believer has the opportunity to hear gospel messages and grow in faith through radio outreach!

Ministering to Muslims Worldwide

BTGMI works with local partners to bring the gospel to people in several countries and languages.

In northern India and surrounding countries, radio and internet gospel proclamation introduces Muslims to Jesus Christ. In several places where the Christian faith is forbidden, audio and digital messages overcome barriers to sharing the good news of salvation. BTGMI's Indian staff members make long treks into remote places to meet with Muslim seekers and baptize those who commit their lives to Christ.

In May 2017, they traveled to a dangerous location to hold a seekers' meeting for 22 Muslims who wanted to know more about the Bible.

"All the participants were instructed to keep their voices low as they prayed and discussed the Bible," said Rev. A. K. Lama, BTGMI ministry leader in India. "The next day they all went to the mountains, where they had full liberty to sing and pray."

Lama added, "We realized that this precious time worshipping God was much needed because they are going through suffering and persecution for the sake of the gospel."

Reaching Muslims Locally

The Christian Reformed Church has also been learning lessons about how to do ministry with Muslims within North America.

Armando's* story is a great example. Armando, a former Muslim, has been on a spiritual journey in the last few years—a journey that eventually led him to McDonald's.



(L to R) Pastor Roland, Armando, and Ken at the first baptism event of the Albanian church plant.

That's where Armando agreed to meet Roland Rizallaraj, a fellow Albanian immigrant and pastor of a Christian Reformed church plant for Albanian immigrants in West Michigan.

"He was convicted by God right then and there," says Rizallaraj. "He gave his life to Jesus and asked God to forgive his sins."

Since then, Rizallaraj has discipled Armando, helping him understand more about what his decision to follow Christ means.

As a church planter, Rizallaraj has been working to reach Albanian immigrants like Armando who are adjusting to life in a new country. Many come from a Muslim background.

Rizallaraj hasn't been at this mission alone. He partners with Resonate Global Mission to fund community events and other ministry costs. The Albanian church plant also partners locally with Classis Grandville, Classis Thornapple Valley, and its parent church, First CRC in Byron Center.

"Ministries like these provide CRCNA congregations with the opportunity to show the world how we will live as followers of Jesus Christ," says Resonate's Amy Schenkel.

Last summer, Armando invited to his baptism seven friends, all Albanian immigrants with a Muslim background who live in Dearborn, a city in eastern Michigan.

One of the women who attended had been fasting all month for Ramadan, which Rizallaraj said was the Holy Spirit's way of wearing her down for this baptism service.

"I'm fasting because I had never heard the truth," the woman told Rizallaraj. "I am Muslim because I'd never heard about Jesus. You are God's people and I want to follow you."

Rizallaraj and his ministry partners are excited to continue seeing Albanian immigrants' response to the gospel. This baptism and its attendees have them considering future church planting in Armando's hometown of Dearborn, a city that includes more than 200,000 Albanian immigrants.

"We are praying that God will show us a way to reach and connect with these people," he said. "The harvest is plentiful, but we need more workers." **B**

*Last names have been withheld to protect people's identities.

CRC Resources for Ministry with Muslims

The CRC Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) created a webpage (crcna.org/eirc/interfaith) to provide resources for churches seeking to reach out to Muslims and neighbors of other faiths.

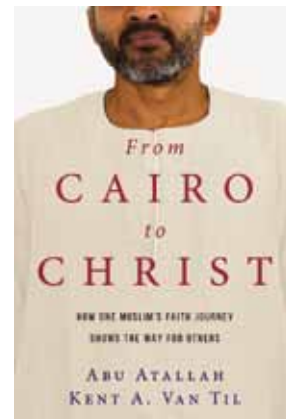
Salaam 2.0 (crcna.org/salaam) is a ministry of Resonate Global Mission focused on mobilizing the church in Canada for witness and dialogue with our Muslim neighbors. This project is now transitioning to focus more widely on diaspora in Canada from other cultures and faith traditions.

Peer to Peer is a new network formed with the help of Resonate and Reformed Church in America colleagues in the Middle East. The program is designed to help equip and train pastors and other leaders in North America for interfaith dialogue from a Reformed perspective. The training involves two weeks overseas in two different Muslim-majority countries. Participants observe interfaith dialogue and other aspects of Christian-Muslim relations, then initiate interfaith dialogue in their home communities.

Book Captures Man's Journey *From Cairo to Christ*

"IF I WERE TO BECOME a Christian, it would mean not only changing my religion but changing my whole identity. . . . Changing from Islam to Christianity would mess up my life forever," said Abu Atallah, a Calvin Theological Seminary graduate, about his journey from Islam to the Christian faith.

Kent Van Til, a 1980 graduate of Calvin College, collaborated with Atallah to share the remarkable story of Atallah's life in their book *From Cairo to Christ*. Growing up in Cairo, Egypt, as an ordinary Muslim, Atallah was deeply embedded in his culture and family. This book is a story of how he was drawn to Christ and to a life of ministry.



Van Til and Atallah met while they were both Calvin Seminary students in the 1980s. At that time, Van Til said he did not know Atallah's story or really anything about Islam. During a chance reunion, he heard his story and was amazed.

"I have always had somewhat of a global interest," said Van Til. While a student at Calvin College, he took off during his sophomore year to travel in Europe.

"I myself was a missionary, so when I heard him start talking about Islam a few years ago, I was fascinated," Van Til said. He was immediately convinced Atallah's story was something that needed to be shared and that he would be the one to do it.

"During my time at Calvin, I had learned to be good at writing, but I never saw myself as a writer," said Van Til.

Starting about six years ago, Van Til said he started writing on and off whenever he got a chance. "The book is based on lots of interviews with [Atallah]," he said. "I was over at his house numerous times over a period of four years."

Van Til completed in-depth research on the history of Islam for some of the chapters. And while he said he loves reading theological and historical works, the challenge was incorporating this important content in a way that was engaging for any audience.

"One thing I took away from this process is just how big Christ is," said Van Til. "Throughout this writing process, I have learned a lot more about Islam. I find myself reading much more on related subjects now."

He said the process sparked his interest in the study of Arabic; he has recently started taking courses on the subject. "I hope this book will give readers more of a knowledge of Islam and an understanding of what it is like to live in the middle of it," he said.

Atallah is the founder of European Training Center, which he runs with his family in Spain. Van Til has authored two other books and anticipates completing two more literary works in the coming years.

—Hannah Ebeling, Calvin College

The View from Here

Stepping Out in Faith

I DIDN'T SEE IT COMING, but in hindsight I'm amazed at the opportunities God provides. Let me explain.

Recently I was in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—originally the home of some of our children, including Getenet, a senior at Trinity Christian College in the Chicago area. Getenet has been working for nearly two years to establish a Christian special education school in Addis Ababa because of severely limited opportunities there for children with special needs and their families. It's amazing what a college student in the United States can accomplish when the faith community comes behind such a project!

When I was in Ethiopia, I spent some time with the teaching staff at the school. (My varied career has included being a special education teacher and a psychologist practicing in pediatrics at a rehabilitation hospital.)

We spent some time on classroom management, probably something every teacher approaches with a bit of fear and anxiety. This teaching staff was no exception, particularly considering that these children had never had the opportunity to attend school, so they hadn't learned to sit in their seats or line up for recess. Instead, they liked to run!

We spent a considerable amount of time on management skills, exploring the benefits of rewards for good behavior, modifying the environment (removing distractions) to help children focus, and using time-out and other methods to help diminish problematic behaviors.

Then I stopped and said something like, "You know, we're interested in all of this management stuff so that these children realize more of the potential God has given them, and you do that



Getenet Timmermans has helped start a Christian school in Ethiopia for children with special needs.

first and foremost by showing the love of Christ."

Then it happened.

The lead teacher wanted to say something, but I could tell she was a bit anxious about what she needed to tell me. Then she said it: "You know that one of the students is Muslim, and we're a Christian school."

I hadn't noticed, but upon reflection, it should have been evident to me when I met his mother and saw how she was dressed. More important than asking how I had missed the cues, however, I needed to recognize that this circumstance was a gift from God not to be squandered.

I responded, "All the more reason to show the love of Christ!"

We talked about how the witness the school could bring to a family that didn't know Jesus as Savior by showing love and acceptance to those some would call "the least of these" is a powerful vehicle for opening the door to the Holy Spirit's work.

Where is God opening a door for each of us? It doesn't require a trip to a faraway country; instead, it means we

should be engaged with all kinds of people. Sometimes we will know that God is calling us to a particular Muslim individual or family; other times we might discover an interfaith encounter after already beginning a relationship.

It does mean that we must step out of our comfort zones. Moreover, it means we need to know that in day cares, workplaces, and so many other places, we will encounter people of other faiths. In each of those places, and in the varied opportunities God provides, we're called to show the light of Christ.

If you're uncertain or anxious about how to do it, check out the resources listed on page 25.



Steven Timmermans is the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

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

이 기사의 한글번역은 TheBanner.org/korean에서 보실 수 있습니다.

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

When Your Home Is a War Zone

LIFE WAS GOOD for many families in Syria. But that changed in 2011 when war broke out and citizens were forced to uproot their lives and flee for safety.

Imali, a Syrian refugee now living in Lebanon, has seven children ranging from 9 months to 11 years old. During her time in Syria, she lived fearfully day to day as she saw buildings collapse and bombs exploding in the streets.

“For two years we lived in this war-zone; it felt like 12 years,” she said. “I used to shut all the windows and doors so that the kids wouldn’t hear the sounds as loud.”

Hoping the war would end, Imali continued living with her family in Syria as long as possible; however, as time went on, staying became increasingly difficult. Bread and flour were no longer available, and it was too dangerous to travel away from their home.

“We didn’t leave immediately because this was our land,” Imali said.

“Eventually we had to move and go somewhere safer. Shortly after we left, we found out our house had been robbed and there was nothing left.”

With no possessions and the conflict intensifying, it was no longer safe for Imali and her family to stay in Syria. They made the difficult decision to flee to Lebanon as refugees, where they lived in a tent. From there they were introduced to a Christian church in partnership with World Renew



whose members were able to provide support and resources such as mattresses and a stove and to connect the children with a nearby school.

“The church came to us from the beginning, and to this day they are the only ones helping us,” she said.

Imali’s family has been able to move to a more permanent structure because of the support they received from World Renew and the local church in Lebanon.

With help, Imali has been able to rebuild a life for her and her children. However, while the family has been able to resettle in Lebanon, Imali will never forget the home she was forced to leave behind.

“I miss Syria like I miss a family member,” she said. “Syria is still our country. I wish there was peace everywhere, not just peace for me and my children. I wish that no one would

have to live through what we’ve been through.”

Imali is not living the life she imagined for herself or her family, yet World Renew and the church join her at this point in her story and work tirelessly to transform a situation of trauma and grief into one of grace and peace.

—Allison Todd, World Renew

Stob Lecture Series Speaker Reimagines Ministry to Those with Dementia

WHEN IT COMES TO WORKING with people with dementia, John Swinton believes that “the theological, the psychological, and the neurological [dimensions] are inextricably intertwined.”

Swinton, a professor in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care and Chair in Divinity and Religious Studies at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, offered this quote during the Stob Lecture Colloquium at Calvin Theological Seminary on January 23, 2018.

In a conversation with Kevin Timpe, the William H. Jellema Chair in Christian Philosophy at Calvin College, Swinton encouraged and challenged the audience to consider the ways in which people with dementia are ministered to in our churches and communities.

He also urged his listeners to think about and to reconsider not only the



John Swinton (l) in conversation with Kevin Timpe.

ways in which we communicate but also how we spend time with this often misunderstood and mistreated population, as well as with other groups that are pushed to the margins. In expanding our understanding of how congregations work with members who have dementia, communities will be better able to serve these populations.

The Stob Lecture Colloquium is part of the Stob Lecture Series, a partnership between Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin College. Named after Henry J. Stob, this series annually brings speakers who focus on conversations of philosophy and ethics within the church. Swinton spoke not only at the Colloquium, but also at the Calvin College January Series earlier that day.

In his conclusion, Swinton advised the audience gathered in the Calvin Seminary Chapel to reassess the ways in which the church ministers to people with mental health concerns. What, he asked, are the goals of these efforts? Perhaps the focus leans too heavily towards healing, when an appropriate and theological approach would be towards love.

Watch a video of this conversation in the “news” section at calvinseminary.edu.

—Matthew Cooke, Calvin Seminary

Peer to Peer Group Studies Interfaith Issues in Middle East

THE FIRST PARTICIPANTS of Peer to Peer, a new Resonate Global Mission program aimed at building interfaith understanding, returned a few months ago from a two-week trip to the Middle East.

Three of those who made the journey were leaders from the United States and three were from Canada; two were from the Reformed Church in America and four came from the Christian Reformed Church.

“The program is designed to help equip and train pastors and other leaders in North America for interfaith dialogue from a Reformed perspective,” said

Rev. Greg Sinclair, team leader for Salaam 2.0, an educational ministry that works to build understanding among CRC members for people of other faiths, especially Muslims.

The training involves two weeks overseas. One week is spent in the Middle East with a partner that dates back to when the Reformed Church in America began collaborating with government leaders in this region 125 years ago to build peace, moderation, and understanding, especially for those who come from countries where Islam is portrayed negatively. The second week is spent on the field with

Resonate Global Mission workers in another Muslim-majority country. The exact locations cannot be published here due to potential security issues.

“Participants observe interfaith dialogue and other aspects of Christian-Muslim relations and then initiate interfaith dialogue in their home communities,” Sinclair said. “We also will involve participants in an ongoing community of practice to help them in their interfaith journey.” Salaam 2.0 plans another cohort of up to eight participants for 2018.

—Chris Meehan, CRC Communications

Calvin College Receives Rare Audubon Prints

CALVIN COLLEGE was recently gifted a collection of prints by naturalist and painter John James Audubon with an estimated value in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Birds of America, produced in 1966 by American Heritage Publishing, was donated to the college by Udean Burke, the late owner of Burke Christian Tours.

The collection contains 431 color illustrations of a wide variety of birds of the United States and is one of only 120 complete sets known to exist. Audubon's *Birds of America* was originally produced between 1827 and 1838, consisting of hand-colored prints made by engraved plates.

"The donor was looking for a Christian school that would put them to use," said David Malone, dean of the Calvin College and Seminary library.

The prints are to be used at the discretion of the college, without restrictions, for the needs of the school, he said.

"Generally, when we have something like this, it's my desire that we not hide it somewhere just in storage, and that the materials get engaged," said Malone. "That's really at the core of what a library does."

Often referred to as one of the world's most expensive books, one set of Audubon's collection of colorful, delicately detailed and authentically rendered prints was sold a few years ago for more than \$10 million. A majority of the 120 complete original sets, featuring hand-painted images of

such birds as the American Crow and the Red-backed Sandpiper, are owned by institutions.

Because they are so valuable, the prints need to be well cared for, but that does not necessarily mean they need to be sequestered and unavailable, explained Malone.

The library's goal is for these prints to be made available for natural science and history students to understand the role of documentation in the history of science. "The collection is very attractive, and I can imagine that [the prints] could be framed and hung around the campus," he said.

The prints are in near-perfect condition. While individual prints of Audubon's *Birds of North America* are available, it is much rarer to come across a complete set of all 431 prints, much less one in perfect condition, explained Randy Vogelzang, Calvin's director of gift planning and major gifts. "There are very few private colleges that have sets like this," he said.

What separates Audubon's work is the detail and the intricacy he was able to create in his documentation, explained Malone. The prints show the change in how the natural world was being documented and viewed at the time. But there is more.

"The science that we have today is shaped so much by a desire to know the God that created it," said Malone.



John James Audubon, Public Domain

John James Audubon reflects this desire to understand creation in his passionate and detailed study of North American birds.

"These fit well within a Reformed perspective," said Malone. "This is God's creation; let us fully understand the depth of it and try and understand as much as we can."

—Hannah Ebeling, Calvin College



Planning worship?

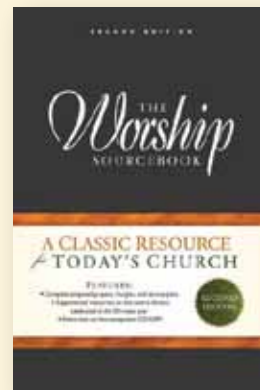
Visit FaithAliveResources.org/Worship to view these and other resources to help you lead and plan worship.



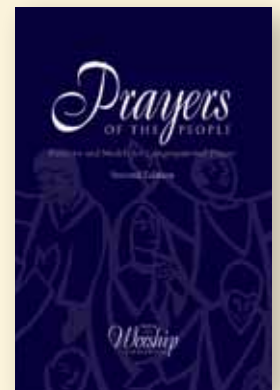
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Under Construction



IT'S SPRING, and that means there's a lot of building going on. Birds are busy making little miracles called nests. They don't go to school to learn how, and they don't have blueprints to follow. God gave them instincts—kind of like feelings—that tell them exactly what to do.

Nest Shapes

Birds use their beaks, their feet, and their bodies to create beautiful “baby cribs” to keep their eggs and hatchlings safe, warm, and dry. Which one of these nests would you want to snuggle into if you were a bird?

Cup nests are shaped like bowls. Robins, cardinals, and blue jays make cup nests.

Cavity nests are holes in trees, cacti, or even telephone poles. Owls and woodpeckers make cavity nests.

Mound nests are piles of nesting material that sit on the ground. Swans make mound nests near lakes or ponds.

Pendant nests hang from branches and are shaped like bags. Baltimore orioles build pendant nests.

Platform nests are built high up in trees, on cliffs, and sometimes on chimneys. Storks and eagles create platform nests.

Scrape nests are scratched into the dirt. Ostriches make big scrape nests.

Nest Supplies

Just like people use lots of different things to build houses, birds use lots of different materials to build their nests.

Nature things: Twigs, grass, leaves, mud, and more. Visit tinyurl.com/BannerNest to watch a hummingbird adding spiderwebs to its nest.


Animal things: Some birds weave fur and feathers into their nests. One type of bird called a swiftlet makes a nest out of its own spit!

People things: Many birds add string, plastic, paper, yarn, and cloth to their nests.

Fun Nest Facts

The bee hummingbird is the smallest bird in the world. Its nest is the size of a thimble.

The largest bird nest ever found was built by bald eagles. It was 9 feet 6 inches (2.9 meters) wide and 20 feet (6 meters) tall. Eagles come back to the same nest every year and add new sticks to it.

African birds called sociable weavers connect their nests to each other like an apartment building. Up to 400 birds share the same nest structure! 



Sandy Swartzentruber works for Faith Formation Ministries and attends Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. She likes to make a blanket nest when she reads books.



istock / jaouad.k

#MeToo and Becoming a Safer Church

by Amanda Worst

Last October, actress Alyssa Milano suggested, “If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘me too’ as a [social media] status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.” While the hashtag may be relatively recent, the movement itself began 10 years ago with activist Tarana Burke. Her work sought to unite and give voice to survivors of sexual abuse—particularly survivors who are women of color. To date, the #MeToo hashtag has been tweeted over 2 million times in more than 85 countries. *Time* named the “Silence Breakers” of this movement its 2017

“Person of the Year.” Many are calling this rapidly growing social movement a reckoning as Hollywood figures, newscasters, and politicians stand on trial.

The issue of sexual abuse is as vast as it is near. Many have seen #MeToo typed out by a coworker, a peer, a friend, or a family member. Many have typed out these words themselves. People of all genders, races, ethnicities, abilities, ages, and religions have been impacted by sexual violence. Particularly upsetting for Christians are stories of sexual abuse that happened in the church by leaders and fellow worshippers—many shared under the

hashtag #ChurchToo. There is both heaviness and hope in the movement and a need for faithful action.

Survivors are watching to see how their congregations respond. Parents are wondering how to teach their young children sexual-abuse prevention. Young adults are finding their education on sexuality lacking. Men are asking how they can be allies. Recently I heard this response: “We [the church] know how to respond to illness. To death. We bring meals. We write cards. We attend a service. But what is the appropriate response to sexual abuse? How can the church respond?” What many are seeing more clearly is the need for the church to address sexual violence and to care well for survivors in the body of Christ.

Sexual Violence

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly now. Love mercy now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

—from the *Pirkei Avot*

The #MeToo movement began in response to sexual harassment but has brought awareness to a variety of issues under the umbrella of sexual violence. Sexual violence encompasses crimes such as sexual abuse, sexual assault, and rape. It includes intimate partner sexual violence, incest, and sexual harassment. These issues are enmeshed with misogyny, sexism, and the glorification of power and violence. Conversations have been stirred on how these social dynamics have provided a foundation for the evil of sexual violence both outside and inside the church.

Sexual violence in all forms is an abuse of power. It attacks the dignity and worth of God’s created ones, and it breaks relationship. It is a far cry from the example given by Jesus Christ, who surrendered power to have a loving, self-sacrificing relationship with us. Jesus is the example we have, and when we see its opposite, the church has a responsibility to cry foul. God is not the author of this evil,

but God does enter the suffering, and we are called to follow. We are called to take actions that communicate to those in our pews who have bravely typed #MeToo—and to the many more who have exercised their choice not to—that we see you, we hear you, and we will respond. Such actions will equip the body to respond as followers of Christ.

Become a Safer Church

A primary need for victim-survivors is safety. The Christian Reformed Church Safe Church Ministry was created by Synod 1994 in order to (1) equip the church in creating safety by raising awareness and providing education; (2) offer support for those affected by sexual abuse; and (3) respond in cases of reported abuse by a church leader. Raising awareness can be as simple as offering an acknowledgement in response to movements like #MeToo. Consider the following from a liturgy from the website Strong Women Write (strong-womenwrite.wordpress.com):

We pause this day to recognize there are many among us who have been wounded by violence, exploitation, coercion, or manipulation. There are many among us who are suffering and grieving. There are many who need support and healing, who need their voices heard, and their stories acknowledged, and their experiences validated. The weight of oppression is heavy, and the effects of trauma are real and long-lasting. We pause this day to recognize that all of us are affected by this culture of violence.

Awareness and education are essential, and every effort should be made to protect people who are most vulnerable in our churches. Each year, I teach my daughter's Sunday school class about abuse prevention through Circle of Grace, a program supported by Safe Church Ministry. My first-grade daughter and her peers are learning that God is always with them and that God cares for their

well-being. They are learning what safe and unsafe secrets are, how to identify trusted adults, and how to ask for help. This education is meant to be built upon at each grade level and continued into young adult ministries.

Sexual violence in all forms is the abuse of power. It attacks the dignity and worth of God's created ones, and it breaks relationship.

I have heard from young adults that what they have learned from their church about sexuality is insufficient. There is a need to teach what healthy and unhealthy relationships look like and about intimacy and sex. The church can and should address related issues such as the glorification of power and violence, pornography, the objectification of others, and how these affect the way we relate to each other.

As a church becomes safer, survivors will disclose their stories, and we are responsible to respond. This is especially true if the suspected abuse involves a minor or if the perpetrator is a church leader. Safe and clear paths for reporting are necessary for becoming a safer church. Policies and procedures should be in place, and the congregation should be aware of these. The church should also be ready with resources for additional support, such as local domestic violence and sexual-assault response organizations that can provide crisis care, shelter, medical attention, and referrals for professional counselors.

Congregations can highlight these resources throughout the ministry

year and link to them on church websites. Many churches place resources in restrooms where individuals feel safe to read them.

Each classis should consider establishing a safe-church team with a representative from each church. Safe Church Ministry equips team members to be a resource within their congregations by offering educational materials, policy development assistance, and consultation. Having these teams in place communicates to survivors that the church cares for them and makes congregations active participants in the effort to end sexual violence.

Break the Silence

Looking at evil within or around us is not easy. The truth is that we have often looked away. But see and speak we must. Breaking the silence may very well begin with the church repenting of the ways it has participated in the sin of sexual violence and its sometimes hurtful or absent response. Breaking the silence means speaking about sexual violence in all its forms from the pulpit, in prayer, and in our times of study. It means giving survivors a voice in the church. And it means that when those survivors choose to share their stories, we must listen and believe them. There is almost nothing more valuable than a nonjudgmental, listening ear to someone who has suffered abuse.

The terms and definitions for sexual abuse and trauma are many; therefore, allow individuals to use their own words to tell their own story. Even the use of "victim" or "survivor" is a personal choice, and in the context of sexual violence you may hear both. Remember, as a listener your role is to be supportive. Leave "why" questions and investigations to those who have been specially trained for that role. There is no shortage of people who will judge and shame survivors of sexual violence. Listening affirms their value and their experience. It begins to build relationship—the very thing broken by abuse. The

church also can make physical space for survivors to join together in a support group. Faith-based resources are available to lead such a group (including Safe Church's *Bathsheba: Come to the Water*). Support groups offer the regular and often needed reminder that "I am not alone."

Bear with One Another

"Action with and for those who suffer is the concrete expression of the compassionate life and the final criterion of being a Christian."

—Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*

Compassion is a Latin word meaning "to suffer with." Survivors desire a community in which they can be cared for in the short- and long-term sufferings they face. While not all experiences result in trauma, many leave behind emotional, psychological, and physical effects. These may include depression, anxiety, flashbacks, nightmares, feelings of shame, and an inability to function and engage in life as the person once did. Psychologist Bessel van der Kolk describes it this way: "Trauma is not the story of something that happened back then. It's the current imprint of that pain and fear living inside people" (*The Body Keeps the Score*). Trauma is not a moment; it is an unfolding. Becoming a trauma-informed church is one way to support those affected. Consider leading a book study on the topic with a selection such as *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* by Serene Jones, or *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help*. Or have a local expert train church leaders. A church that understands trauma will inform the congregation ahead of time that they are going to speak on sexual violence, knowing that survivors may need time to consider how to care for themselves during such a message.

The victim-survivors in the body of Christ are on a journey. Each is unique in his or her place and needs. While the church should be ready with resources to meet these needs, it must


also be patient, allowing individuals to decide which steps to take and when. People who have been sexually abused have lost their sense of control, and the ability to make choices is part of the path to healing. Be mindful of a tendency to rush toward forgiveness and grace. These are central and needed messages of the gospel, but also important are compassion and justice.

In a culture that hurries healing and neglects justice, those who suffer often suffer alone. The church can be a space that recognizes the fullness of the journey, allowing room for those in despair and those who have found healing. Some of the most powerful spaces I've sat in with survivors have been in services designed with them in mind. Some of these services gave voice to personal testimony; others were almost entirely silent. They used a variety of ways to communicate: Scripture, songs, art, and written response. In all of them, we learned how to sit with suffering. We learned to lament and to experience that God laments with us. We found that Scripture reflects both anguish and hope. We saw that we need each other.

Building Allies

Consider this: A church that has worked to become a safer church, that has regularly broken the silence of sexual abuse, that has made space for survivors to speak out and to each other, and that has faithfully walked alongside those suffering is building a body of allies—allies who, when they hear someone disclose his or her story at a Bible study or to a prayer servant, will know how to respond. They will say, "I'm so sorry that happened to you," and "I care about you; how can I help?" They will know how to sit with someone who is suffering, without the need to fix or resolve. They will check in periodically, knowing that the trauma of sexual abuse extends beyond the time it occurred. They will know whom in the church to connect with for resources. If they hear someone objectifying another person, they will speak out. They will

challenge the culture that blames the victim and normalizes violence. They will work toward policies that protect people who are vulnerable, and they will hold perpetrators accountable. They will honor the dignity and worth of another and know how to engage in healthy relationships. They will reflect the loving, self-sacrificing Christ.

What can your church do to respond to sexual abuse? Begin by praying that the outpouring of survivor stories will stir action and create lasting changes. Ask God how you and your church can be instruments of justice and peace. Visit the Safe Church Ministry website and learn more about the resources available. See if your classis has a safe-church coordinator or safe-church team. If not, propose moving toward this goal with your church leadership. Join the work so that your congregation may lead as an example in response to an issue that is not separate, but central to the life of the church. 

Learn More

- » CRCNA Safe Church Ministry (crcna.org/SafeChurch)
- » Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN): US National Helpline 800.656.HOPE[4673] (www.rainn.org)
- » CRCNA position statement on abuse (crcna.org/welcome/beliefsposition-statements/abuse)



Amanda Worst is a licensed clinical social worker providing therapy to adults and couples. She worships at Madison Church: Ford Campus in Grand Rapids, Mich.

1. How did you feel about and respond to the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements? How prevalent do you feel this issue might be in your own congregation?

2. What are some steps your church has taken . . .

READ MORE ONLINE

We avoid the furnace of transformation by living in minds fixed on judging and comparing and critiquing. Perhaps we think we're entitled to this precisely because we're right.



Chuck DeGroat, associate professor of pastoral care and counseling at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Mich., is the author of *Leaving Egypt* (Faith Alive) and *Toughest People to Love* (Eerdmans).

Putting On the Mind of Christ

THROUGH HIS DUTCH BROGUE, the weathered and white-haired Christian Reformed elder says to my father, "This is the true church!" We are leaving to transition to a Reformed Church in America congregation, mostly for their youth program, as I recall.

The elder isn't happy. We are not necessarily looking for his blessing, but it's clear we won't get it anyway. According to him, we are leaving right for wrong, true for untrue. Even at 12, I'm keenly aware of the tension and wonder if we're now on the precipice of hell.

My tradition holds "truth" in high regard. As I was taught in those early days and then in seminary, truth is held in the mind of God, deposited in the Scriptures, sorted by theologians into apprehensible categories, and assented to by the church. Truth is paramount.

And if the sermons I heard in those days were any indication, the apostle Paul seemed to "get it" more than anyone. Galatians and Romans got prime coverage, with occasional offerings from Isaiah and the gospels at Christmas, and the psalms on rare occasions. Never did I hear a sermon on the messier or more mysterious parts of Scripture such as Song of Songs, Lamentations, or Revelation.

I'm grateful for this catechesis. Yet when I look back, I see that my own transformation emerged not so much through knowing more, but through pain and shame and failure, more often than not processed with therapists outside the church, not pastors.

In the midst of Paul's grief in Philippians (mischaracterized as "the book of joy"), he proclaims that he wants to "know Christ," but his "knowing" seems to require a journey. To know the "power of the resurrection," it seems that we must participate in the "fellowship of his sufferings," being conformed to Christ "in his death."

Wow. That's different. In this scenario, becoming like Jesus sounds a lot more complicated than right versus wrong.

Real transformation isn't accomplished through accumulating information, but by formation through the same wilderness journey Jesus endured.

Are our churches places of transformation? Do we steward death-to-resurrection journeys well? I don't think so. My Reformed tradition is pretty fond of casting aspersions on prosperity preaching, but we're not so attuned to our strategies for avoiding the painful wilderness journey of transformation. We live in our heads.

Our anxiety is raised amid theological disagreements and polity disputes and liturgical differences. It makes no difference whether you're a so-called "conservative" or "progressive" Reformed Christian, the family dysfunction is the same. If you're not thinking right about something, we come with fire and fury. We avoid the furnace of transformation by living in minds fixed on judging and comparing and critiquing. Perhaps we think we're entitled to this precisely because we're right.

As I get older, I'm drawn to stories of women and men who've become more like Jesus through lived participation in Christ's sufferings. I'm drawn to letters written by Rutherford or Spurgeon amid depression and grief, to the dark nights of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, the Confessions of Augustine, and the honest introspection of Baxter. I'm drawn to Christians who've gotten over themselves, who (even if we have honest disagreements) engage with curiosity. I am drawn to vulnerable people, not militant truth warriors. I'm drawn to people who feel like they have more to learn, not those who've arrived.

Putting on the mind of Christ, it seems to me, is about going on a transformational journey with Jesus. It's learning to walk with him, to ask questions, confess, cry, laugh, and just be. I'm learning. It's a different kind of learning, and it's taking a while. So re-"mind" me if I forget, Jesus. **B**

1. What experiences have you had with someone who is a "militant truth warrior"? What were some...

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A Pizza-Box Sign

Sitting beside my new friend on a Vancouver sidewalk, I take in this beautiful moment with a deep breath and a prayer.



Elizabeth Drummond is an artist of words and theater based in Vancouver, B.C. She is a member of Maple Ridge Christian Reformed Church.

A RED HEART catches my eye. Amid the bustle of the city—the buses and bicycles and business people whizzing by, the smell of coffee beans wafting from the nearby Starbucks, and the street people trying to accost me for a few dollars—a tiny, hand-drawn heart stands out. The heart is a portion of a small cardboard sign, probably made from the inside of a pizza box. It reads: *You don't have to give us money. We ♡ breakfast too.*

On second glance, the sign's apparent creator is resting against a No Parking sign, with two overflowing, tattered bags, and an upside-down baseball cap holding a meager "Toonie" (that's a two-dollar coin, for you folks south of the border) slightly closing him off from the world. I don't really want to stop. I'm eager to take the next bus and start seeing shows at the theater festival I'm volunteering for. Even so, I find myself turning around and approaching the man.

"Have you had breakfast?" I ask lamely. Obviously he hasn't had breakfast; the sign clearly states that.

"No, not yet," he confirms.

"Well—what do you want? I can grab you something." I indicate the Starbucks sitting beside us.

"Anything would be great." He's looking up at me now so I have a chance to notice his features. The man has a fair, worn complexion. He is balding in front, yet his strawberry-blond hair hangs long in the back. But the thing I notice the most are his eyes—blue-green in color, they sparkle.

"Well, what do you like from Starbucks?"

"I—I don't know. I don't get to go inside much," he shrugs honestly.

Slightly embarrassed at my ignorance, I run inside and purchase two large coffees and one bacon and egg breakfast sandwich. As I set the coffee down and hand him the bagged sandwich, I notice the attractive pizza box sign has disappeared. The man thanks me profusely and I respond awkwardly. He opens the little sugar packets and begins to pour them into the steaming paper cup. I look down at my own coffee, already doctored up the way I like it with just a little bit of cream. I ought to be going, but my legs suddenly lock me in place.

The man is asking for my name now.

"Elizabeth," I respond, crouching slowly as I try to balance both my coffee and heavy backpack to extend my hand politely.

"I'm Jack," he says, taking my hand briefly, his ever-present smile evident in his voice.

"Nice to meet you," I offer genuinely, now trying to make my way back to my feet. But before I can do so, William Shakespeare's face catches my eye. It's engraved beautifully onto a brown book with a leather-like cover. "What are you reading?"

Jack tells me eagerly that the book is a journal, and he explains how excited he was to find it in an alley dumpster. "It's always great to find treasures like that," he continues. "All I really need is a sleeping bag and a good book." I smile in agreement, depositing my backpack to the ground and seating myself in a more comfortable position.

Jack begins to talk easily now, and I listen as if he were an old friend. He speaks of a life of trial and adventure sprinkled with drugs, violence, and sorrow. It all began in a desperate home with an abusive father and an



Céline Malépart

absent mother that he left at 13. Although he left school at the same time, Jack is well spoken, versed in poetry, art, science, and politics. His stories reveal he's in his 30s, but he looks 10 years older.

He mentions God now and again but claims no allegiance to the Christian faith.

We chat companionably about theater. He wanted to be an actor, and I'm trying to be a professional theater artist. He tells me he's been published, but warns that doesn't make one a great writer. I tell him about the theater festival I'm volunteering for and offer the glossy Fringe guide full of publicity pictures and show times. He flips through it ravenously, and I sense a hunger that even a breakfast sandwich will not cure. We are one and the same, Jack and me, even as we are seemingly separated by age, experience, lifestyle, and income. Sitting beside my new friend on a Vancouver sidewalk, I take in this beautiful moment with a deep breath and a prayer.

"I'm a Christian, and I believe God has a hand in everything I do. Meeting you is really inspiring and I know God meant for it to happen. When I saw your sign with the heart, I had to stop—and now I know why."

Something changes in Jack now. The sparkle in his eyes explodes. There's a brilliant light in his face that wasn't there before.

"You know, I can always sense when people are going to stop to give me money or buy me food as you have done. Thank you again. And I always trust somehow that I'll be fed." He pauses briefly and looks off into the busy, oncoming traffic before continuing. "I—I'm Christian, too. My family was Irish Catholic, but I don't call myself that. I never tell anyone I'm a Christian." He looks down at his tattered shoes and takes a sip of his now-lukewarm coffee. "I believe in God. But I can't tell anyone I know. I can't even talk to them the way we have today. They don't get it, the people I know."

We stay for three hours, sipping coffee till our cups run dry on a dusty sidewalk, two strangers with similar souls.

Physical hunger is serious, and I will always buy food for those who ask because no one deserves to be hungry. But the truth is that our hearts cry out just as much as our bellies do. Jesus says that he is the bread of life. "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Several centuries later, St. Teresa of Avila reminded the world that Christ has no body on earth but ours. We are to be his tangible acts of compassion—his earthly hands, feet, eyes, and body.

For months I've tried to make sense of this unexpected encounter, but I simply can't. I don't believe it's meant to be made sense of after all. I stopped to help a fellow human being, and he inspired me. I tried to fill a stranger's belly, and he filled my heart. I meant to shine the light of Christ and only found it flashing back at me. I only hope I gave Jack half as much as he gave me. **B**

Love Your (New) Neighbor

MUSLIM IMMIGRATION to countries in Europe and North America over the past several decades has pushed Christians in those regions to consider how to receive these newcomers. These considerations are not just religious, but also personal, cultural, and political. Where might a mosque be built? How do we respond to violence committed by Muslims, and how do we respond to violence committed against Muslims? What about women who wear headscarves, or what about prayer from different religious traditions in public venues?

Jesus Christ calls
his followers to
lives of love
and service.

How should we advocate when it comes to immigration policies?

The conversation quickly becomes divided along political lines, and progress toward answers is difficult. This is why Matthew Kaemingk's book *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* comes as a breath of fresh air. Kaemingk, a Christian Reformed minister and a dean and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, roots the conversation theologically.

This theology has great practical and political implications for how Christians respond to Muslim immigration, but the theological root of the conversation encourages our primary allegiance to Jesus and not to any political party or perspective. Instead of advocating complete, fear-motivated rejection of Muslim immigrants

or blind acceptance of the values of Muslim culture in the name of tolerance, the book offers a more nuanced third way.

Kaemingk finds valuable resources in the Reformed theology of Dutch scholars including Abraham Kuyper. From this tradition, he advocates an approach of Christian pluralism. This approach, guided by a firm commitment to Jesus Christ alone as Lord, motivates the Christian to act hospitably toward all neighbors, both fellow Christians and those of other religions. We seek the welfare of our Muslim neighbor not because all religions are the same, but because Jesus Christ alone is Lord, and he calls his followers to lives of love and service. Kaemingk helpfully explores Kuyper's late-19th-century context and the contemporary Dutch context before offering applications for our present North American context.

The two congregations I have served as a minister, together with many other congregations, have engaged questions of hospitality to Muslims practically by partnering with agencies such as Bethany Christian Services to welcome refugees, many of whom are Muslim. That practical engagement pairs well with the intellectual engagement of this book as the church seeks to follow Jesus Christ in a multi-faith world. (Eerdmans) **B**



Rebecca Jordan Heys is the minister of worship and pastoral care at Calvin CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

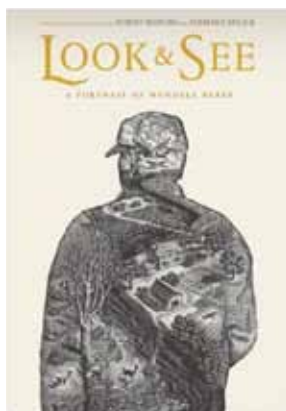


Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World

by Kelley Nikondeha

reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Kelley Nikondeha experienced the "sacrament of belonging" early in her life when she was adopted by her parents. She never imagined that years later she and her husband Claude would become parents of two young children through adoption. Both of these lifelong, life-changing experiences form the basis of Nikondeha's story, which she tells with poetic sensitivity and insight. Nikondeha enlarges the way we look at adoption and belonging. *Adopted* reveals the expansiveness of God's grace and his desire for all to belong. (Eerdmans)



Look & See

reviewed by Jeffrey Bouman

Poet, essayist, novelist, farmer, and conservationist Wendell Berry is a contemporary American prophet. In this beautifully filmed documentary, we see images of his life captured by his lifelong friend, photographer James Baker Hall, and hear Berry's voice, most effectively captured reading his own poetry. We see and hear about Berry's decades-old faithfulness in artfully—and sometimes angrily—reminding everyone from fellow farmers to politicians that there is a better way to treat the land and each other. By beginning with deep looking and seeing, we step toward fulfilling our role as stewards of God's good creation. Streaming on Netflix. (Two Birds Film)

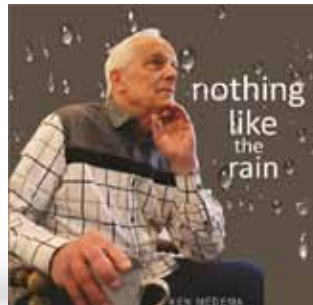


The Player King

by Avi

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Based on a true story in 1486 England, this juvenile novel is set in political turmoil as King Henry VII seizes the throne and young Prince Edward, the rightful monarch, disappears. Lambert, an orphaned boy who is a servant in a tavern, notices that he is being watched by a Dominican friar. The friar eventually tells the boy that he is Prince Edward, the true king of England. *The Player King* is a fast-paced adventure filled with surprising plot twists. Young readers will see that status can be fleeting and that those who have been raised up by circumstances can just as easily be flung down. Ages 8 and up. (Atheneum)



Nothing Like the Rain

by Ken Medema

reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

While Ken Medema's new album seems almost instantly recognizable, featuring the same rich baritone voice and emotive piano playing he's performed with since the early 1970s, *Nothing Like the Rain* could not have been written and recorded all those years ago. These songs reflect the wisdom of an older artist, one who shares his joys, his pain, and his insights with listeners as he encourages, chastises, and blesses the church. The album closes with "The Song Is Alive," based on one of his amazing improvisations. The song employs just voice and piano and serves as a beautiful and fitting end to this fine album. (kenmedema.com)



The Embrace of Buildings: A Second Look at Walkable City Neighborhoods

by Lee Hardy

reviewed by Eve Clayton

How did urban sprawl get its start? What do walkable neighborhoods and mixed-use zoning have to do with loving our neighbor? Lee Hardy, a philosophy professor at Calvin College, explores questions like these in a compelling book about urban design and city life. Thoroughly researched and rich with examples from dozens of places, the book reveals the author's love of vibrant communities and good design as well as his concern for economic justice and creation care. Hardy paints a convincing picture of what can happen when citizens and churches work to (re)claim their communities for the common good. (Calvin College Press)

The Lowdown

ReThink It: If you haven't already heard, ReFrame Media's blog on faith and pop culture has redesigned its wonderful website; check it out at thinkchristian.reframemedia.com.

Cracked: In the animated film *Animal Crackers*, a family in a predicament finds that by eating from a magical box of animal crackers, they can become the animal they eat. In theaters this month. (Entertainment Studios)

Booked Up: Readers, rejoice! April marks the start of TV adaptations of Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* (PBS, Apr. 1) and E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (Starz, Apr. 8); the second season of *The Handmaid's Tale* starts on April 25 on Hulu.

Take Note: Writer Marilyn McEntyre's new book, *Make a List*, opens new possibilities for the humble art of listmaking as a spiritual practice. She offers ideas for lists and includes lists of her own that read like poems. (Eerdmans)

READ MORE ONLINE

Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?

When a handful of sleep-deprived women come back from a cemetery talking about angels and Jesus and resurrection, you're going to be a bit skeptical.



Mary S. Hulst has served as college chaplain at Calvin College since 2009.

HE VALIDATED HIS AGNOSTICISM by naming all the ways “the church” and “Christianity” had hurt people: racism, sexism, colonialism, sexual abuse. . . .

After giving him plenty of time to say what he needed to say, I said, “Ben*, you’ve been distracted.” He looked at me, confused. “You’ve spent a lot of time looking at the weaknesses of Christianity and the church, and I know there are plenty. But they have distracted you from what really matters.”

He listened intently.

“Everything depends on whether or not Jesus rose from the dead. If he didn’t, then all of us here”—I waved my hand to indicate the Christian college campus—“are idiots. But Ben, if Jesus *did* rise from the dead, then everything is different.”

Ben’s temptation is common. We can become despondent at what “the church” or “Christians” are doing or not doing in this world. But here’s the thing: Everything depends on whether or not Jesus rose from the dead.

So did he?

Historians have been trying to answer that question ever since Easter morning: What actually happened? The opposing forces did their best to come up with an alternative story immediately: “You must say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep’” (Matt. 28:13, NRSV). But that doesn’t align with the state the disciples are in: They are confused. The women come back from the tomb joyful and speaking of angels, and the others look at them as if they are crazy. Luke puts it this way: “These words seemed to them an idle tale” (Luke 24:11, NRSV). When a handful of sleep-deprived women come back from a cemetery flushed and bleary-eyed, talking

about angels and Jesus and resurrection, you’re going to be a bit skeptical. *Because resurrections don’t happen.*

The reluctance of Jesus’ dearest friends to believe in the resurrection points to its veracity. If you were making this up, wouldn’t you have all the disciples, Jesus’ mom, the women who sat at his feet, a Roman centurion, and a Pharisee all there to witness it? Frankly, if this were made up, it would have been a better story. As it is, the disciples are bewildered.

Until Jesus shows up. “Shalom,” he says, and asks for something to eat. They are stunned. And then he shows up again. And again. He spent 40 days showing up, teaching them, and showing them the connections between the Scriptures and his life (Luke 24:36-49).

In all of the gospels, the disciples don’t ask, “Hey, when will you show up again?” “Hey, Jesus, Thomas wasn’t here. Can you come back when he is?” They make no recorded attempt to manipulate the experience or to tell Jesus this would be much more impressive if he did it in the temple courts. The disciples are so perplexed that an actual resurrection has happened in their midst that they simply receive it. With befuddlement and joy and a little fear. They receive this crazy truth that Jesus rose from the dead.

There are books that do an incredible job at proving the resurrection of Jesus. But start with these four: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In the disciples you will see yourself: befuddled, joyful, fearful, even doubting (Matt. 28:17). If they were making this up, they would have written a better story. Instead, they simply wrote the truth.

I ended my conversation with Ben by inviting him to read the gospels. He admitted that he hadn’t read the Bible in a long time and had avoided learning about Jesus. Ben’s story isn’t over. There could be some resurrection ahead.

Not the student’s real name; a compilation of a few different students. **B*



Artist's statement:

Though there may be a long road ahead, we can have hope in knowing that Christ gives us freedom. Because of Christ, we can be part of something outside of ourselves, and we are not limited to this world or to our earthly bodies. Our minds can be free knowing that our future is a heavenly one.

The Road Ahead. By Erika Fager, Grade 12, Covenant Day School, Matthews, N.C., a member of Christian Schools International.

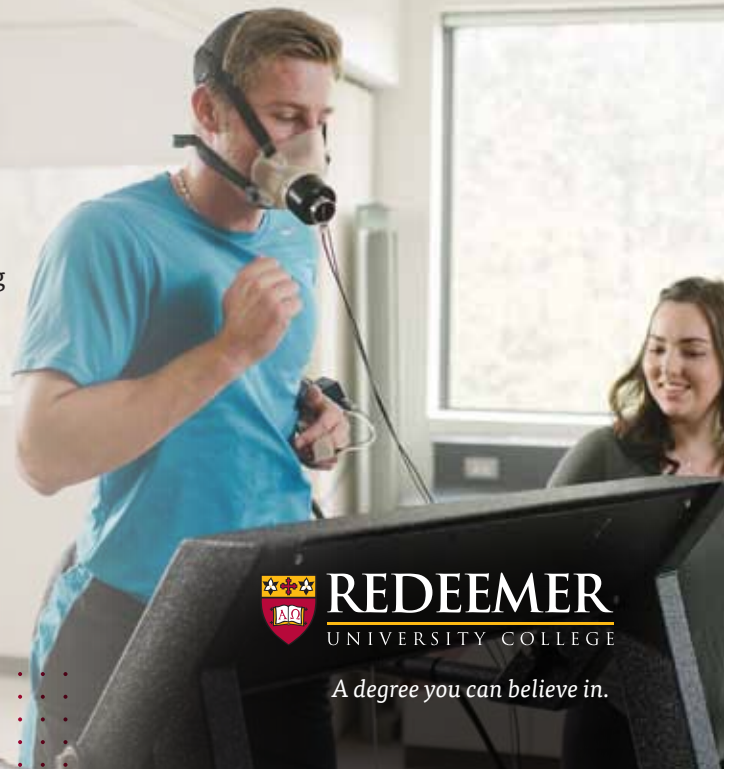
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Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS ZEELAND will meet on Thursday, May 17, at 4PM, at the Beaverdam CRC of Hudsonville. Agenda deadline is April 4. REV. RON MEYER, S. C.

General

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER (U. S.) In May 1988 the President of the United States signed into law a bill establishing the first Thursday of May as a National Day of Prayer. This year the National Day of Prayer falls on Thursday, May 3. The synod of the CRC has urged churches in the United States "to observe faithfully any national day of prayer which the United States President publicizes to the nation" (*Acts of Synod 1969*). "Our churches must be open to our congregations and our fellow countrymen on such occasions, when God in his providence leads those in civil authority to call our citizenry to pray. We must pray for and with our country" (*Acts of Synod 1958*).

Steven R. Timmermans, Executive Director

Retirement

The congregation of Jamestown CRC (Hudsonville, MI) congratulates Rev. Dan Gritter on his retirement on April

8, 2018. We thank God for Pastor Dan and Jane and their 3 years of faithful ministry at Jamestown CRC. We pray God's blessings on them in their retirement.

Miscellaneous

CHHS CELEBRATES 100 YEARS! Chicago Christian High School will celebrate it's 100th Anniversary on April 20th at 6pm at the Tinley Park Convention Center. Free event - donations accepted. To register and for more information, go to www.SWChristian.org. 708-388-7656

HP SCHOLTE SESQUICENTENNIAL CONFERENCE Aug. 16-18, 2018, Pella, Iowa. Speakers from Netherlands and North America will examine the impact of Hendrik Pieter Scholte, founder of Pella. www.pellahistorical.org.

Church Positions Available

LEAD PASTOR Mill Creek Community Church, located in the exciting, growing north Seattle area, seeks a pastor to lead it into the next phase of its mission. We are an open and inviting church, seeking in all we do to reflect the renewing love of God in our community. Check out our church profile at millcreekchurch.com with information on how to apply. We are open to both women and men in leadership.

DUNCAN CRC on beautiful Vancouver Island BC is seeking a full-time, dynamic pastor who would be a caring shepherd ministering to all ages in our congregation. More info available on our website duncancrc.org or by contacting the search committee at search@duncancrc.org

LEAD PASTOR for smaller Vital, Outreaching & Welcoming church - Faith Community CRC, Beaver Dam, WI -- 45 mi from Madison, WI & 10 mi from Christian Schools. Email Bruce McMurphy, brucecmurphy@gmail.com or ph / text Bruce at 920-960-7524.

SENIOR PASTOR - PATERSON, NJ Madison Avenue CRC is seeking a senior Pastor called to serve in a multiracial, multicultural congregation in an urban environment which is transforming the community through spiritual leadership, faith formation, discipleship, indigenous leadership & outreach ministries. Position available Summer 2018. Email tugmanaka@yahoo.com for add'l information.

SEEKING SENIOR PASTOR: Phoenix CRC has many established self-sustaining ministries of all ages with passionate leaders who use their Spiritual gifts to contribute to Christ's Kingdom. We are excited about our growing numbers of children. We seek a Pastor to inspire us to live out our God-given potential through Biblical preaching, teaching and engaging with our existing leaders. Got to phoenixcrc.org and contact us at search@phoenixcrc.org.

HELLO FUTURE PASTOR - Just wanted to say hi! We're a healthy, family-focused church in beautiful Calgary, AB, and we're already praying for you. Contact the search committee at peterdejonge@shaw.ca or 403-730-9543.

PART-TIME PASTOR Looking for a challenge? Trinity Fellowship CRC in San Diego is seeking a part-time (bi-vocational) pastor who is skilled in and passionate about preaching and leadership. We are a small diversified church that wants to attract, engage and enfold more members of our community. If interested please contact Mr. Jim Salle at 619-429-8715 or cell 619-245-8583. <https://trinitysdccrc.org>

SEEKING PASTOR Prairie Lane CRC in Omaha, Nebraska is seeking a fulltime lead pastor to start immediately. Please contact Mike Hostetler for information: 402-981-2648 mike@hostetlerhome.com

WORSHIP DIRECTOR Caledonia Christian Reformed Church is seeking a full time Worship Director. The job description is available on church website @ www.caledoniaccrc.org. Please email your resume to Sue Sikma at ssikma@caledoniaccrc.org.

Anniversary

60TH ANNIVERSARY

DOORN—Henry and Doris (Kamp) 17111 Kamp Court Tinley Park, IL 60477 will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on March 28, 2018. Children: Henry Jr. and Karen, Jim and Margie, Al and Ruth, Ken and Jill; 16 grandchildren, and 1 great-grandchild. Congratulations! We love you both and thank God for His love, faithfulness, and many blessings! To God be the glory!



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Birthdays

100TH BIRTHDAY

JEAN (WAALKES) HOMAN of 979 Village Ln, Jenison MI, 49428 will celebrate her 100th birthday May 2. Thanking God for her faith and gentle spirit are her 5 children and spouses, 9 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

90TH BIRTHDAY

FRAN (ROP) SOPER will celebrate her 90th birthday on April 26. Praising God for her love & devotion is Hal, her husband of 68 years & her children Linda (Bob), Barb (Dave), Gail (Doug), Sarah, Hal, Paul (Sue), 20 grandchildren & 17 great-grandchildren. Greetings may be sent to 2772 Pfeiffer Woods Dr #4203 Grand Rapids MI 49512

GERTRUDE R. BAKER will celebrate her 90th birthday on April 10, 2018. Her husband Louis and her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren are thankful for her deep faith, her caring heart, her many acts of kindness in the lives of others, and her faithful prayers. She lives at 11911 James St., Apt. A-4, Holland, Michigan, 49424.

HENRY BYMA praises God for 90 years March 30, with his wife Janet, also 90. His children; Rich & Rosina, Anna & Jake Ellens, Ben & Linda, Audrey & Roy Little, Betsy & the late Ed Van Der Molen, Joan & George Nafis, give thanks for his faith and love. Pake to 22 grandchildren and 46 great grands. The family now totals 100 blessings. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" 309 Rt.519, Sussex, N. J. 07461

RUTH (KONING) VAN GROUW BANDSTRA wife of Rev. Andy Bandstra and the late Clarence Van Grouw, will celebrate her 90th birthday on April 27. Children: Cheryl & Bernie De Young, Karen & Bob Veldman, Ruth & Ron VerWys, Crystal & Paul Van Beek, Lee & Donna Van Grouw, Barb & Norm Hawkins, Lynn & Greg Andriese, 23 grandchildren, 50 great-grandchildren. Stepchildren: Nancy & Dick Stob, Ruth Bandstra, Sue & Rev. Rich Hamstra, Mary & Bob Ippel, Barb & Barry Newman, 14 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren. We are very thankful for her example of a life filled with faith and grace. Cards may be sent to: 2105 Raybrook SE, Apt. 4046, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.

WINIFRED MIERSMA of 2500 Breton Woods Dr SE., Apt 1048 will be 90 years old on April 1. Her family gives thanks to God for her and her life.

85TH BIRTHDAY

JEAN GOEMAN (JIPPING) of 95 Old Mill Dr #8 Holland MI 49423 celebrates her 85th birthday April 20. Your children and grandchildren love you and thank God for you.

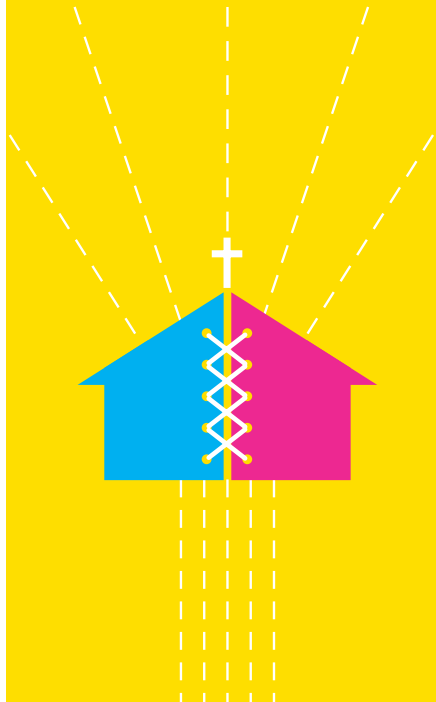
Obituaries

DEVRIES Edward H., of Uxbridge, MA went to be with his lord on December 10, 2017 at the age of 92. He was the beloved husband of Nellie (Nydam) for 71 years, the loving father of his children Henry (Jan) DeVries and Maribeth (Doug) Kenbeek, and the loving "Pop Pop" to his 6 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren.

HAAN Donald, age 85, of Highland, IN went to be with his Lord and Savior on January 28, 2018. Beloved husband of 65 years to Grace (Hoving). Father of 5 children, Jay (Susan) Haan, Leanne (Larry) Plowman, Doug (Renee) Haan, Jim (Pat) Haan and Scott (Julie) Haan. Grandfather of 17 and Great-Grandfather of 25. His life was a testimony filled with love for the Lord.

HAAK Maxine nee Selles, age 88, of Kalamazoo, MI passed away December 17, 2017. Beloved wife of 67 years of Wil-lard (Bill). Loving mother of Karen (Kal) Vander Weele, Ann Haak, Jane (Gary) Grant, Lori (Ken) Hoogstra, grandmother of 14 and great-grandmother of 7. Maxine helped found the Kalamazoo Deacon's Conference and was a tireless volunteer in the schools, her church and Disaster Response Services of World Renew. Memorial gifts may be made to World Renew-Disaster Response Services.

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September 20 – October 2
Pastor Bill & Lyn Vanden Bosch

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HEDMAN, Beatrice (Terpstra) age 85 of Bloomington, MN went home to her Savior February 4, 2018. Preceded in death by husband Paul in 1962, and sisters Theresa Terpstra, Helen Van Someren, Dorothy Hedman. Survived by children Randall & Eva Hedman (Lauren, Gerrit), Cheryl & Duane Hettver (Kaycia, Keaton), Roger & Sheri Hedman. Lovingly remembered by sister Harriet (Dean) Lampers, many nieces, nephews, cousins, family and friends. Her life-long trust in the Lord, in joy and in sorrow, leaves behind an enduring legacy of faith.

HERLEIN Nellie, age 95 of Grand Haven, Michigan, and Palmetto, Florida, went to be with her Lord on January 8, 2018. She was preceded in death by her loving husband, Jay, of 50 years. She is survived by her children, Linda (Dan) Shepard and Larry (Carla) Herlein, six grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. We thank God for her Christian testimony.

MARTINUS Dr. Martin, age 98, went to be with his Savior and friend, Jesus, on Wednesday, January 17, 2018, in Grand Haven, MI. He was born to the late William and Anna (Dykstra) Martinus in Holland, Michigan. Martin married Irene VanAppledorn of Holland; they had just celebrated 69 years together. She preceded him in death, as did a granddaughter. Martin graduated from Holland Christian High School, Calvin College, and the University of Michigan Medical School. He practiced as a general surgeon at Butterworth Hospital and was the Medical Director at Kent Community Hospital. He also served on the boards of Bethany Christian Services and Seymour Christian School. Martin was a member of Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, and a past deacon and elder at LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Martin is survived by his children M. James (Harriet) Martinus of Jenison, Mary (Curt) DeJongh of Grand Haven, and William (Shirley) Martinus of West Olive, 11 grandchildren and 26 great-grandchildren; Memorial Contributions may be given to the Calvin Seminary Martin and Irene Martinus Scholarship Fund, which is intended to promote calling on congregants and excellence in preaching.

MASSELINK Wm. J. (Bill) DDS passed away Feb. 6 2018. He was the dearly loved husband of Glenda, father of W. Ted. (Heike) Masselink, Marsha (Kevin) Lange, and grandfather of Rachel, Rebecca, Timothy, Kirsten, and Erik. A kind, and loving man who ably served his God and his country. We thank God for his example.



OZINGA Kenneth J. age 66, of Seattle, WA, passed away peacefully at home on February 8, 2018 of pneumonia with swallowing difficulties from MSA. Ken is the beloved husband of Judy (nee Timmer). Loving father of Charlie (Penny) Ozinga, Katie (Scott) Ryan, Meagan (Jeff) Ramos and Jana (Kendall)

Burns. Cherished grandfather of Grace and Luke Ramos; Aidan and Janson Burns; and step-grandfather of Lucas and Shelby Ryan. Dear brother of Martin (Mary) (and the late Ruth) Ozinga III and Beverly Ozinga. Devoted son-in-law of Margaret Timmer. Fond brother-in-law of Susan Jones, Pat (Gary) Lanning, Cheryl (Randy) Weg and Marlae (David) Schnare. Much loved uncle of many nieces and nephews. Before settling in Seattle, WA, Ken raised his family in Evergreen Park, IL moved to Palos Park, IL and also lived in Wisconsin for several years. Ken was President of The First National Bank of Evergreen Park. Memorial services will be held in both Washington and Wisconsin. Donations can be made in his honor and memory to Lynden Christian School Association or Southwest Chicago Christian Schools.

SCHEMPER Loyd, age 89 of Bellflower, CA, passed away on February 13, 2018. He was preceded in death by his wife Louise (Van Houten) Schemper and one grandson. He will be missed by his children, Linda and Bill Hagedorn, Lugene and Carla Schemper, Henry and Pam Schemper, Marie and Mark Evans; by his 11 grandchildren and their spouses; by his 19 great-grandchildren; and by other members of his extended family.

STEGINK Evelyn June— June 12, 1922 – February 26, 2018 She is the mother of LeRoy (Anjean), Keith (Margaret), Calvin (Carol), David (Dale – deceased), Karl, Susan (deceased), and Carol (Ernie – deceased). She has 15 grandchildren and 33 great-grandchildren. She is also survived by her sister Laura Broersma of California. Memorial Service at Hillcrest Christian Reformed Church (3000 S. Race Denver CO 80210) on March 17, 2018 at 1:00 conducted by Rev. Robert Koornneef. A donation may be made in her name to World Renew (1700 28th St., SE Grand Rapids, MI 49508) or a cause of your own

VANDER SCHUUR Margaret, age 92, daughter of the King of Kings, went to her eternal home on February 8, 2018. There she was met by her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as well as her husband, Harold Vander Schuur; son, Jay Vander Schuur; her parents, William and Cora Van Zalen; and her three sisters Jean, Betty, and Connie. She is lovingly remembered by her brother, William Van Zalen and her children, David and Jennifer Vander Schuur, Sue and Kelly Bauder, Esther and Doug Glashower and Brenda Vander Schuur as well as numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren. Margaret's love and passion for Christ and people and her servant heart inspired her to be a mighty prayer warrior and example for many around the world. Her one day at a time confidence in her living Lord carried her through all of life's challenges. She deeply loved her Lord, her family and her church. Funeral services were held at Messiah CRC in Hudsonville. Memorial contributions may be made to Resonate Global Mission for the work of Brenda Vander Schuur.

VAN DER WEELE Steve, left his earthly home of 97 years for his eternal home on February 20, 2018. His wife Viola preceded him. He is survived by two children, Deborah Kula (Robert, deceased) of Louisiana and Philip Van Der Weele (Joan Snyder) of Oregon; two granddaughters, Kathryn and Jennifer; brothers, Don (Joan) and Ray (Phyllis); two sisters-in-law, Betty and Harriet; and many nieces, nephews, and grand-nieces and nephews.

VAN TIL CORNELIUS G, age 90 of Munster Indiana, formerly of Highland Indiana, passed away January 28, 2018. He is survived by his wife Rosemary and children Jim (Ginny) Van Til, Doug (Jan) Van Til, Mary (Randy) Mitchell, Cathy (Jeff) Visser, 10 grandchildren and 27 great-grandchildren.

VAN WINGERDEN Carrie Elizabeth of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on Feb. 18, 2018. Preceded in death by her husband Nick, she is survived by her children Cindy (Steve) Buher and Randy (Vicki) Van Wingerden; seven grandchildren, and eleven great-grandchildren.

VANDE POLDER Helen Emily, 84, was born in Passaic, NJ, to Reverend Emo and Nellie Van Halsema on March 21, 1933, and went home to be with her Lord on February 13, 2018. She died at home of natural causes. She was predeceased by her beloved husband, Don, as well as her parents and four of her siblings. Helen graduated with a B. A. in English in 1954 from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI. After college, she met Donald R Vande Polder, a medical student. They married in 1960. Following brief stays in Ann Arbor, MI, and Houston, TX, the couple moved to Sarasota, FL, in 1965, and Don began his medical practice as Sarasota's first neurologist. Their five children attended and graduated from Bradenton Christian School, which she supported throughout her life. For more than 50 years Helen was a devoted member of Bradenton Christian Reformed Church, where, for 25 of those years, she also ran the church library. She leaves behind five children and 11 grandchildren

Employment

REDEEMER U. C. PRESIDENT SEARCH Redeemer University College (Hamilton, Ontario) stands out across Canada for its commitment to a Christian undergraduate liberal arts and sciences education that develops the whole person. Redeemer is now embarking on a search for the fourth President of the institution. The next President needs to be a skilled communicator to internal and external audi-

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- » Deadline for submissions is midnight, July 13, 2018.
- » Contest open to college-age students enrolled in an undergraduate or associates/diploma program who is a member of or regularly attends a Christian Reformed church.
- » Essays should be no more than 1,000 words in length, submitted as a Word file and accompanied by a separate cover letter that includes your name, address, phone number, where you worship, and brief biographical note. Do not include this information on the essay itself. Send to info@thebanner.org.
- » Decisions of judges are final. We reserve the right to withhold one or more prizes if none are deemed worthy. Winners will be notified by July 31.

BANNER

Thinking He Was the Gardener

Thinking he was the gardener,
she did not recognize him,
eyes blurred with tears, the weight
of grief breaking her heart.

Now, all these centuries later, we find
her misidentification of him as gardener
happily apt.
For he *is* the gardener
of our lives and our salvation—
planter, waterer, weeder, feeder,
completer.

He is the gardener
of all green and growing things, of
grasses, flowers, and trees. The great sequoias,
redwoods, and cedars of the world bow down to him
who bends to tend the almost invisible lettuce seeds
planted this morning in my garden.

He cares for all creatures, plants
the conies, those “feeble folk,”
in houses of stone to protect them, gives
water for the wild donkeys, delights
in the antics of leviathan.

Before time was, he cast stars
like seeds into the endless
furrows of space and still
charts their growth over seasons
that linger on for eons.

Dear, sad Mary, one word and she knew him,
yet all eternity may not be time enough
for her to comprehend him.



David Schelhaas is a
retired Dordt College
English professor and a
member of Covenant CRC,
Sioux Center, Iowa.



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