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(See the CRC Yearbook for a complete list.)

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BANNER

Volume 144 | Number 12 | 2009



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The story of how Henk and Mavis got their kids to give them what they really wanted.
by James C. Schaap

Q Aceh's Redemption

 Five years after the deadly tsunami, we can see how grace has touched a century of tears.
by Louis M. Tamminga with Mona Sarionsong

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Sooooo Busy!

WHAT? CHRISTMAS SEASON AGAIN? ALREADY? We just did that! We haven't even recovered from last year's go-round, and here we go again!

Sigh!

Not that I'm a grinch. Honest. I actually *like* most of it: the worship, the time with family and friends, the extra ministry opportunities. It's just that, well, Christmas season is so BUSY!

Maybe that's not all so bad. Maybe our busyness allows us in some minor way to identify with the One whose birth we celebrate. Christmas made Jesus busy too, *really* busy.

The Son of God, from an eternity with nothing but time on his hands, plunged into a world ruled by the clock. It's humiliating enough to be tossed into the rotting mess of sinful humanity. But now the God of time and Lord of the Sabbath is presented with the indignity of being subject to time—just another way in which, as the Heidelberg Catechism so perceptively observes, Jesus suffered "during his whole life on earth" (Q&A 37) and not just at its end.

A brief sweep through the gospels:

Maybe our busyness allows us in some minor way to identify with the One whose birth we celebrate.

- The boy Jesus in the temple gets a tongue-lashing from his earthly parents because he can't stick to their schedule and his heavenly Father's schedule at the same time (Luke 2:48).
- The same passage informs us that Jesus "increased in wisdom"—in other words, the fount of all wisdom had to gain it piecemeal, a bit at a time (Luke 2:52).
- Jesus had to endure great temptation when his stomach told him it was time to eat. Matthew tells us that after 40 days of fasting, Jesus was "famished" (Matt. 4:2).
- The One for whom 1,000 years is like a day must tell his mom that he cannot yet bring the full Messianic joy of God's kingdom because his "hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). All he may accomplish at that moment is a "sign." The reality must wait.
- In Mark's and Luke's accounts, Jesus runs late on a pastoral call to Jairus's daughter. All for good reason—to effect another healing. But the delay increases the pain of the frantic parents and tests their faith even further (Mark 5:35).
- Jesus invites his disciples on a retreat, "for many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat" (Mark 6:31).
- Jesus gets outfoxed by a "Canaanite" woman over a timing issue, heals her daughter, and now needs to insert another tour of duty through Gentile territory into his already overloaded agenda (Mark 7:31ff.).

• Even after his crucifixion Jesus must spend three days (by Jewish reckoning) in the grave to atone for our crime, he must do the time.

If the Holy Spirit empowered the human Jesus to survive and fulfill his ministry despite the humiliations, temptations, and restrictions of the cruel clock, then we can survive it too, because in due time he has given us that same Spirit.

So what if we get a bit too much busyness this Christmas season? Or too little? The risen Lord of the Sabbath empowers and invigorates us even when time begins to hurt. Let's go for it!



editor of *The Banner* and pastor of preaching and administration for West End CRC, Edmonton,

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BANNER

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LEARS



It seems amazing—and more than a little disheartening—to find that apparently no one has given thought to what seems like an inevitable eventuality: if we do confirm the Belhar as a full and formal confession of the CRC, what will we do with pastors (like myself) who cannot in good conscience submit to its authority by signing the Form of Subscription, which is prerequisite to ordination in the CRC (see "No Need to Adopt Belhar," IMHO, November 2009)?

The decision to accept the Belhar as a confession necessarily includes with it the decision to exclude those who cannot accept it on those terms—a truly strange starting point for a document whose stated purpose is unity, reconciliation, and justice.

—Rev. Bob Cumings Mountain View CRC Lynden, Wash.

As a lifelong CRC member, old enough to remember when music was public and phone calls were private, I find it ironic that there is a movement to adopt another form of unity when the three we have already are generally ignored. It's been a long time since I've heard a thought-provoking sermon or read a thought-provoking article in *The Banner* on the great theological doctrines of our denomination.

—John Pousma Denver, Colo.

I want to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to Cheryl Kroll, who wrote "Nothing to Fear," and Rev. Phil Reinders, who wrote "The Promise of God's Guidance" (October 2009) for the love, comfort, and joy of God they showed to me.

> —Bev Overeiner Grand Rapids, Mich.

I enjoyed "Was the Reformation Necessary?" (October 2009) on the Reformation and the resulting rift between Catholics and Protestants 500 years ago. I have been teaching in a Catholic school for the past seven years and can attest that Catholic beliefs are very similar to our own. We are more alike than we are different!

So why do we focus so much on the differences? In my opinion, our criticism of Catholics is rooted in both ignorance and arrogance. By their own admission, my Catholic colleagues say the Reformation was necessary to correct church corruption. They also say that Vatican II, in the early 1960s, was a pivotal event in "Christianizing" the Catholic Church.

Are there issues in Catholic doctrine that I have a hard time reconciling? Of course. But the fundamental, core belief that Jesus Christ died to save us from our sins is foundational to both our faiths and should unite us as brothers and sisters in Christ!

> —Kent Zevenbergen Hull, Iowa

I am by and large disappointed with the replies given by Brother Mouw to the four questions raised in the article, in particular question three. Surely more in-depth answers could have been given. The three Roman Catholic colleagues were far more candid and specific with their replies.

> —Klaas Brobbel Oakville, Ontario

I am proud of my father for writing "A Letter to Rev. Veenema" (IMHO, June 2009). It was a difficult letter to write. My father could never be described as left wing, liberal, or accepting of the latest trend or fad, but he has learned to live with compassion and to question some of the CRC rules. His article and Rev. Veenema's (March) were not about [pushing] the church to accept and embrace homosexuality. Rather, they were about the need for fathers to understand what they need to do to help their sons embrace their Lord. (In the CRC's 1973 report on homosexuality, does it not demand that everyone is responsible to minister to gays within the church? What about those who have a loved one who is gay? How do you minister to them?)

I have been gay my entire life. I fought it when I was young, questioned it as a teen, and have accepted it ever since, and God has stood beside me every step of the way. The CRC has taken my church life away from me, but it cannot touch my relationship with God. My parents raised me above all to love our Lord. I will be eternally thankful for that . . . even if we do not agree on church theology.

> —Mark Vaandering London, Ontario

CRCNEWS

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Travel to Guinea Put on Hold for CRC Personnel

n mid-fall the Christian Reformed Church's Crisis Management Team placed a hold on all travel by CRC personnel to the West African country of Guinea, due to the political instability there.

Bill Thornburg, leader of the CRC's Guinea Event Response Team, said there were no plans at that time to pull out World Missions personnel already in the country, but the Crisis Management Team was monitoring the situation closely.

"We have one family in Conakry, and the others are in rural areas, which have not been affected so much," Thornburg said.

Tensions in the coastal capital city Conakry escalated following a rally opposing the military rule of Capt. Moussa Dadis Camara. The U.S. and Canadian governments have urged their citizens to leave the predominantly Muslim country.

"Pray for a just and peaceful resolution to the political situation, protection over our staff and partners, and wisdom for the event response team," Thornburg said.

—Gayla R. Postma

Pastor Runs 50 Miles at 50 for \$50K

While some people view turning 50 as a time to slow down, Rev. Tim Hoekstra celebrated his milestone year by running 50 miles (80.5 km) and setting a goal of raising \$50,000 for clean water wells in Kenya. His 50-mile run included the 2009 Chicago Marathon.

Hoekstra, pastor of Suburban Life Community Christian Reformed Church in Darien, III., was inspired by the Old Testament idea of a year of jubilee for the poor every 50 years. So he combined his love of running with his heart for the poor.

Hoekstra's training included more than 30 runs of 15 miles or more, lasting several hours a day. He remarked that the grueling regimen has been "an exercise in experiencing my ordinariness and weakness, and watching God take the whole thing over, meeting me there in the road."

On race day for the Chicago Marathon, Hoekstra and his supporters met for prayer at 1:30 a.m. in a



JESSICA HOEKSTRA

Rev. Tim Hoekstra celebrates after finishing his 50-mile run.

far-western suburb of Chicago. At 1:45 he began running the 23.8 miles to the starting line of the marathon, and then ran another 26.2 miles as a participant in the marathon.

Hoekstra partnered with Team World Vision to plan his run and manage the fund-raising. He has almost reached his \$50,000 goal, with donations still coming in.

IN MEMORIAM

Calvin Board Stands by Homosexuality Statement

fter its October meeting, the Calvin College board of trustees said it regrets the confusion and distress caused by its recent statement about homosexuality, but it did not withdraw the statement as the faculty had requested.

The board's statement, written in May and issued in August, said that "advocacy by faculty and staff, both in and out of the classroom, for homosexual practice and same-sex marriage is unacceptable."

That touched off a significant controversy, as faculty felt college policy had been unilaterally changed without normal processes and that academic freedom was being threatened (see *Banner*, October 2009).

In late September, the faculty senate voted 36-4 to ask the board to withdraw the May memo and return to its 2008 position: that faculty, administration, and board trustees need to talk about how best to address homosexuality in teaching, writing, and speaking (see *Banner*, November 2009).

The response from the board to that request read, in part, "Although we did not intend the [2009] statement to change existing policy, we understand why many felt it did." But the statement was not withdrawn.

The board also reaffirmed that its position reflects the Christian Reformed Church's position on homosexuality—that homosexual orientation is not a sin, but homosexual practice is.

It also called for the formation of a new "Special Committee of Board Members" to revisit the 2009 statement, to investigate how to better articulate the college's position.

That didn't seem to clear up the confusion. "People were trying

to find out the status of the 2009 memo," said Karin Maag, who serves as vice chair of the Calvin faculty senate. "[College] president [Gaylen] Byker seemed to indicate that the May 2009 memo is still in effect."

Still, faculty seemed encouraged by the board's willingness to discuss the issue.

"I think it's healthy to take things more slowly, in the sense that a snap decision was made in May, so let's not make another snap decision," Maag said.

The board's committee will also study whether synod (the church's annual leadership meeting) should decide if the CRC's position on homosexuality is a doctrinal issue.

Calvin College, a liberal arts school located in Grand Rapids, Mich., is owned by the Christian Reformed Church.

—Christian Bell



Rev. Andrew K. Chun 1970-2009

Rev. Andrew K. Chun, a genial and gifted pastor, leading churchman, champion of the poor, and witness for Christ, died July 15, following a heart attack. He was 39.

Born in Seoul, South Korea, Chun immigrated to the U.S. at age 7. He received his Master of Divinity degree from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1997 and was ordained into the Christian Reformed ministry that year.

He served congregations in Michigan, California, and New Jersey. His sudden death ended a promising career all too soon.

Chun was fluent in both Korean and English, and was at home in both cultures. He was deeply concerned about the plight of the poor and the downcast and was an encouragement to many.

His gifts served both his classis and the denomination. He was a member of the Faith Formation Committee, the board of Calvin Theological Seminary, and had a seat on the denominational Judicial Code Committee.

Chun is survived by his wife, Sarah, and their three children, ages 7 to 2.

—Louis M. Tamminga

For more on the life and ministry of Rev. Chun, please visit www.thebanner.org. In addition to being posted online, further information on recently deceased ministers is available each year in the front pages of the Christian Reformed Church's annual Yearbook.



Plantinga to Step Down from Seminary

After serving for 10 years as president of Calvin Theological Seminary, Rev. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. announced to the seminary board of trustees his intention to step down after the 2010-2011 academic year.

The school, located in Grand Rapids, Mich., is the official seminary of the Christian Reformed Church.

Plantinga expressed a desire to have more time to write and said that he and his wife "have prayed earnestly about this decision and have made it freely and joyfully," adding, "I'll leave my post with satisfaction."

During Plantinga's tenure as president, the seminary saw an increase in its enrollment and fund-raising, as well as several changes,

most notably the implementation of a new curriculum.

At a meeting of the CRC's Board of Trustees in September, Plantinga reported, "The seminary is thriving. We've made big changes in curriculum. I don't think I've started a year when the atmosphere is as good as it is now."

Plantinga plans to remain associated with the seminary, but details have not yet been determined.

-Christian Bell

CRCNEWS

CALLS ACCEPTED

From Trinity CRC, Edmonton, Alberta, to **Rev. Richard deLange** of Aylmer (Ont.) CRC.

From Webster (N.Y.) CRC to **Rev.** Edward C. Visser of Fellowship CRC, Big Rapids, Mich.

CRC Advocates for Travel to Cuba

Peter Vander Meulen, Catherine Cooper, and Gary Mulder, representing the Christian Reformed Church's Office of Social Justice, met with policymakers in Washington, D.C., at the end of September to press for an end to the ban on travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens and residents.

For decades, the U.S. travel ban has disrupted the work of the agencies of the CRC in North America and fellowship with the 12 congregations of the Christian Reformed Church in Cuba. Some American congregations have maintained relationships with the Cuban congregations, despite difficulties with travel.

The CRC has lobbied for an end to the embargo for more than a decade after a letter from the Cuban CRC's synod of 1998 requested that the North Americans express to the U.S. government that the embargo is an "injustice that causes suffering for the very weakest people."

The Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act (H.R. 874/S.428) would end the restrictions on travel to and from Cuba by U.S. citizens. There are no Canadian restrictions on travel to Cuba.

–Gayla R. Postma

Kenyans Get Their Goats

Three thousand goats were distributed to 300 families in two villages of Kenya's Rift Valley, thanks to the dream of some Vancouver hockey fans.

Joel Nagtegaal, a member of Bridge Community Christian Reformed Church in Langley, British Columbia, joined forces with some friends to pledge money for each playoff win of their favorite hockey team, the Vancouver Canucks. Even though their team didn't advance far in the playoffs, the goat campaign (www.goatcanucksgoat.com) garnered worldwide attention and raised enough money to buy those 3,000 goats (see Banner, August 2009, p. 11).

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee part-

Free Spuds Raise Agriculture Awareness

Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, recently put 100,000 pounds of potatoes up for grabs to citizens who were willing to dig for them.

Visser, owner of Norbest Farms, said he was happy to give away \$20,000 worth of potatoes. "People need to see what we are doing up here and what it is worth to them in the long term."

Nearly 10,000 people turned out to dig potatoes, creating a traffic jam on a major highway. Each person was given a reuseable bag to harvest their 50 pounds of potatoes after Visser's son, Matt, turned them over with the tractor.

"I wanted to give a voice to local food and to the need to start eating more locally. I wanted to do something that would make a bunch of noise and get the attention of the decision makers about this pocket of great agri-



Three thousand goats were distributed by CRWRC in Kenya.

nered with the Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA) to distribute the goats to people who were displaced by post-election violence in Kenya.

Goats do well in the hot climate, multiply quickly, and are a valuable source of nutrition. Each family received nine females and one male after going through goat-care training.

"Children are the main beneficiaries because goats are a source of hope," said Rev. Fred Witteveen, a CRWRC Kenya consultant. "Where there is hope, children have a future."

—Jenny deGroot



Edmonton residents turned out in the thousands to dig for free potatoes.

cultural land right in the city," said Visser. "God was there, no doubt about that. The weather was great, and it really exceeded my expectations."

Visser's daughter, Sarah, 15, worked the whole day as well. "It was amazing to see people just sitting in the dirt, feeling the dirt like they had never done that before," she said.

Visser worked on the event with the Edmonton Potato Grower's Association and the Greater Edmonton Alliance, a broad-based citizens' organization. —*Rachel deKoning Kraay*

Ontario Church Creates "Mess"

Two staff members, several volunteers, 100 people without homes, one barbecue grill, and lots of art supplies could add up to one big mess. But in London, Ontario, "The Mess" is a weekly arts ministry that's making an impact on the city.

The Mess is an arts-based initiative of First Christian Reformed Church in London, in partnership with Streetlight Ministries, which provides a place where people can meet Christ and get mentoring to help them find a way out of lifestyle patterns that have led them into poverty.

Mike Bieber, 29, has been part of the program since it started. "It's an invite where everyone is welcome for a community meal, and we do art afterwards," he said. "It doesn't matter where you are coming from, and there are no expectations. It has made me grow as an artist and see things differently."

This year The Mess received a \$5,000 grant from the Christian Reformed Church's Sea to Sea poverty-alleviation fund. Gayle



Jereme Wilcocks, 19, is a guest at The Mess's graffiti workshop in London, Ontario.

Herrison, the kitchen coordinator for The Mess, rode across North America with the 2008 Sea to Sea bike tour. "It's been so exciting to see that all the effort put into cycling last summer has come back to benefit a program I am part of," she said.

Asked how the ministry got its name, First CRC's pastor Rev. Pieter Pereboom said, "Because we mess around with arts. Because we come to Christ out of a mess. This world is a mess, and Christ comes to redeem the mess."

—Raquel Flores Lunshof

Giant Art Show Lets CRC Artists Shine

The work of more than 1,200 artists was on display this fall in Grand Rapids, Mich., as part of a new public art competition known as ArtPrize.

ArtPrize entries were displayed around the city's downtown, allowing the public to view and vote for the best piece in the competition. More than 300,000 votes were cast in a oneweek period.

Debra Van Tuinen, a member of Olympia (Wash.) Christian Reformed Church, displayed her painting titled *Wave Energy* and placed in the top 75.



Wave Energy, an encaustic (hot wax) painting by Debra Van Tuinen placed in the top 75 entries in ArtPrize.

She was pleased by the public reaction to the show. "What I liked

about it was getting so many people out to see art," Van Tuinen said.

Virginia Wieringa, a member of Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids, also had an entry, as part of an exhibit titled "MANNA: A Visual Collage of Faith," put together by the group Grand Rapids Christians in the Visual Arts. She echoed Van Tuinen's enthusiasm for ArtPrize. "What an amazing, fascinating process," she said.

The contest included art in many mediums. Placing in the top 10 were a giant sculpture of the Loch Ness monster placed in the Grand River and a 20-foot-tall table with matching chairs hoisted atop a bridge spanning the river.

ArtPrize is likely to return next year, and Van Tuinen said she is considering entering again. "As an artist, it was an amazing event," she said.

-Christian Bell

Finding Community in Calcutta

Happy, joyful children and a sense of community. That's what a church group found in Calcutta this summer.

Nineteen teens and adults from New Hope Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Monroe, Wash., and Family of Faith CRC in Kennewick, Wash., visited India and Thailand.

Through a physician in his church, Rev. Rob Jansons, pastor of New Hope Fellowship, had connected with a Calcutta native whose ministry is devoted to helping street children in Calcutta break the cycle of poverty. Once there, the team led vacation Bible school programs in mobile schools.

Before the group left, a Sunday school collection called "Quarters for Calcutta"

raised \$1,600 to provide lunch to Calcutta's street children.

Katy Roosendaal, 16, from Richland, Wash., realized the significance of giving one quarter when she saw one boy receive his lunch and run to meet his sibling. "I got the feeling that not only would that meal feed the child for a day, it would feed his family," she said.

The group also brought money for tarps to shelter refugees who escaped to Thailand from Burma. Shannon Slager, a teacher from Bellingham, Wash., said she actually prayed that the group would not be allowed into the refugee camp; now she said the visit "was a highlight of the trip."



Becca Jansons holds a child from the mobile school in Calcutta.

Jansons said the trip was "absolutely worth it!" — Evangeline Magee DeMaster

CRCNEWS

California Church, Neighbors Clean Up Community

Delhi, Calif., is a high-need community facing poverty and gangs, and the county doesn't always have enough resources to care for this unincorporated area.

So the people of Church of the Cross, a Christian Reformed church plant in Delhi, got involved with



Two volunteers pitch in to clear weeds in Delhi, Calif.

their neighbors to clear weeds and paint over graffiti.

Church member Sandra Gwin-Edwards said, "We are not only bringing together a community for a good cause, but we are allowing them to feel responsible for the improvement."

The county supplied tools and garbage bags, and volunteers supplied the hard labor. A group of about 25 people, including some as young as age 5, pitched in to cut down and haul away weeds along the city streets.

Another group used donated paint to cover the graffiti marring fences along the road. Gwin-Edwards said, "The teens who worked on it took pride in it, and it has become something they don't want defaced."

Afterward, everyone came together to share food and fellowship sponsored by the church. The church was so excited about the project that they are planning to do it again. "I do think that community pride is contagious," said Gwin-Edwards. "The right people have to be afflicted with it."

—Heidi Wicker



Ironman athlete Mike Pluimer races to raise money for CRWRC's Embrace AIDS campaign.

Ironman Athlete Invites Others to "Join the Race" Against AIDS

Ironman triathlete Mike Pluimer teamed up with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee's Embrace AIDS initiative to raise funds for and awareness of the fight against AIDS.

Pluimer, a member of Unity Christian Reformed Church in Prinsburg, Minn., and Randy Hedman of CRWRC started *www. jointherace.org*, where people can sign up online as iJoiners to partner with Pluimer in raising money and awareness.

While Pluimer actually competes in Ironman events, which include swimming, biking, and running a total of 140 miles (226 km), iJoiners train and complete their miles toward the Ironman distance at their own pace. Most of the iJoiners are teens and young adults.

"The program is designed to get other people actively involved as they have to train, raise funds and awareness, and tell others about it," Pluimer said. "They have to sacrifice to reach the goal, and that's the point."

Pluimer, an engineer, has raced in nine events, including two this year. He has raised \$1.3 million, including \$40,000 for CRWRC.

—Paul Delger

Reaching Out by Repairing Rides

The New Hope Bike Co-op in Hamilton, Ontario, serves its neighbors with wrenches, tire tubes, and bicycles. Jeff Neven, a driving force behind the initiative, said that, in his view, love of God and neighbor includes offering bike repairs, free use of tools, lowcost parts, and cheap refurbished bikes.

First Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton held a one-day bike repair event that blossomed into a summer-long bike repair shop used by 20 to 40 people daily.

First CRC and New Hope CRC, a new Hamilton church plant, backed the program

with private donations. Bethel CRC in Listowel and Ebenezer CRC in Jarvis collected and delivered 100 used bikes. A government grant was used to hire student Sid Slotegraaf, who encouraged a bike culture, built relation-



ships, and developed community partner-ships.

Neven said anyone may hang out at the co-op without having to buy anything. The co-op models the belief that all people are valuable, can learn new things, and are able to offer their gifts to the community.

Thanks to the co-op, more Hamiltonians have inexpensive, environmentally friendly transportation and, Neven added, "lives are being changed."

—Sophie Vandenberg

Sid Slotegraaf works on a bike for a guest at New Hope Bike Co-op.



GLENN MERGELMEYER

California Church Celebrates Diversity

Rosewood Christian Reformed Church in Bellflower, Calif., recently celebrated the congregation's diversity with singing, dancing, people in indigenous dress, and a reading of Psalm 117:1 in 10 different languages. "Unity is not threatened by diversity," said Rev. Dan Brink, pastor of the congregation that has people from 20 different countries of origin. Julieta Condoretti, event coordinator, said, "It was like a small sample of what is going to happen in heaven." -Heidi Wicker

Trinity Christian College Celebrates 50th

Trinity Christian College celebrated its 50th birthday with 1,400 guests at a dinner at Navy Pier in Chicago. Homecoming events on the Palos Heights, Ill., campus and a community worship service rounded out the celebration.

Rev. Arthur De Kruyter, one of the college's founding members, shared some of his recollections of the school's beginning.

De Kruyter's stories reminded current president Steven Timmermans that in God it is possible to do what many say is impossible. "The weekend gave us opportunity to thank and praise God for making the impossible possible at Trinity these past 50 years," Timmermans said.

Cyclists Ride for Refugees

Students from Georgetown Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Mich., biked for a reason on a rainy autumn Saturday. "I joined to help refugees all over the world, so they can feel just as safe as us," said Trent Vegter, 12.

The students were among at least 500 riders from several west Michigan Christian Reformed churches who participated in Ride for Refugees, raising \$75,000.

Organizers Glen and Kori Vanderkooi are members of Pathway CRC in Byron Center, Mich. "It's important to raise awareness of the 67 million refugees," Kori said.

Some participants raised money for Tim and Angie Sliedrecht, who work for a partner organization of Christian Reformed World Missions in Uganda.

Georgetown CRC middle school director Lisa DeVries said it was an opportunity for the youths to participate in missions. "Riding a bike is something they can do," she said.

—Carolyn Koster Yost



Rachael Morrison, 14, left, and Nicole Kaptein, 13, took part in the West Michigan Ride for Refugees.

Court Says Church Keeps Property

The Michigan Court of Appeals ruled in September that Lamont (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church will keep its property, upholding a ruling from a lower court.

The church had been in a legal battle with the Lamont Community Church since the latter group split away from the CRC in 2005 and filed suit against Lamont CRC for the church building and assets.

—Karen Gorter



Green Bean Burns

The popular Green Bean Coffee House burned down Oct. 23. It was a ministry of Sanctuary Christian Reformed Church in Seattle (see *Banner*, November 2009, p. 12). Taproot Theatre, where Sanctuary holds its worship services, sustained heavy smoke and water damage. Arson has been determined as the cause.

Acknowledging that the coffeehouse is more than its building, Rev. Randy Rowland said, "The Green Bean is unscathed. On the other hand, the building is gone." A neighboring competitor has offered space so the Green Bean could reopen immediately, if the church chooses.

-Evangeline Magee DeMaster

CRCNEWS

Building Fellowship by Sharing a Building

When two congregations in Tualatin, Ore., decided to share one building, they practiced good stewardship but found deepened fellowship as well.

In 2008, Rev. Greg Miller and his Baptist congregation, Creekside Bible Church, moved into the church building of Christ Community Christian Reformed Church, a congregation led by Rev. Virgil Michael.

The congregations' first shared vacation Bible school went well. Youth group discussions were stimulated by Chad Harms, a member of the Baptist congregation.

A program for young girls and a women's Bible study became more viable with twice as many people to draw on. Since this summer, the two pastors have been meeting every Sunday morning for prayer.

Both pastors say their success is due to more focus on the local church and less focus on their denominations. Both pastors say they respect the other's theology.

Michael admits that one family left, saying, "You're too loosey-goosey." But Miller said, "We've tried to teach our people to be kingdomfocused."

Michael agreed that the point is to "promote the kingdom of God."

—Evangeline Magee DeMaster

News from Fall Classis Meetings

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to classis, a regional grouping of churches. There, delegates review shared ministries and practice mutual accountability for their congregations' individual ministries. Here are the highlights of the most recent classis meetings:

Ministers Coming and Going

Several seminary graduates were **welcomed into ministry** of the Word and sacraments in the CRC, including Jonathan Averill, Paul Birnbaum, Joel DeMoor, Rebecca Jordan Heys, Mark Hilbelink, James Kirk, Allen Kleine-Deters, Brad Knetsch, James Kuiper, Nicholas Monsma, Bonny Mulder-Behnia, Zachery Olson, Albert Postma, Brian Seifert, David Van Berkel, Paul van Stralen, Aaron Winkle, Tim Wood, and Andrew Zomerman.

Ministers from other denominations admitted to CRC ministry were Revs. Drew Brown, Jeong Ha Chun, Joshua Jung, Boo Shik Kong, Kyung Ho Park, Won Seok Song, David Van Harten, Mirtha Villafane, and Robert Woodyard.

Revs. Tony Maan and Steve Van Eck were **readmitted** to CRC ministry and are eligible for call.

Revs. William Delleman, Jeff Fisher, Ed Gerber, Charles Geschiere, Ken Krause, Mike Laird, Coleman Moore, Karl Neerhof, Peter Van Elderen Jr., Eugene Vis, Kevin J. Vryhof, and David Westra were **released** from sorvice in their local congregation

from service in their local congregation.

Revs. Hyuk Soo Kwon and Peter Van Drunen were **loaned** to non-CRC churches.

Revs. Clifford Bajema, Karl House, Richard Jones, Myung-han Kang, Rich Kim, Tim Kwon, and Byung Min were **released from CRC ministry**. Nam Kieu and Lloyd Burghart were **deposed**.

Ministry Changes

New ministries were started in Providence, R.I.; Milton, Ontario; Mukilteo, Wash.; Quincy, Wash.; Gallatin Valley, Mont.; Lethbridge and Calgary, Alberta.

Iglesia Cristiana Vida Nueva CRC in Miami Lakes, Fla., moved to organized status, which means it is now a self-standing congregation no longer supervised by a neighboring church.

Richfield CRC in Clifton, N.J., is seeking to **merge** with two Reformed Church in America congregations in that city.

Ministries ended include North Shore Chapel CRC in Danvers, Mass.; Manchester (N.H.) L.I.F.E. CRC; Passaic County Community College CRC campus ministry in Paterson, N.J.; Kincardine (Ont.) CRC; and the hospital ministry of Classis Toronto.

New initiatives include a grant of \$35,000 in Classis Grandville for development of a **retreat center focused on church renewal.**

Classes British Columbia Northwest and Southeast formed a committee to connect their congre-

gations with Christian Reformed congregations in Sierra Leone.

Classis Southeast U.S. plans to plant or affiliate with **20 new churches by 2020**.

Training and Discussions

Delegates in Classes Chicago South, Illiana, and Northern Illinois learned about **church planting in the inner city.**

California South delegates discussed how to deal with **potential members who do not believe in baptizing young children**.

Eastern Canada had a workshop on **boundaries for pastors**, and British Columbia Northwest delegates discussed **pastoral care for members with same-sex attraction**.

Overtures to Synod 2010

Classis Heartland is requesting that Synod 2010 appoint a study committee to provide guidance regarding non-attending church members, including studying the applicable articles in the Church Order (the rules that govern structure and activities of the CRC).

Classis Pacific Northwest wants Synod 2010 to ask the Candidacy Committee to provide clarity regarding the permanence and length of stay for **ministry associates serving in established churches**, particularly in the role of solo pastors (Church Order Article 23).

Miscellaneous

Classis Huron invited deacons to attend classis in January 2010, with recommendations about **making deacons voting delegates** to come in May 2010.

In response to an inquiry, Classis Minnkota advised a group of ministers and elders in western Michigan to pursue **formation of a classis that would be united theologically.** The inquiry noted efforts being made to prepare overtures to Synod 2010 to form such a classis.

Classis Pacific Northwest created **Extended Education for Korean Congregations** to help Korean congregations learn about CRC polity and doctrines and help them establish a firm identity within the CRC.

More details and additional news from the classes is available in this month's online *Banner* at *www. thebanner.org.*

-Banner News Correspondents

Streak of Grace

NA SNOW-COVERED hill, when I was in junior high, my life flashed before my eyes. In the brilliance, I caught a glimpse of God.

Locals know the glacially carved peak as "Lucas Hill"—a stony knob of dirt rising ominously over the vale where my tiny junior high building sat shadowed. Sixth through eighth grades met in an old four-room schoolhouse. To the east, above us, sat Lucas Christian Reformed Church. To the north, above us, Benthem's dairy farm. To the south, higher than all, stood the hill.

Around Christmastime each year, lakeeffect weather from mighty Lake Michigan would dump layers of fresh, powdery snow over the grass and bramble. It became a place of beauty. It became a place of terror.

Each recess we would don our mittens and coats, pull on our soggy boots, and grab our sleds to ride the beast. Mr. Westmaas, the science teacher, clocked students at close to 50 mph (80 kph). But gravity wasn't the real danger. Evil was. And evil was in the eighth grade.

Those older boys, freakishly large to my sixth-grade eyes, had developed a sport to Olympic precision: smashing younger kids. They came prepared. Their chariots of pain were well crafted. Two orange hard-plastic sleds were bolted firmly together for added weight. A block of foam wrapped in black garbage bags and lashed down with frayed duct tape served as a seat. Like a pack of wolves they waited, sneering, at the top of the hill, until a small, skinny underclassman headed down it. Then the hunt would commence. One goal: annihilation. Shaming, painful annihilation. Broken bodies. Broken spirits.

It was recess, and there I sat atop the hill on my flimsy, single-ply sled. Heart racing. I was beginning to understand the calculus of nature's two primordial forces: *gravity* plus *sin* equals *pain*. The wind whipped off the surrounding fields. But my cheeks were rosy for another reason. Fear. Then I felt it. Gruff hands pressing on my back. One of the older boys had exited his sled and was trying to push me down—a sacrifice to their dark intentions.

He was stronger. I had no hope. That's when my life flashed before my eyes. I could envision the pain. The humiliation. Fear gripped me.

Then it happened.

Like a streak of grace, another young kid, equally small and vulnerable, headed off to my rescue. Pushing himself to the front, he voluntarily took the bull's-eye off my back. Throwing his tiny body between the pincers of earthly gravity and human sin, he headed down the hill like a lamb to the slaughter.

Instinctively, the wolves followed their new target, leaving me to breathe under the bright sun atop the glistening snow. I was saved.

Many winters later, I reflect on that cold day. It has become a picture of rescue and grace. A small picture of Christmas. Eternity flashing before his eyes, the second person of the Trinity submitted himself to pain and humiliation. Plunging into a wooden manger through terrestrial gravity, he took on the hateful forces of human sin. With Herod, Pilate, and the Devil himself sneering, Jesus slid over the brim of earth's knob. Vulnerable. Meek. Tiny.

Then, in a brilliant streak of grace, he absorbed the wrath. He went where we feared. He took our place. Now we sit with rosy cheeks, breathing in freedom by the gulp in a world washed whiter than snow.



Rev. John Lee is pastor of Bethel CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa. He grew up on a dairy farm outside McBain, Mich., where he attended

Northern Michigan Christian School.



There is an alleluia lurking in every struggle.

— JOAN CHITTISTER

The Nightmare of Christmas



AUGHTER RUTH

was always last to leave the Sunday family dinners. She would be the mom, Mavis thought, once Mavis passed on—at

least that was taken care of. It was always the same ritual, really: first Tim and Sarah (if they showed up at all); then silent Sam and sweet Janice, who often had afternoon plans; then Deb and her Reinder; and finally, the oldest, Ruth and antsy Ben. It went that way every week, like the Waltons at bedtime.

This time Ruth had motive. "So, Mom," she said, poking her pointer finger in the caramel apple dip—and she didn't need the extra calories—"what on earth are we supposed to get you and Dad for Christmas?" She checked to see if any of her kids were looking, then stuck her finger in her mouth. "Every year it gets tougher and tougher," she said. "We go crazy—all of us kids—trying to figure out what to get."

"A fancy Caribbean cruise, like my globetrotting kids," her father said from behind the sink, where he stood, apronbedecked, his hands in the dishwater.

"You're so full of b.s., Dad," Ruth told him. "You two wouldn't go if we paid you."

"That so?" her father said. "They got beaches there where the women wear nothing on top," he told them, gesturing with his wet hands.

"That'll do you a lot of good, old man," Mavis told her husband.

"I read on Drudge just last week—a man of 90 was just now a father," Henk told them, nodding his head in affirmation. He half-turned, far enough to see his daughter giggle. "I'm serious, Mom," Ruth said again. "And now that Dad has that camera he bought, we can't give you pictures anymore either—and he doesn't wear ties," she said, pointing at him.

"Bubble bath?" Ruth asked.

"I got a drawer-full you can take home right now," Mavis told her, "or wait until we pass away. Either way you'll get it."

"Oh, Mom," Ruth said, "it's always the same old song—Christmas is just such a nightmare."



Christmas is just such a nightmare.

That's what Henk and Mavis kept telling each other after that Sunday in early December. "Christmas is such a nightmare," they'd say, even though it wasn't when they were kids, even though all they got one year in his family up north, Henk told Mavis for the eleventy-seventh time, was an orange, just an orange. "And that was plain wonderful."

If that Michael Jackson guy proved one thing, Henk thought, it was that Jesus Christ wasn't wrong about money —it never really did a thing for happiness. And even though he and Mavis had far more than they could count or even spend, for that matter, even though any one of the kids could send their parents to the Riviera, according to their oldest child, Christmas was just such a nightmare.

"I'm not letting you anywhere near those beaches," Mavis told him one night when they were sitting home alone in the family room. "Only if you let me go topless too." "They got laws against that," Henk said, looking up from *The Banner*, over the top of his half-glasses. "Or I do."

Henk had started painting houses when he was 16, never finished high school. Soon enough he owned the company and hired six men. They worked all year long, interior and exterior. Things grew. And grew. A furniture business followed, then eight stores throughout four counties, and even some interior decorating, which Mavis, often enough, did herself in those early years, before they hired some prissy professional—and then fired her when Janice showed up and married Sam. Janice had the eye. And she was the only one of the girls who really showed much interest in the church.

Not that the others didn't go to church—off and on, at least. But Henk and Mavis had often told each other that their kids likely made a point of going to church because of their parents, because they were family and all, and, although no one would say it, they were scared stiff about being left out of the will.

"So what do I tell them, anyway?" Mavis said to him rather quickly, knowing that it wouldn't take long—*Banner* or not—before her husband began nodding off. "Today Deb called," she said. "What can we get the two of you for Christmas?'—same question as Ruth."

"They got too much money," Henk told her.

"Well, so do we," Mavis told him, "and what's worse, we gave it to 'em ourselves."

"They don't know what it's like to be poor—none of them," he said.

"Oh, get off your high horse," she said. "They're all good kids, all of them, and you love 'em too."

"Doesn't mean we didn't spoil 'em," Henk told her. » She didn't need to look at him because she knew very well where this conversation was going. They'd been there before, and besides, there was never all that much new under the sun when you get high into your 80s, she'd come to think. "So what do I tell 'em?" Mavis said again.

"Well, what do you want?" Henk said.

"What I want is for all of them—up and down the whole family, the whole shooting match—what I want is that each and every one of them loves the Lord," she said. "And so do you."

"We can't give them that," he said.

"They can, sure as anything, give it to us," she said.

"What are you thinking—thumbscrews? You can't wring blood out of a turnip," he told her.

"Not a one of 'em is a turnip," Mavis reminded him. "And we're not talking about blood either, except maybe the Lord's."

"The Lord's blood," Henk said, "has been given once and for all."

"Sometimes I wonder if I could still get you into seminary," Mavis told him.

"I'd get stumped by the Greek," he said. "We got to think some." He put down the magazine and sucked, noisily, at whatever little chunks of chicken were still jammed between his teeth. "Let 'em give it to charity—"

"Ten years already they've been doing that," Mavis told him. "Christmas is such a nightmare."

"No it i'n't," he said.

"Wasn't me that said it," Mavis said. "It was your firstborn. So what do you need, anyway?—what do I tell 'em when they ask? You got a half-dozen pairs of house slippers—which wouldn't be half bad if we still lived in North Dakota."

"How do we get them to give us what we really want?" he said. "That's the question." It was Mavis's idea, really, but as soon as she told her husband what she was thinking, he went for it.

For a moment, the two of them sat there, sounds of a men's quartet coming sweetly from the Bose on the shelf—"O Little Town of Bethlehem."

"Maybe we ought to just do it ourselves," Mavis told him.

Henk looked up at his wife. "You're not making sense, woman," he told her.

"Maybe—maybe not," Mavis said.

And that's how the plot was hatched.

It was Mavis's idea, really, but as soon as she told her husband what she was thinking, he went for it, as if the two were one flesh, which they were. Mostly.



Ever since he'd retired, his kids let him have an office in the original store, a little one, sort of out of the way, but at least a place for him to go to when he needed to, which was generally at least once a day, sometimes more, because he still liked to talk to customers when they came in, even if the sales itself he gave up long ago. The way he and Mavis had it figured, they'd need someone else to do the printing because both of them had handwriting their children knew better than their own, most people typing nowadays and writing almost nothing.

So he took the project to a secretary, whom he swore to secrecy. Henk had the feeling, when she'd finished, that she had absolutely no clue what was going on.

When he came home, Mavis had assembled a series of boxes, each a little larger than rest, like those little Russian dolls, one inside the next. The last one was big as a shoebox, one of Henk's too. When he was 70, Henk used to moan that an old man's ears—his were floppy as a mule deer's—like his feet, never stopped growing, even if almost everything else shrunk to miniscule. Well, except a prostate.

Mavis packed it all up sweetly, wrapped it like only women can, Henk told her, put a bow around it the old-fashioned way, curling the ribbon with scissors, then anointed it with the name tag the secretary had printed herself: "To Mom and Dad, from all of us."

Perfect, they thought. Just perfect.



A decade ago already, Ruth started having Christmas Eve over at her place because Mom and Dad's, she'd said, didn't hold all the kids anymore—grandkids and their spouses, and even great-grandkids, in fact. Ruth, whose Ben never really stopped working, had this big house down in the valley, a place almost without walls. It was so long and large you could have bowled in the living room. Henk and Mavis couldn't begin to guess where Ruth got their tree, so big it was a shame to cut it down.

And their present to themselves—and from their kids—wasn't hard to sneak in, either, because on Tuesdays, when Ruth was working at the store, Mavis went over there to cook supper. Not that she had to. Mavis just loved to cook. So two days before Christmas Eve, she simply took that shoebox over to her daughter's house, along with the salmon she was going to fix, and slipped that gift in with the other pretty ones, just one of several dozen beneath that huge pine.



Mavis is right—they're good kids, all of 'em. Not that they're not sinners, but then, as the psalmist says, who can stand before the throne of God? They show up for church, which is important, Henk and Mavis both say, but sometimes there's no lights on there, and there should be. They don't think like Christians in the business world, Henk had come to believe, despite the fact that they were taught not to leave their love for the Lord somewhere in the warehouse with the trade-in mattresses.

Ben works hard, not a lazy bone in his body, but sometimes he doesn't pay a dime's worth of attention to Ruth, who carries way too much of a load at home and always did. Deb and Reinder talk a lot about the Lord, but the others sometimes want to oust him from the business because dreamy Reinder has a habit of not showing up for work, then telling the rest of them that he was doing Habitat work, or buying hamburgers for the homeless.

Silent Sam isn't the brightest lamp in the showroom. What he really loves are his four-wheelers, and he wouldn't miss a race all summer long if Deb didn't make sure he showed up once in a while for church.

Tim and Sarah are the artists, too cool for their brothers and sisters, both of them sporting tattoos and an array of earrings you only see on pirates, Henk says.

Not a bum in the bunch, but Mavis and Henk just weren't sure any of them really loved the Lord, just weren't sure the message ever got through, and just weren't sure where in this life they'd gone wrong.

Their present came up when Cami, Deb's youngest, delivered the box to them, third round of presents, the whole ballroom littered with electronic gizmos and flat gift certificates or shiny debit cards. "Says it's for Grandpa and Grandma," she

"You think two old people have no more tricks up their sleeves?"

told them, when she handed it to Mavis. "Well, I'll be," Mavis said. "I wonder who this is from."

All eyes were on her. Henk didn't move his head, just his eyes to make sure he saw what was going on.

Mavis tugged on the ribbon ends she'd left accessible and untied the bow as if it had been dipped in gold. "What have we here?" she said.

Even Markie put down his giant Transformer—that's how quiet it became in Ruth's museum room with the vaulted ceiling. Maddie sat in her grandpa's lap with the cloth doll she'd got in the first round.

Mavis took off the paper, lifted the cover from the shoebox, and seemed

stunned to find another wrapped box inside. "Is this a joke?" she said. "Who is this from?"

The kids looked at each other sheepishly.

Mavis carefully unwrapped the second box, opened it, and acted totally shocked to find another. And another. And another. And another.

And all this time no one spoke. Henk kept watching his kids out of the corner of his eye because no one knew what was coming down the pike here, at the very soul of an annual exercise in which the women knew exactly what was in almost every last package. What was worse, of course, was that the drama was building because all of them must have wondered who on earth went way over the line and bought something the rest of them hadn't agreed upon ahead of time—and then kept it to themselves.

"I'm sorry to hold you up this way," Mavis told her kids and grandkids. "There's always another box."

And then she got to the last one, a small white square box that once held a pearl necklace. She opened it up to a piece of paper, neatly folded, then brought that paper up to her eyes, unfolding it slowly.

Even the dog was still.

She took her time, read through what the secretary had copied from Mavis's note, then dropped the paper suddenly and reached for her eyes, as if what she'd read had moved her very soul. "What can I say?" she asked. "What can I possibly say?"

"Read it," Henk told her. "It's for me too."

"I don't know that I can," she said. "I just can't begin to thank you all."

The kids looked quizzically at each other, eyes ablaze.

"It's just perfect," she said. "It's the best gift you could possibly give us."

"What does it say, woman?" Henk said. » Slowly, she brought the paper up to her eyes, looked all around the room appreciatively, her smile itself a blessing, then started in.

"Dear Mom and Dad"—and then she bit her lip, which Henk thought might have been a little too much.

"Christmas can be such a nightmare," she read, and then added, looking up, "Isn't that the truth though?" She grabbed Henk's glasses off his nose as if she couldn't read without them. "We never know quite what to get you," she read, "so with this note, we give you our love."

A little too mushy for their family, Henk thought, but he'd let her have her way, like he'd done plenty often in the past 60 years.

"But even more than that," Mavis read, "'we give you our pledge that no matter what happens in this life, we will always love the Lord."

There, that was it. Henk watched Mavis's eyes, clear like morning summer skies as she looked around the room, at each of her children, one at a time.

"From all of us—your children," she said, and put the paper down.

Perfect silence. Even the grandchildren didn't move.

"That's very nice," Henk said, "but I was thinking it would be that Caribbean cruise."

"You shush," Mavis told him. "We could not get a better present."

Still no one moved.

"There's nothing we can say," Mavis said, "—isn't that right, old man? This is just perfect."

In the room, even though there was all that wide-open space, you could feel fear and anger like a deep evening fog. Maybe it was going too far now, Henk thought. Maybe this would go somewhere they hadn't planned, and that wouldn't be good.

Maybe it was going too far now, Henk thought.

"Old man?" Mavis said again. "Isn't this just the best thing we could receive?"

Even Ruth had nothing to say. Deb's mouth stood open like a cave. Sweet Janice was almost in a swoon, and Sarah, tough-as-nails Sarah, the artist, looked mad—like the men. After all, who had the right to make them pledge to something they hadn't? Who had the guts to sign all their names on the dotted line?

"This is what we wanted," Mavis told them, breathing out something huge, as if all her trials were behind her. "This is exactly what we wanted for Christmas."

Sideways glances veered like bayonets.

"And that's exactly what we wanted to tell you," Henk said, because he just didn't know what was going to happen.

But no one understood.

He held his darling granddaughter in his lap. "When you asked, 'What is it you want for Christmas, Mom and Dad?' when you asked us that question, we got to thinking that there was nothing our children could give us, nothing at all. Nothing we want or need, but this: a testimony that always in this world—no matter how much money you have always in this world, our Lord and Savior comes first in your lives."

No one spoke, until finally, it was Timothy, the youngest, the artist. "You mean you two pulled this whole thing off yourselves?" he said.

"Sarah had a baby at 90," Henk said. "Read it yourself in the Bible. You think two old people have no more tricks up their sleeves?"

"I don't know what to say," Ruth muttered.

"It's not something we're asking you to say," Mavis told her, told them all. "You asked the question, and we gave you the answer—this is what we want for Christmas, for every Christmas, even this one, which may be our last."

It was clear none of them knew what to say. What they'd got from their parents was the answer to the question, something each of them already knew.

Little Cami got up and went for the tree because it was time for another present.

"Wait, wait," sweet Janice said. "I think we ought to pray. I just think we ought to pray and praise the Lord."

Henk wasn't so sure, but then, he told himself, there are a lot of things that happen in life you just have to take, so he was the one who said, "The Doxology." So they sang. Later, Mavis told him he should have picked out a carol.

And then there were more presents. And then apple dumplings with lots of caramel, which some of them shouldn't have had, Mavis thought. But you only get Christmas once a year, after all, she thought, and really, the whole season can be such a nightmare, if you let it.

And it shouldn't be. No, no, she thought, it shouldn't be.

When it was all over and that great room a royal mess, Reinder the Dreamer pulled out some mistletoe and hung it over their heads—Henk and Mavis, who thrilled everyone, even the little kids, with a big fat wet kiss for Christmas.

And it wasn't a nightmare at all, Henk thought. Not at all.



Dr. James C. Schaap teaches literature and writing at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa, and is an award-winning author. His

collection of Psalm meditations, *Sixty at Sixty*, is available from Faith Alive Christian Resources (800.333.8300; faithaliveresources.org).

Two Little Girls

YEAR OR TWO AGO, in late autumn, an advertisement appeared on one side of a double billboard near my home. It pictured a young girl wrinkling her nose in protest against a pinkish food on her family's Thanksgiving table. I don't recall what was being promoted, but the girl was cute and the ad worth a chuckle.

Around Christmas, though, I was taken aback by a new ad, also featuring a little girl, on the adjoining billboard. This waif trudged along a windswept sidewalk, her hand clasped in that of a mostly unseen guardian. I remember precisely what was being advertised: Mel Trotter Ministries, which runs a shelter in downtown Grand Rapids, Mich., for people who are homeless.

The hapless youngster on the second billboard was in every way the foil of her unintended counterpart on the first. The satiny dress of one gave way to the other's grimy overalls. Both faces were unhappy, but the second girl's was dirty and pinched rather than peeved. She was making a heart-wrenching appeal: "Please pick me up."

The first child in this ironic juxtaposition suddenly came to symbolize for me the "enemy" that all too often is us. She became the unwitting representative of all in our culture that is selfish, pampered, demanding, and complacent.

Parents deal with the pressures of materialism all the time, especially in today's economic climate. The lifestyle limitations imposed on us by the loss of a job, divorce, or the death of a spouse may affect our children acutely. But excessive sacrifices to shield children from a decline in social status may be ill-advised. Sure, some concessions to style and selective attention to fads make sense, but trying on our kids' behalf to keep up with the little Joneses at school will yield disappointing results in terms of our children's character development and ability to find lasting satisfaction in life. Name-brand clothing, expensive extracurricular activities, and electronic gadgetry may, in the long run, be "casualties" worth losing. comply. If you've never noticed Deuteronomy 33:12, take a moment to let its words sink in: "The one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders." Wow! We do well to make sure our kids know this aspect of their heritage.

But there are also times when the message flows in the other direction. Maybe you, like me, have learned a thing or two from your child.

Maybe you, like me, have learned a thing or two from your child.

Kids are resilient, and we may easily underestimate their capacity to come to terms with financial reversals. When one of my three adopted daughters was 7, she demonstrated precocious (and precious) insight. Reflecting on her move to my home from an earlier family due to a disrupted adoption, she announced, "This is a littler house than I'm used to, but it's more important to be loved."

The opportunity for spiritual gain in conjunction with material decline may be a bonus our families might never experience unless we're forced to scale back. God, who delights in irony, regularly camouflages blessing within adversity on our behalf. The testimonies of two seasoned saints, as expressed in Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28, bear this out in unforgettable language.

Each of us is invited, like the little girl on that second billboard, to ask with childlike trust for God to pick us up and carry us along, knowing he'll readily Years ago, my then-3-year-old grandson, straining to see our pastor in his vestments, pleaded, "Please pick me up. I can't see God." What more eloquent statement of our number-one priority as Christian parents! Let's be open to the possibility of God buoying *us* up through our kids' insights.

Yes, children can reflect back to us the shortcomings of our me-first, materialistic culture and lifestyle. But if we're truly willing to listen, they can also touch our hearts with long-forgotten wisdom.



Donna Huisjen is a freelance editor and the single adoptive mother of three grown daughters. She attends Woodlawn Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Ministry Shares: How a Little Church Does Big Things

e all face tough questions about our charitable giving. Which of the many worthy causes clamoring for our attention will I choose to support? How much can I afford to give? Will my gift be used well? Will it help to transform lives and communities? I can't give to everything—what will happen to the programs if I can't support them?

In tough financial times, these questions are even harder to answer.

That's one reason why the Christian Reformed Church in North America has a system called ministry shares. Although the income from ministry shares accounts for less than half of the CRC's overall ministry budget, it allows for churches to be planted, missionaries to bring the good news, and scores of projects to build God's kingdom, even when times are tight.

Ministry shares also give each and every adult member of the CRC a stake in the ministries that belong to their church. Here's how the ministry share program works: each congregation is asked to contribute a certain amount on behalf of each active, adult member toward these shared denominational ministries. All CRC agencies except the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) receive a portion of their annual budgets from ministry shares.

These dollars go a long way.

They help missionaries to start libraries in Russia and to speak softly to Muslims about Jesus Christ. They help the church begin new and innovative places of worship all over North America and to train leaders for those congregations. They support a program that helps to break down racial barriers. They allow media ministers to reach across borders and share the good news with millions who otherwise might never hear.

They help provide a Reformed Christian education to college and seminary students. They help fund the development of curriculum and other resources that help thousands of children, teens, and



adults come to know God and serve their neighbors. They help pay the salaries of the men and women who work in the background, making sure that ministry remains always first for the church. They help fund a ministry whose focus is to keep our churches safe from abuse. They pay for the office that dedicates itself to

Ministry shares give every member a stake in the CRC's ministries.

making sure that everyone, regardless of their disabilities, has a proper place at God's table.

"This is an effective and efficient way for us to do ministry," says John Bolt, director of finance and administration for the CRC. "We tell churches that there are suggested levels of ministry share contributions. If you feel financially blessed, you can give more. But if you are having money difficulties, you can pay less."

To learn more about ministry shares and what they do, go to *www.crcna.org* and click on "Ministry Shares" under "Donate." You will find a variety of useful resources, including an entertaining and informative short video that answers many of the questions people have about ministry shares.

-CRC Communications

"We Owe Our Existence to Ministry Shares"

s soon as he had the chance, church planter Chris Mitchell started to tell the people in his fledgling congregation about the Christian Reformed Church's system of raising funds through ministry shares.

That seemed a little ironic, because when Mitchell and his wife, Cindi, started the New England Chapel in a rented office space with support from Christian Reformed Home Missions, their goal was to plant a church free from the trappings of a traditional CRC congregation.

A graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary, Mitchell's focus was to reach people who had given up on religion, yet were still seeking God. His outreach touched a chord, and people began to join this community that accepted everyone, regardless of their questions or doubts.

Given his relatively free-wheeling approach in planting the church in a western suburb of Boston, Mass., you might think that Mitchell wouldn't want to talk about ministry shares—a program that some in the CRC regard as a sort of "denominational tax."

But Mitchell, who was raised in the Boston area and had little interest in religion when he was growing up, is a fan of the ministry-shares system.

"The first few years of building our church would have been impossible" without the subsidy they received via ministry shares, Mitchell says. "The truth is we owe our existence to ministry shares."

New England Chapel now meets in a refurbished warehouse and attracts about 1,000 worshipers each weekend.

"Our leadership decided, even as we were still receiving ministry shares, to have the vision of our church [contributing to] ministry shares," he says. "We saw this as a way of giving back . . . to help



other church plants and to give back to the denomination that has supported us."

At first it was difficult to explain the ministry-shares concept to people, Mitchell says. Most church members had little idea about how denominations operate or how the CRC's wide range of shared ministries are funded. "We had to discuss and describe this whole process and how it works," he says.

The ministry-shares program raises about \$25 million a year to help support CRC ministries in North America and around the world. Congregations are asked to contribute to ministry shares based on the number of active adult members on their rolls.

A key attribute of the program is that there is almost no overhead cost. To raise the same amount of money through fund-raising campaigns would require spending several million dollars a year money that, thanks to ministry shares, the CRC can spend on ministry programs instead. Mitchell's church was already growing prior to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. When the attacks happened, New England Chapel threw open its doors for anyone interested in gathering and praying. Many people came for prayer and comfort—and many of them stayed.

New England Chapel describes itself as "a place where the music and messages speak to your real life. It is a place to belong and share and serve the community. It is a place to find God in our own time, at your own pace—all without pressure and judgment, but with hope and patience."

Mitchell says he is very grateful for the vision for ministry that he learned while attending Calvin Theological Seminary. He also went to school at the University of Rhode Island and earned a degree in theology from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass.

Although he supports ministry shares, Mitchell says the system may need to be adjusted to accommodate changing definitions of church membership. These days, not everyone who attends a church becomes an official member, he notes. "The whole idea of membership is confusing at best. Overall, though, [ministry shares] is an important way of giving."



Chris Meehan is news and media relations director for the CRC.

CHURCH Back to God

2009 ANNUAL MINISTRY REPORT

Back to God Ministries International

ack to God Ministries International is the media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church. Using tools that effectively reach into diverse cultures and societies, BTGMI seeks to evangelize and disciple, transforming lives and communities by the power of God's Word and

Quick Facts

Spirit.

BTGMI program initiatives include

- 49 audio programs airing on more than 1,770 radio stations and delivered by Internet, CD, and cell phone.
- 10 video programs airing on more than 128 TV stations and delivered by Internet or DVD.
- 28 websites providing evangelism and discipleship resources.
- daily devotionals offered via telephone that receive millions of calls yearly.
- distribution of devotionals and other written literature, including more than 3.9 million devotional booklets in six languages distributed annually.
- 23 international centers where those who respond to BTGMI media can receive further spiritual direction, plus more than 38 centers where volunteers provide follow-up.
- Bible study correspondence courses in six languages.
- children's ministries in seven languages.

BTGMI's 10 unique language ministries use radio,

television, Internet,

phone, and print media to reach people in major cities and remote villages around the world. Each year, BTGMI touches the lives of people in more than 200 countries.

New Outreach in India

For the first time BTGMI will broadcast in India's major language, Hindi, and other local languages. In collaboration with Words of Hope, the media ministry of the Reformed Church in America; and Good Books Ministries in northern India, we have the opportunity to reach an estimated 400 million Hindi-speaking people. This also opens doors for producing broadcasts that reach people in neighboring countries.

What Else Is New?

In order to increase leadership training for communities of faith that form in response to this media work, BTGMI has entered into partnership with the Timothy Institute of Calvin Theological Seminary. This partnership is already at work in Indonesia among the 121 Listener Communities established over the past three



years. BTGMI also works in partnership with Christian Reformed World Missions and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) for advanced evangelistic and diaconal training in Indonesia.

In the Middle East there is a new openness to the gospel. There has been a significant increase in visits to our Arabic website and downloads of the Bible and other discipleship materials. Text messaging provides a secure way for listeners to ask questions about the Christian faith.

In China, partners are opening doors for the duplication and distribution of much-needed discipleship materials.



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Calvin College

n 2009 Calvin College celebrated the conclusion of a capital campaign that raised \$155 million, including almost \$45 million for student scholarships, financial aid, and faculty research.

Calvin president Gaylen Byker said, "It was humbling to end a long fundraising effort knowing that Calvin alumni and friends believe in the institution enough to support it so fully, not only with financial gifts but also with gifts of time, talents, and prayers.

"Throughout the campaign I attended numerous events at locations across North America," Byker added. "At each stop I talked with our supporters about the many ways in which Calvin equips young women and men to be agents of

Quick Facts

- Founded in 1876 as a school for CRC ministerial students with one teacher and seven students
- 100 academic majors and minors, with everything from accounting to youth ministry leadership
- 4,100 students from 48 states, seven Canadian provinces, and more than 50 countries, who join 400 faculty members on the 400-acre Calvin campus
- About 900 graduates annually who serve in a variety of places around the world and join the 60,000 members of the Calvin Alumni Association
- 2009-2010 tuition of \$23,810 with 92 percent of all students receiving financial aid (average need-based award at Calvin is \$16,000 per year)
- Some 60 percent of all Calvin students receive academic scholarships.
- Ministry shares provide grants for CRC students, who make up around 50 percent of the Calvin student body.
- Semester-long off-campus study programs in 12 locations such as China, Ghana, Hungary, Spain, and more.



renewal in God's world.... We celebrated what Calvin alumni do around the world, and heard from our graduates about how God works in their lives as they seek to make a difference in his kingdom."

Calvin also celebrated another milestone in 2009: the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin. It was an opportunity for the campus community to have some fun (the celebration included a humorous video, birthday cake and punch, and even some singing) and to reflect on how the 16th-century Reformer's life and legacy lives on at Calvin College.

Today, 500 years after John Calvin's birth and 133 years after Calvin College was founded as a place to train future ministers, Calvin continues to offer a solidly Christian education, rooted in the Reformed faith—an education that allows students to explore more than 100 academic options on the 400-acre campus in Grand Rapids, Mich., and at numerous locales around the globe through the school's robust off-campus programs.

Please keep Calvin in your prayers as it continues to work at educating young men and women for service in God's world.



Contact info: Website: *www.calvin.edu* 616.526.6000 or 800.688.0122



CHURCHAT 2009 ANNUAL MINISTRY REPORT



Seminarians Joseph Hwang, Kyle Kloostra, and Thyra Van Keeken begin a new school year.

Quick Facts

- About 300 students attend CTS, representing more than 40 different denominations around the world.
- The Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree is a three-year program that prepares people for ordained ministry as pastors.
- The Master of Arts (M.A.) degrees in educational ministries, evangelism and missions, church planting, pastoral care, worship, or youth and family ministries are two-year programs for people who desire specialized training for service as a church staff person or ministry associate.
- The Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in Bible and theology is a one-year program for persons with sufficient college Bible and theology courses.
- Master (M.T.S. and Th.M.) and doctoral (Ph.D.) degree programs are for those interested in teaching Bible and theology.
- CTS offers advanced-standing opportunities to incoming students with Bible and theology degrees.
- CTS is a leading seminary in the innovative use of technology in biblical studies courses.

Calvin Theological Seminary

alvin Theological Seminary (CTS) seeks to "prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13).

CTS is committed to formation for ministry: developing character, knowledge, and skills in the context of Christian community.

What's New

Calvin Theological Seminary's new Master of Divinity curriculum was launched this fall. It retains the strengths of a classical theological education while placing renewed emphasis on preaching, spiritual formation, contextualized ministry, and congregational leadership.

CTS is grateful for strong enrollment this year. There were 82 new students in all degree programs—up 34 percent from last year—including 38 new M.Div. students (a 36-percent increase) and 23 new Th.M. students (a 53-percent increase).

In the summer of 2009, students served in a variety of internships in places from Brazil, Egypt, and Uganda to Alaska, New Jersey, and California. They served in organizations ranging from prison and national park ministries to hospital chaplaincies, as well as in 40 congregations.

CTS is offering new certificate programs for church members and staff desiring specialized training but not degree programs. Certificates are available in church planting, educational ministries, English Bible, ministry, missions and evangelism, pastoral care, theology, worship, and youth ministry.

A decline in ministry shares resulted in sharp budget cuts at the seminary this year, including staff and faculty reductions as well as cuts in faculty and staff compensation. The seminary appreciates and depends on the denomination's ongoing support.

The seminary is grateful for a 25 percent increase in annual fund gifts in fiscal year 2009 compared to fiscal year 2008, and a 39 percent increase in the *number* of gifts to the annual fund in 2009, thanks to a matching gift challenge.

Through its Center for Excellence in Preaching, CTS received a major gift for promoting good skills in written expression and oral delivery. A new Rhetoric Center is open and other related programs are available to students.

CTS was saddened by the death of one of our trustees, Rev. Andrew Chun, in July. We express our heartfelt sympathy to his wife and young children.



Contact info: Website: *www.calvinseminary.edu* 800.388.6034 or 616.957.6036



Christian Reformed Home Missions

hristian Reformed Home Missions participates in God's redemptive mission by cultivating gospel movements across North America through partnerships with leaders, churches, ministries, classes, and other CRC agencies.

Working in regional teams, Home Missions staff focus on multiplying new churches and campus ministries, cultivating diverse missional leaders, and partnering with churches in a shared mission of renewal. We help people to clearly speak and live out the good news of Christ changing lives, healing communities, and renewing culture by God's Spirit.

What's New

More than 20 new churches were started through Home Missions partnerships during the year. One of these new ministries, Agua Vida, ministers to Hispanic migrant workers who labor on dairy farms in DeMotte, Ind. The church attracts more than 50 migrant workers and their families to weekly worship services.

Although it officially launched in 2008, MosaicHouse Community Church in Edmonton, Alberta, made great strides in 2009. What began as an attempt to reach out to this ethnically diverse Canadian city has turned into regular worship services that attract Chinese, East Indian, Venezuelan, Costa Rican, and Korean American people. The church also features an active, growing network of small groups.

Home Missions' campus ministers used creative approaches to introduce students to the gospel this past year. For example, the campus ministry at William Paterson University in Paterson, N.J., launched an outreach program called "Garbage Evangelism." Students go into residence halls, knock on doors, offer to take out garbage, and invite people to share prayer requests. The program has helped bring students to Christ.



Pastor Steve Wolma of City Grace Church in New York City baptizes a new member.

Home Missions also provided coaching and training for pastors, church leaders, and prayer leaders in existing congregations. For instance, the Home

Quick Facts

- Home Missions funds 176 ministries in the United States and Canada.
- 101 new churches currently receive financial assistance from Home Missions, with more in the early planning stages.
- More than 500 Christian Reformed churches and nearly 400 congregations from other denominations are active in small groups ministry, thanks to programs and resources made available through Home Missions.
- 22 educational ministries (20 campuses and two New Mexico schools) receive Home Missions support.
- 13 Leadership Development Networks are training evangelists in English-, Korean-, and Spanish-speaking communities.
- Home Missions provides training for classis prayer coordinators.

Missions Great Lakes Ministry Team was involved in coaching clusters of pastors and other staff leaders, as well as coaching individual pastors and consulting with congregational vision teams.

Home Missions is thankful to Christian Reformed churches and members for your prayers and generous financial support.



Contact info:

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Christian Reformed World Missions

hristian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) is charged with taking the transformational power of the gospel to people around the globe. World Missions partners with the church to respond obediently to our Lord's commission to witness to the good news of God's kingdom and to make disciples of all nations.

World Missions challenges CRC congregations to vigorously participate in mission with churches and other Chris-

Quick Facts

- World Missions has more than 200 missionaries serving in over 20 countries around the world.
- The Spirit has moved more than 9,000 people to commit their lives to Christ this year through the work of World Missions missionaries and partners.
- Nearly 50 new worshiping communities were established in the past year.
- 15 new missionaries received training during July 2009 to serve in countries such as Nigeria, Honduras, Uganda, and Nicaragua.
- 13 young adults served in four countries around the world as part of our Summer Mission Program.
- World Missions continues to partner with Calvin Theological Seminary to provide crosscultural internships for seminary students.
- 85 teachers and administrators serve in international schools through World Missions.

tian organizations throughout the world.

Evangelism

In Sierra Leone, a country ravaged by an 11-year civil war, CRWM-supported missionary Rev. John Phiri of the Reformed Church in Zambia is partnering with the Christian Reformed Church in Sierra Leone to reach out to people hungry for the hope found in Christ. Over the past three years, the CRC in Sierra Leone has at least tripled in size.

Christian Education

World Missions continues to promote Christian education around the world. This year, almost 70 people are serving as partner teachers in international Christian and secular schools. A new training program promotes teaching and learning from a Christian worldview by equipping Christian educators who have few resources and little formal training.

Leadership Training

World Missions works with partner orga-

nizations to train and equip national leaders for service in their communities. Increasingly, Timothy Leadership Training (TLT) is being used from Bangladesh to Haiti as a practical, affordable, hands-on approach for training

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people in a biblical worldview of leadership. Along with TLT, CRWM missionaries teach in seminaries, developing and encouraging future church leaders so they can teach others.

Special Projects: Hope Equals

In January 2010, World Missions will launch a youth project, Hope Equals, as a way to encourage Christian college-age youths to become actively involved in a peaceful, just, and mutually respectful resolution to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Together with Palestinian and Israeli organizations and individuals committed to peacemaking, CRWM will begin a process of discussion and discovery to help build hope in the Middle East.

Missions Education and Engagement

The Missions Education and Engagement Team (MEET) of World Missions walks alongside local congregations to enhance their vision for global outreach. CRWM wants to see local congregations actively engaged in global ministry. Through tailored resources, training, and consultation, MEET staff assist local leaders in stimulating a deeper vision for and involvement in missions.

Contact info:

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CRWRC

he Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) responds on your behalf to poverty, hunger, disasters, and injustice around the world. It also provides you with volunteer opportunities, advocacy ideas, and educational materials about poverty and justice.

What's New

"As much of the world continues to suffer through economic recession, there are many areas that have also had to recover from catastrophic natural disasters," said Bill Adams, CRWRC's Disaster Response Services director, about the difficult past year.

As job losses, budget cuts, and home foreclosures impacted many church members in North America, disasters, AIDS, and skyrocketing food prices placed extra burdens on families around the world. The church rose to the challenge.

Because of faithful donors and volunteers, CRWRC was able to maintain its ministry of help in responding to Hurricane Ike in east Texas, severe flooding in central Alaska, and flooding throughout the Midwest, while also continuing to assist communities that are recovering from the hurricanes of 2005, said Adams.

Internationally, CRWRC wrapped up five years of relief and rehabilitation in tsunami-affected communities in Asia and began a new rehabilitation project in southern Sudan. In total, CRWRC responded to war, drought, and disaster in 33 countries and provided emergency assistance to more than 800,000 people. At the same time, CRWRC continued its long-term work with leaders from 3,853 communities, helping people to identify needs and carry out programs to improve health, increase literacy, create new jobs, and improve society. This helped almost 600,000 people to improve their lives and communities in lasting ways. These programs were primarily carried out alongside local churches and Christian organizations.

The witness to Christ's love was strengthened even as the world reeled from recession. "CRWRC has been blessed by the amount of ministry we were able to do last year," said Ida Kaastra Mutoigo, CRWRC-Canada director. "The willingness of church members to give sacrificially during tough economic times so that others can be helped is what Christian love is all about. We're humbled to have been a part of it and amazed by God's grace as communities and lives are changed."

CRWRC receives no ministry shares. To learn how you can get involved, please visit *www.crwrc. org.*



In response to severe drought, CRWRC provided food to 69,000 people in Kenya, thanks in part to its membership in the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.



Contact info:

Website: www.crwrc.org United States: 800.55.CRWRC or 616.224.0740 Canada: 800.730.3490 or 905.336.2920 E-mail: crwrc@crcna.org

Quick Facts

- Last year, CRWRC served in 44 countries, responding to disaster and providing long-term community programs.
- In total, CRWRC's programs helped 1,398,744 people.
- CRWRC's ministry was supported by 3,594 volunteers.
- CRWRC's Embrace AIDS campaign reached \$3 million last year, making new and expanded AIDS programs possible in 19 countries.



CHURCHAT 2009 ANNUAL MINISTRY REPORT

Faith Alive Christian Resources

aith Alive is the publishing ministry of the Christian Reformed Church and the resource provider of the Reformed Church in America. We arecommitted to enabling vibrant relationships between individuals, churches, communities, and the God who created them all.

We offer curriculum for preschoolers through adults, as well as resources for youth groups, small groups, people with special needs, worship planners, and church leaders.

What's New

Mark Rice was appointed as the new director of Faith Alive late in 2008. "This is an exciting time for denominational publishing," Rice says. "The need has never been greater for distinctly Reformed, high-quality, creative content that meets people's needs and glorifies God."

Feedback on our *Walk With Me* and *Kid Connection* curricula for children continues to be positive. One church wrote us, "The kids are telling their parents that they do not want to miss class!" We consider that high praise.

Planning is in full swing for a new intergenerational "curriculum" scheduled for release in 2012. This program will lead congregations—from Sunday school children to adults—through the entire Bible each year. Stay tuned as details of this exciting new venture unfold.

Work is also continuing on a new Bible study series called *Infuse*, the first installment of which will be available early in 2010.

The Banner is exploring ways to expand its online presence to offer readers additional content and spark interaction, while retaining its commitment to excellent content in print.

This year's training opportunities included the GROW conference for Sunday school leaders and a number of webinars on topics such as autism and children's ministry.

In our Worship and Music office, preparations continue for a bi-denominational hymnal to be shared with the Reformed Church in America.

Under the leadership of strategic developer Jan Dykman, World Literature Ministries is seeing dramatic results from increased marketing efforts.

Faith Alive is grateful for our faithful customers and for the ministry share support we receive from Christian Reformed church members. It's a privilege and a blessing to partner with you all!



Contact info: 800.333.8300

www.FaithAliveResources.org www.TheBanner.org www.ReformedWorship.org www.LibrosDesafio.org

New Releases



God Wins: an 8-session study on the book of Revelation. Includes DVD segments by Rev. Lew Vander Meer.







Pursued by God: a biography of John Calvin to celebrate his 500th birthday.



The Elder's Handbook and The Deacon's Handbook: resource guides for those who serve on council



Contemporary Songs for Worship: a new collection of 37 contemporary arrangements for congregational singing



Denominational Services & Specialized Ministries

enominational Services oversees the work of Christian Reformed Church agencies and specialized ministries and provides funds for synodical expenses and offices, the Board of Trustees, and general administration.

Specialized Ministries serve the church by initiating, designing, and implementing ministry programs in the areas of Safe Church Ministry (formerly Abuse Prevention), Urban Aboriginal Ministries, the Committee for Contact with the Government (Canada), Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, Disability Concerns, Pastor-Church Relations, Race Relations, and Social Justice.



Safe Church Ministry

afe Church Ministry is the new name for the Office of Abuse Prevention. The mission remains the same: to create awareness of various forms of abuse against persons of all ages, to help churches reduce the risk of an incidence of abuse, and to help churches promote healing and restoration through a just and effective response to victims and offenders.

The emphasis of Safe Church Ministry is to support churches in developing and maintaining healthy interactions between adults and youths and between adults and other adults in the context of church programs and ministry. We offer educa-

Quick Facts

- To date, 584 Christian Reformed churches report implementing a child safety policy.
- Classis Central Plains became the newest classis to form a Safe Church Team.

tion, training, resources, policies, protocols, and consultation services.

In addition, we train Classis Safe Church Teams to conduct the advisory panel process. We encourage these teams to help churches with educational opportunities; to provide support services to victims, offenders, and their families; and to act as advocates for the advisory panel process.

What's New

Safe Church Ministry redesigned its website to showcase new and additional resources. New features to be added include a DVD for training volunteers, a PowerPoint presentation on bullying, and a devotional page.

Each year, on the last Sunday in September, churches have an opportunity to learn more about a certain aspect of abuse. This year, churches could, by ordering bulletin inserts, learn about elder abuse and the path to healing. Four bulletin inserts are available in a series intended to create awareness of abuse. In addition, small-fee booklets and no-fee booklets are available on the Safe Church Ministry and Faith Alive websites. Classis Safe Church Team advocates met this year to learn how to assist an individual who brings forward an allegation of abuse to an advisory panel. Team chairpersons met again this fall. They learned more about restorative justice and shared best practices on conducting an advisory panel.

Faith Alive released a revised edition of *Preventing Child Abuse: Creating a Safe Place.* The book contains the denomination's policy on child abuse and many new appendices on topics such as sexual harassment, bullying, and integrating a sexual offender into the church. The revised edition also includes a broader array of policies for the benefit of nonprofit organizations that serve the needs of youths.



Contact info: Website: www.crcna.org/safechurch Beth A. Swagman, director 616.224.0735 E-mail: bswagman@crcna.org

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Pastor-Church Relations

astor-Church Relations (PCR) serves pastors, staff, church councils, and congregations of the Christian Reformed Church by promoting healthy relationships that support the effectiveness of congregational ministries.

Quick Facts

- Working under the auspices of PCR, the Staff Ministry Committee has developed a credentialing process for congregational ministry staff that is currently in a pilot stage.
- Educational events are often requested by churches during times of low-level conflict.
- The staff of PCR, in conjunction with a pastors' peer group, is writing a manual for the effective evaluations of pastors and church staff.

Although each response to individuals or groups is customized to the specifics of the situation, some types of responses are relatively common. One such response is an educational response. Congregations, councils, pastors, staff, or combinations thereof frequently ask PCR to help facilitate educational experiences.

Educational offerings include helping to build a team, having difficult conversations, or linking the work of the group to the gospel narrative and the narratives of our lives. PCR also offers seminars on positive responses to conflict.

In addition, PCR provides intervention assistance for congregations when conflict interferes with ministry. This is done either directly with onsite visits from PCR staff or indirectly through consultation with classical church visitors or other regional resources. Many of these interventions are also conducted or supported through phone or e-mail interaction.

What's New

There have been significant changes in staff. In January, Rev. Norm Thomasma was appointed as the new director of PCR. In March, Rev. Cecil VanNiejenhuis began working as a pastor/congregation consultant. Thomasma continues to work out of the Grand Rapids office, and Van-Niejenhuis is based in Edmonton, Alberta.



Contact info:

Website: www.crcna.org Norm Thomasma, director 616.224.0764 E-mail: nthomasma@crcna.org

Jeanne Kallemeyn, staff ministry specialist 616.726.1152 Email: *jkallemeyn@crcna.org*

Laura Palsrok, ministerial information service coordinator/administrative assistant 616.224.0837 Email: *lpalsrok@crcna.org*

Cecil VanNiejenhuis, pastor/ congregation consultant 616.224.0746 E-mail: cvanniejenhuis@crcna.org

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

haplaincy and Care Ministry is the office that develops and promotes the ministry of chaplains and ministries of care with Christian Reformed pastors, congregations, and other CRCNA agencies and ministries.

What's New

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry changed its name from Chaplaincy Ministries to underscore the vital importance of the caring ministry of the entire body of Christ. When hired, the new director of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry will work with chaplains, churches, and denominational ministries.

Chaplains bring the love of Christ into a variety of settings, including

the workplace, hospitals, hospice, the military, and extended care facilities. They need the support and prayers you offer on their behalf individually and in your congregations. Pray that our chaplains and the members of your own congregation may be faithful in loving a broken world in need of God's shalom.



Contact info:

Website: www.crcna.org/chaplaincy Rev. Mark Stephenson, interim director 616.224.0733 or 224.0844 E-mail: chaplain@crcna.org

Quick Facts

- Because chaplains are paid by the institutions for which they work, every dollar invested in chaplaincy and care ministry through donations and ministry shares yields about 35 dollars in ministry by chaplains.
- The CRC has 117 chaplains: 96 full-time, of which 18 are full-time military; and 21 part-time, of which five are in the National Guard and Military Reserve.
- Currently 24 students are in training for chaplaincy.
- Rev. Mark Stephenson serves as the interim director of the Chaplaincy and Care Ministry as well as the director of Disability Concerns. Rev. Herm Keizer continues to do chaplain endorsements.
Canadian Ministries

Sometimes things that begin with the best of intentions can go terribly wrong. In Canada we see this in the residential school issue. Decades ago, aboriginal children were removed from their families and communities and placed in residential schools. The intent was that the kids would get a good education and be prepared to fit into Canadian society.

Tragically, these schools became places of sexual, physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse for many. Aboriginal culture was deemed inferior, so attempts were made to remove it from students' hearts and minds. Graduates emerged confused and wounded.

Most of the residential schools were run by Christian denominations. These churches are now apologizing and seeking to make amends. May there be true reconciliation and deep healing. The Urban Aboriginal Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church seek to contribute to this healing and reconciliation. With hospitality, spiritual guidance, and encouragement, we model how the gospel and culture can be sensitively contextualized.

In the name of Christ we seek a better tomorrow.



Contact info: Website: www.crcna.org/canadianministry Rev. Bruce Adema, director 905.336.2920 or 800.730.3490 E-mail: bruceadema@crcna.org

Quick Facts

- The CRC's Urban Aboriginal Ministry centers are in Winnipeg, Manitoba; Regina, Saskatchewan; and Edmonton, Alberta.
- The Canadian ministry staff is looking at other places in Canada where such ministries could be of benefit.
- The Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG) has made justice for aboriginal people a major part of its study and advocacy ministry.

Quick Facts

- More than 550 disability advocates help Christian Reformed churches across the continent.
- We offer free bulk subscriptions to our newsletter, *Breaking Barriers*, which resources congregations for ministry with people with disabilities. Also available in Spanish on our website.
- About 17 percent of people in the U.S. and Canada live with one or more disabilities.
- If this statistic holds true in your church, 17 people in every 100 live with a disabling condition.
- Our website features many resources for worship and for developing inclusive ministries.

Disability Concerns

isability Concerns helps churches to flourish by including people with disabilities in every aspect of congregational life. In healthy churches, everybody belongs and everybody serves.

What's New

Handbook for Disability Advocates. Recently we completed a handbook for inclusion of people with disabilities in congregational life. Many congregations want to welcome and enfold people with disabilities, but don't know how. This free handbook, available on our website for download, helps churches build a framework for inclusion and offers specific ideas for including people living with a variety of impairments such as autism, hearing loss, and dementia. Though it is written for church advocates, any church leader will find the ideas in the handbook helpful.

A Compassionate Journey: Coming Alongside People with Disabilities or Chronic Illnesses by John Cook. Most congregations do well at caring for people with shortterm (one month or less) crises, but have trouble knowing how to help people who don't "get better." This book enables church leaders and members to care more effectively for individuals with long-term needs.



Contact info: Website: www.crcna.org/ disability Rev. Mark Stephenson, director 888.463.0272 E-mail: disabilityconcerns@crcna.org

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Race Relations

ace Relations is a ministry by which the Christian Reformed Church provides leadership and assistance to the denomination, congregations, and members of the CRC in working to eliminate racism and its effects within the body of Christ and throughout the world. We also seek to celebrate our diversity as a denomination.

Race Relations uses four ministry tools in its work: All Nations Heritage Week celebration services, the Dance of Racial Reconciliation (DORR) and Widening the Circle (WTC) workshops, the Multiethnic Conference, and Race Relations scholarships for college and seminary students.

What's New

The Office of Race Relations awards annual scholarships to applicants attending Reformed institutions of higher education. This year, \$9,000 was awarded to nine students from Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, Dordt College, Kuyper College, Trinity Christian College, and Redeemer University College. Funding for the scholarships comes from

Quick Facts

- A youth version of the DORR curriculum is now available.
- We are currently planning to develop a curriculum for DORR Level 2 by the end of 2009.
- The Multiethnic Conference, held on the campus of Trinity Christian College in June 2009, was a success.

offerings received during All Nations Heritage Sunday celebration services that are designated to support the work of Race Relations.

Most CRCNA staff working at the CRC's Grand Rapids, Mich.; Burlington, Ontario; and BTGMI campuses

have now taken the DORR and/or WTC anti-racism workshops. In April 2009, we took the DORR workshop to Nicaragua for the World Missions and CRWRC missionaries in that area. We will continue to offer the workshops for CRCNA employees as well as for any churches or institutions who request them.



Contact info:

Website: www.crcna.org/race Rev. Esteban Lugo, director 877.864.3977 or 616.224.5883 E-mail: elugo@crcna.org Steve Kabetu, coordinator (Canada) 800.730.3490 or 905.336.2920 E-mail: *skabetu@crcna.org*

Office of Social Justice

he Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJ) responds to God's call to let justice flow like a river in our personal and communal lives, especially as it relates to hunger and poverty. We educate CRC members, encourage and support their engagement in social justice issues, and occasionally are involved in direct advocacy.

What's New

The Office of Social Justice has lots of new ways to stay connected. Our latest newsletter, "OSJ Prayers," is a weekly digest of the most pressing justice issues around the world for use in small groups or personal prayer.

For a comprehensive over-

view of various social-justice issues, turn to *Justice Seekers* magazine. The summer issue on fair trade was a huge success. We also have an active presence on both Facebook and Twitter for folks who prefer shorter, more immediate updates.

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Our Action Center at *www. crcjustice.org* has an increased capacity, thanks to our new advocacy and issues intern. Visit regularly to get a Reformed perspective on the hottest political topics, from the situation in the Middle East to immigration reform and healthcare. Don't know how to advocate? We can help with that too!



Contact info: Website: *www.crcjustice.org* United States Peter Vander Meulen 616.224.0807 E-mail: *pvandermeulen@crcna.org*

Canada Karen Bokma 800.730.3490 E-mail: *kbokma@crcna.org*

Quick Facts

Our social networking website, CRC Justice Seekers, is still going strong at *justiceseekers.ning.com*. Join others in the CRC as we discuss and reflect on socialjustice issues from a Reformed perspective with photos, videos, and blog posts.

We regularly help other agencies develop advocacy programs. Recent partnerships include CRWRC's World Hunger and Embrace AIDS campaigns, World Missions' Middle East campaign (Hope Equals), and Disability Concerns. Contact us to learn how your ministry can do advocacy too.

CRC Foundation

he Christian Reformed Church Foundation's mission is to resource the priorities of the denomination and to support new ministry that emerges at the local, regional, or denominational level.

What's New

During the past year, the foundation enjoyed an important partnership with the CRCNA in the distribution of funds raised by the 2008 Sea to Sea bike tour. About \$360,000 was distributed to 60 Christian Reformed churches and related ministries in grants of \$10,000 or less for the purpose of alleviating poverty. What a blessing to be a part of growing these ministries and sharing in the vision of hundreds of cyclists and their supporters! Currently the foundation is seeking funding for three needs:

- The Leadership Exchange—a leadership development program that helps clergy and lay leaders to be salt and light in our churches, our communities, and the world.
- The Network: Connecting Churches for Ministry—to help congregations connect with new resources and each other in vibrant ministry. This is in keeping with the denomination's priority to "create and sustain healthy congregations."
- Timothy Institute of Calvin Theological Seminary—so church leaders in 36 countries, where church growth is soaring, can receive affordable, doctrinally sound training.

At this time, the foundation is not seeking proposals for program grants and is focused on resourcing the projects described above. As priorities within the denomination change, the CRC Foundation board will adjust the funding priorities. For the most up-to-date description of the mission and funding priorities of the foundation, visit us at *www.crcna.org/foundation*.



Contact info: Website: www.crcna.org/foundation 616.224.0817 or 877.272.6299 E-mail: Foundation@crcna.org

CRC Loan Fund

he Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund was established by Synod 1983 for the benefit of Christian Reformed churches in the United States. The Loan Fund makes loans available to churches wishing to purchase or build a worship facility or parsonage, to purchase land, or to make improvements or repairs to existing property.

The Loan Fund's only source of funds (we do not solicit gifts or receive ministry shares) is investments made by individuals, Christian Reformed congregations and classes, and other organizations related to the CRC. The Loan Fund pays excellent interest rates on investments and uses those investments to help churches meet their facilities needs.

What's New

Fiscal year 2008-09 was a year of modest growth for the Loan Fund. Net revenue was \$395,520, nearly as high as last year despite a deteriorating economy. Commitments made for new loans were \$1.2 million, down from \$6.4 million last year, with loan activity slowing significantly in the first six months of 2009. More than \$3.3 million in loans to seven churches were closed.

These loans were made for a variety of purposes. Second CRC in Lynden, Wash., and First CRC in Grosse Pointe Park, Mich., made additions to their historic buildings. Prairie Lane CRC in Omaha, Neb., built a new worship center. New Horizon CRC in Paterson, N.J., purchased its first worship facility and parsonage.

The CRC Loan Fund is able to help these and many other churches only because many members and churches in the CRC choose to make investments in the Loan Fund. You can become part of this unique ministry. Your investment will help us continue to serve our churches. Contact us or check our website for more information.

This information does not constitute an offer to sell or a solicitation of an offer to purchase. Offers will be made only by the offering circular in those jurisdictions where it is lawful to make such an offer or solicitation of an offer.

Investments in the Loan Fund involve risks more fully disclosed in the offering circular.



Contact info:

Website: www.crcna.org/loanfund Carl Gronsman, director 800.332.0012 or 616.224.0829 Fax: 616.726.1149 E-mail: crlf@crcna.org

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Giving Summary: 2009

iscal 2009 witnessed the largest economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Security markets experienced record declines. Yet the Christian Reformed Church was blessed, as the reductions in ministry shares and other gifts were less than anticipated:

- Total ministry shares receipts were down by 8.8 percent from the prior year.
- Above-ministry-shares gifts declined by \$3.9 million, or 11.5 percent, from fiscal 2008.
- Estate gifts were down by \$2.1 million.
- Disaster-response gifts, which are tied to specific events, increased by more than \$800,000. ■

Sea to Sea	
Ministry Share	0
Other Gift Income	1,185,000
Other Income	71,000
Total Income	1,256,000
Special Assistance Fund	

2009

Special Assistance Fund	
Ministry Share	128,000
Other Gift Income	0
Other Income	5,000
Total Income	133,000

	2009	2008	2007
ack to God Ministries			
Ministry Share	3,623,000	4,008,000	4,258,000
Other Gift Income	5,329,000	7,257,000	5,490,000
Other Income	-97,000	182,000	532,000
Total Income	8,855,000	11,447,000	10,280,000
alvin College			
Ministry Share	2,603,000	2,731,000	2,769,000
Other Gift Income	2,435,000	2,765,000	2,811,000
Other Income	90,238,000	88,792,000	82,270,000
Total Income	95,276,000	94,288,000	87,850,000
alvin Seminary			
Ministry Share	2,876,000	3,179,000	2,898,000
Other Gift Income	865,000	885,000	816,000
Other Income	3,205,000	2,738,000	2,753,000
Total Income	6,946,000	6,802,000	6,467,000
aith Alive			
Ministry Share	1,090,000	1,234,000	1,050,000
Other Gift Income	309,000	395,000	298,000
Other Income	4,205,000	4,733,000	5,323,000
Total Income	5,604,000	6,362,000	6,671,000
ome Missions			
Ministry Share	3,665,000	4,216,000	4,986,000
Other Gift Income	1,730,000	2,325,000	1,742,000
Other Income	-24,000	465,000	1,597,000
Total Income	5,371,000	7,006,000	8,325,000
orld Missions			
Ministry Share	4,602,000	5,025,000	5,094,000
Other Gift Income	7,979,000	8,234,000	7,253,000
Other Income	488,000	276,000	813,000
Total Income	13,069,000	13,535,000	13,160,000
orld Relief			
Ministry Share	0	0	0
Other Gift Income	25,967,000	20,113,000	20,235,000
Other Income	4,579,000	16,189,000	8,967,000
Total Income	30,546,000	36,302,000	29,202,000
pecialized Ministries			
Ministry Share	3,304,000	3,348,000	2,745,000
Other Gift Income	474,000	440,000	448,000
Other Income	246,000	1,242,000	30,000
Total Income	4,024,000	5,030,000	3,223,000
enominational Service	S		
Ministry Share	2,817,000	3,215,000	2,894,000
Other Gift Income	38,000	17,000	19,000
Other Income	628,000	258,000	596,000
Total Income	3,483,000	3,490,000	3,509,000
oundation			
Ministry Share	0	0	0
Other Gift Income	978,000	319,000	345,000
Other Income	358,000	41,000	96,000
Total Income	1,336,000	360,000	441,000
oan Fund			
Ministry Share	0	0	0
		0	0
Other Gift Income	0	0	0
Other Gift Income Other Income	0 1,905,000	1,896,000	1,584,000

May There Be Peace

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light; The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:13-14 (TNIV)

he angels sang to the glory of God above the fields of Bethlehem—a city under Roman control and occupation. Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, Son of God and son of man, was no longer under the rule of David or his family. It was under the thumb of a foreign invader. How does one sing of peace on earth in that circumstance?

Much has changed in the 2,000 years since that first Christmas. Once a sleepy little town nestled in the hills a short journey from Jerusalem, Bethlehem is now a busy city of narrow streets, traffic jams, bustling shops, and 30,000 residents. It bears little resemblance to the town you see on Christmas cards.

Each year tens of thousands of pilgrims from around the world come to see and touch the place of the Messiah's birth. As they wind their way through the Church of the Nativity, it matters little to them if the church is the actual site of the nativity. They come not out of a need for historical accuracy, but seeking to better understand the setting of Scripture and the life of Jesus.

Not so very long ago, I was one such pilgrim, seeking to walk where Jesus walked. I, too, was captivated by the City of David.

The place where angels proclaimed good news of great joy is today a site of hopeless despair.

What I discovered, though, was not the town I expected but a place of contradictions.

The place where angels proclaimed good news of great joy to all people is today a site of hopeless despair for many. Palestinians who call this city home live in a world of political fear. Refugee camps are packed with people whose lands and livelihoods have been torn apart. Soldiers with automatic weapons walk the streets.

The city is a living mosaic of fear, despair, anger, and hopelessness. Yet even in this place of pain, there are glimmers of God's hope. Even among the hurting and desperate there are those who turn their hopelessness into powerful works of transformation.

They are people like Mitri Raheb, pastor of the Evan-

gelical Lutheran "Christmas Tree" Church in the heart of Bethlehem. In addition to being a pastor, he leads the Diyar Consortium, an amazing outreach of education, training, and economic empowerment efforts that has become the third-largest private employer in Bethlehem.

It's hard for North Americans to imagine the lives of Palestinian Christians such as the family who opened their home to my wife, Linda, and me as we journeyed though the West Bank. These folks have lived under occupation

their entire lives. They live in fear that at any time

war will again erupt and their property and home will be taken from them. Yet they continue to work and worship, praying for the day that they, too, will experience peace and freedom.

These are our brothers and sisters in Christ. In a few weeks they will join with us and with Christians around the world in celebrating the incarnation of Immanuel. They ask for our prayers and our solidarity.

This Christmas, as you celebrate the Christ child, as you exchange gifts and words of good will, I ask that you will join me in a prayer for peace—peace in Bethlehem, peace in Jerusalem, peace around the world.

Peace on earth, good will to all.



Rev. Jerry Dykstra is

executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

A Special Night in Bethlehem

Have you ever imagined what it would be like to be in Bethlehem on the first Christmas? Let's try it. Let's imagine right now that you're one of the people traveling to Bethlehem to be counted by the Roman government on the night Jesus was born. You'll need to use all your five senses. Are you ready?



• What Do You Hear?

As you travel toward Bethlehem, the road isn't quiet like it usually is at nighttime. It's filled with people! They're all walking or riding donkeys. Some are going to Bethlehem like you. Some are going the other way to other towns.

Most of the travelers don't sound happy at all. They're grumbling about the Romans, because the Romans forced them to take this trip so they could count the people and charge them higher taxes.

Because it's the end of the day, babies and tired children are crying. Listen as their parents try to comfort them: "Shhhh...we're almost there!"

The donkeys are braying because they're tired too, and they want to lie down. On the hillsides, sheep are baaing—they're not used to all this noise at night! Or maybe they saw something that startled them....

2. What Do You See?

Finally, after a very long trip, you're here—in Bethlehem! It's usually a small town, but tonight there are people everywhere. It's dusty and crowded, and all the inns are full to bursting.

You wander around, trying to find a place to sleep for the night. You pass houses and other buildings made of stone, but they're all full.

Someone tells you there might be room in a nearby stable. When you find it, you see some shepherds coming out. They have strange looks on their bearded faces, like they've just seen something amazing.

You wonder if it's OK to go into the stable. Who knows what's going on in there? So you go to the door, open it just a crack, and peek inside. There IS someone there!

It's a man and a woman. They look tired. The woman is lying down and resting. Then you see why: there's a baby sleeping in the animals' food trough! He's wrapped in strips of cloth. He's so tiny, he can't be more than a few hours old.

The man and woman invite you in. They ask what your name is, and they tell you their names: Joseph and Mary. They tell you the baby's name too: Jesus.



3• What Do You Smell?

Now close your eyes and breathe in through your nose. What do you smell? Lots of smells mix together: warm animals, manure, fresh hay and grain, the dirt and sweat of the shepherds who just left. When the doors are closed, it's pretty strong-smelling in the stable!

But then you tiptoe close to baby Jesus. You put your nose by his head and breathe in. Do you smell that "new baby" smell? All babies smell special. They smell like milk and flowers and sleep.

4 • What Do You Touch?

Joseph and Mary invite you to sit down. They can see you're tired. You lean your head back against the stone walls of the stable. It's not very comfortable, but it's nice not to be walking anymore. You rest for a bit.

Then Mary asks if you'd like to hold the baby. You nod. You're a little nervous because you haven't held very many babies. But you walk over to the manger. It's cold and hard because it's made of stone like the stable. Joseph has put some straw in it to make it softer, but the straw is prickly. You reach into the scratchy stalks and put your arms under the baby. You lift him up. It's surprising how light he is—he's very little. He's also warm and soft.

You sit down on the hard stable floor, and you hold the baby Jesus gently as he sleeps. Every now and then his arms move or his legs kick. Maybe he's dreaming.

5. What Do You Taste?

Having a baby can take a very long time, and Mary and Joseph haven't eaten in a while. So while Mary and Jesus rest, Joseph goes out to buy some food.

When he comes back, he doesn't bring cereal or hamburgers or pizza. He brings homemade bread, salty fish, tangy olives, and white cheese made from goat's milk.

Joseph offers you some food because he can see you're hungry too. Can you taste the bread? It's still warm, and it's chewy and soft. Watch for bones in the fish! And when you eat the olives, don't forget to spit out the pits. Even though you don't like goat cheese, the food tastes so good after your long journey.

You're so very glad you found this place. It's peaceful here, and even though the stable is hard and cold and smelly, it's been a very special night.



Sandy Swartzentruber works for Faith Alive and is a member of Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, Mich. She once traveled to Bethlehem, where it really is easier to imagine what things were like when Jesus was alive.



HAVE YOU HEARD? The Reading Crisis is over.

The National Endowment for the Arts released new survey findings this year indicating that literature is no longer in danger of extinction brought on by competition from other media, contrary to earlier NEA reports. The so-called Reading Crisis, while it lasted, was only one of several death-of-reading controversies to grace editorial pages this decade. Cooler-headed researchers have insisted all along that the debate was overblown, but that doesn't make for good headlines.

Confused and curious, I decided to examine reading habits for myself specifically, best-seller lists from the past 100 years. If fiction was in trouble, I wanted to know.

Written fiction has a unique truthtelling power. Unlike other forms of storytelling, it investigates both our total depravity—our capacity to deceive ourselves—*and* language's role in that deception.

I didn't find much evidence of apocalyptic change over the past century, but I did notice, in the past 15 years, two subtler trends: the rise of the info-novel and the memoir.

Written fiction has a unique truth-telling power.

Bad best-sellers have always shoved characters around in service of a sexy story. Info-novels—*The Da Vinci Code, Sophie's World*, and, yes, *Left Behind*—go further, subordinating both characters and story to a series of bulleted talking points.

Memoirs, meanwhile—though they're often as contrived as any novel, or even outright fabrications—have gotten so popular that a few editors have resorted to re-labeling novels as memoirs.

These developments are no "reading crisis"—let's leave melodrama to the NEA. But they're troubling nonetheless. Do richly imagined novels not seem "serious" enough, so that we have to lard them with factoids or pretend they really happened?

During the same 15 years we've repeatedly found ourselves at the mercy of institutions possessing, at best, a memoirist's commitment to truth. Whether it was a U.S. administration that (as one Bush official told journalist Ron Suskind) governed by the relativist maxim "We are the Empire, and we create reality when we act," or that infinitely expanding credit bubble on which so many nations gambled and lost—or even the Reading Crisis itself—we're as selfdeluding as ever.

We need literature to remind us of that fact.



Phil Christman Jr. is a student in the MFA-Fiction program at University of South Carolina.



Faith Like Potatoes

reviewed by Ron VandenBurg

In this film based on a true story, African-born Scotsman Angus Buchan resettles his family on a South African farm after escaping political unrest in Zambia. Angus's life changes when he comes to Christ. He begins sharing his faith with local Zulu workers and white farmers, and in conditions of drought and doubt he plants potatoes. Though his family's faith is challenged repeatedly, this film reveals people of faith seeking God's direction and God's provision for their needs. (Sony)



The Orthodox Heretic by Peter Rollins

reviewed by Bryan Berghoef

This unique collection of parables, stories,

and tales will challenge your understanding of faith, discipleship, and what it means to be the church. Rollins retells familiar parables or biblical stories; he also spins contemporary tales that embody an uncompromising critique of typical religion. Written by a fiery Irish philosopher/theologian, this collection is guaranteed to provoke you, unsettle you, and call you into a deeper understanding of what true faith is. (Paraclete Press)



Extra Credit by Andrew Clements reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

To boost her chances of passing the sixth grade, an Illinois girl named Abby takes on an extra-credit project by becoming a pen pal with an Afghani boy. Abby and Saheed's exchange of letters stirs up opposition in both their communities, but it builds a bridge between them in their disparate worlds. Abby voices what each comes to realize: "People are simple, but the stuff going on around them can get complicated. And even dangerous." Ages 9-12. (Atheneum)



ON DEATH ROW

THOMAS CAHILL

A Saint on **Death Row:** The Story of Dominique Green

by Thomas Cahill reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In his indictment of the death penalty, Cahill relates how Dominique Green, an African American man charged with murder, "was convicted and executed by a system that has no regard for fairness and no regard for human life." Learning from other death-row prisoners that "coming here is not the end of their lives but merely a second chance," Green used his second chance to better the lives of his fellow prisoners, to fight for justice, and to pursue the abolition of the death penalty. (Nan A. Talese)



Age of Persuasion reviewed by Ron DeBoer

Terry O'Reilly, a former advertising executive and now examiner of trends in advertising and the media, hosts the CBC radio

program Age of Persuasion. Some of the topics in O'Reilly's half-hour podcasts

include "Selling War," a look at the history of persuading young men to join the army and the new challenges of recruitment; "Nasty Is the New Nice," an exploration of the new, meaner tone of the latest advertising trend; and "Selling God," an examination of the delicate, always-controversial relationship between faith and advertising. All-new episodes start Jan. 4, 2010. (ageofpersuasion. *wordpress.com*)



Food, Inc.

reviewed by Otto Selles

The North American food industry produces a remarkable amount of food at a very low cost. But if we knew how this food is produced, would we want to eat it? After watching this riveting documentary by Robert Kenner, you will think twice about what you put in your grocery cart. Discussions with farmers, businesspeople, and activists, including the likes of Eric Schlosser (Fast Food Nation), trace the high price that workers, consumers, animals, and the environment pay for our cheap food. Recommended for adult church group discussions. (Magnolia)

THE LOWDOWN

Last-Minute Gift Ideas



A Year of Yancev: Drawn from his many writings, Grace Notes is a book of daily

readings by Philip Yancey. (Zondervan)



Would your older children prefer Harry Potter and the Half-**Blood** Prince (Warner) or Night at the

Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian (20th Century Fox)? Both are out on DVD.



Mission-Minded: Aunt Tena: Called to Serve is a collection of the journals and letters

of Tena Huizinga, a missionary nurse in Nigeria. (Eerdmans)

Casting Call: Casting Crowns is back with more worshipful rock

on their new CD Until the Whole World Hears. (Reunion)

> Check thebanner.org for links to find out more about these titles.

Standing on Tiptoe

"SOMEDAY SOON, my little man, our Lord Jesus is coming again. I hope you never forget it as long as you live."

So spoke my friend's grandpa as, years ago, the two walked together on the grandpa's farm. Otherwise a man of few words, the elderly gentleman wanted to make sure that his grandson heard his heart's deep conviction and hope from his own lips before he died.

One of my own wise teachers expressed the same truth in different words: "We Christians ought not to fit too well in this world. Our identity is different; our human destiny is beyond this life."

According to John Calvin, training our eyes on heaven day by day is crucial to keeping our bearings and direction. Thus he made "meditation upon the future life" (*Institutes* III.ix) one of the three central features of the Christian life. Together with self-denial and cross-bearing, such meditation gives us energy for the task of trying to imitate Christ and live as he intends.

Our lives here on earth, like Jesus' life when he was among us, are difficult and crammed with cross-shaped distresses. But amid these distresses, by faith we can see our already-ascended Lord holding before our eyes the treasure that lies beyond our own eventual death—life forever with him. How important, therefore, "to raise our eyes to heaven" (III.ix.1).

Calvin insisted that we hold the hope of life hereafter continually before us because he knew all too well that Satan is out to lure believers toward "a brutish love of this world." Satan wants to beguile us into thinking that this life is all there is.

Sad to say, the evil one succeeds all too often. Too easily we fall head-over-heels in love with this world. Too gladly we're ready to cash in what we've been promised in return for what we can get now. As a result, the prospect of life forever with our Savior no longer magnetically draws us. How important, therefore, to engage in the spiritual practice of remembering where our home is—"lest we cling too tenaciously to [our love of present things]" (III.ix.1).

When we cherish continually in our minds and hearts the sure hope that soon "the Lord will receive his faithful people into the peace of his Kingdom, will wipe away every tear from their eyes, will clothe them with a robe of glory ... and rejoicing, will feed them with the unspeakable sweetness of his delights, will elevate them to his sublime fellowship"

Training our eyes on heaven day by day is crucial to keeping our bearings and direction.

(III.ix.6)—then we can walk the Christian way discerningly and keep our direction with better intention.

But Christian hope isn't something passive and static, some "dead thing."

It is active. It calls for regular practice, careful vigilance, daily stretching toward the final goal. We are ever to "march onward, and aspire to this heritage that is prepared for us, never doubting but that we shall attain it, because our Lord Jesus Christ will then appear, and the life that is now hidden from us will be revealed to us" (from Calvin's sermon on Titus 3:4-7).

"And so we shall be with the Lord forever," says 1 Thessalonians 4:18. My Calvinist ancestors assured me that this rock-solid affirmation was always enough to steady them and keep them going along their own life's journey, no matter their present circumstances. They encouraged me, too, to try to keep it before my eyes. Their advice has served me well during my 67 years.

Now, as my own death draws closer, I want this to be my final word—my passionate encouragement—to young people: "Stand on tiptoe, for Jesus is coming soon. I hope you never forget it as long as you live."

WEB Q'S See discussion questions at the end of this article on *The Banner's* website: *www.thebanner.org*.



Rev. Dale Cooper is chaplain emeritus of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich. *The Banner* thanks him for writing a special series for us this year on the teachings of John Calvin.

Let the Little Children Come ...

THINK TONIGHT I FOUND SOME MAGI.

It was 6:00, and for no particular reason I decided that we needed to drive around and look at Christmas lights.

Never mind that no one wanted to go—there's nothing like being forced to look at Christmas lights to cheer you up.

In typical fashion, the kids got over their frustration quicker than I did. They began singing Christmas carols five minutes into the drive. Me? I decided that the cheerful singing only made me grumpier. Sure, "Silent Night" is great, but what about those lights?!

Thankfully for everyone, I could only keep up my Grinch impression for so long. Generally speaking, little children singing carols and reenacting "A Charlie Brown Christmas" will eventually break down any hard-hearted wall you put up. On the way home we headed to McDonald's for some ice cream, and I somehow managed to confuse the drive-through person into giving us an extra sundae.

While I had already learned some lessons by this point about pride and stubbornness, my education was just beginning.

Before we got home, we stopped at the drugstore for some cough medicine. As I got out of the car, I discovered some spilled ice cream in the back of the "burb." Not a big deal, though a minor frustration. Then all my children followed me into the store—just because. So much for "get in, get out." Sigh.

As I'm looking for Children's Motrin, cue the one daughter who is learning to read: "Is this it? Is the red one it? Is it blue? I like grape. Hey, strawberry is pretty...."

Then my oldest daughter, Anneke, asks, "Dad, do you have any change?" I give her The Look and continue searching. Finally I find the medicine as daughter number two, who is fighting an addiction to somersaults and handstands, performs for me in the aisle for all to see. Then Anneke again asks for change. I stop and mutter something like, "Wasn't an ice cream good enough?"

"Dad, I don't want to buy anything. Didn't you see the homeless guy out front with the sign?"

Didn't I see the homeless guy? There was a homeless guy in front of the store? I gulp.

"Yeah, so I thought if you had some change I could give it to him."

Yup, I was as quiet as you think I should be at that point.

Anneke goes to the car, gets some money, walks up to this guy as Dad nervously observes (but is finally smart enough to stay out of the way). The guy says, "Thank you. God bless you, and Merry Christmas."



I'm nervous—maybe because something is changing before my eyes.

Suddenly I have some "dirt" in my eyes.

When we get home, the two older girls pull out bread, butter, cheese, chocolate, a blanket, a thermos, a pack of granola bars, and some mandarin oranges. I know what's going on here. I'm not sure what to do. Actually, I am. Once again, I stay out of the way.

Bev, my wife, fills the thermos with hot chocolate. The girls pack up the blanket and food nicely, and I receive instructions to buy the man cigarettes so he doesn't spend the money we gave him on that. I am getting educated.

On the way back to the drugstore, I ask the girls if they are nervous. (I am, but not sure why—maybe because something is changing before my eyes.) My daughter only says that she really, really hopes he isn't gone.

He is there. I stay in the car. This is their moment, their idea. When the girls return, one says, "Thanks for taking us to see the Christmas lights, Dad. We wouldn't have met him if we didn't go."

And I didn't even see him.



Matt Beimers is a member of The Bridge Community CRC in Langley, British Columbia. He and his wife, Bev, are parents to four daughters.

Five years after the deadly tsunami, we can see how grace has touched a century of tears.

Aceh's edemption

HEN I HEARD the name Aceh, the main locale in Indonesia hit by the 2004 tsunami, it was not new to me. I remembered it from my grade-school days. Aceh, or Atjeh, as we knew it at that time, was the center of many years of rebellion against the Dutch colonial authorities.

Train Aller

Banda Aceh is the northernmost region of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. As patriotic school children we were proud of the Dutch victories over the Acehnese after decades of often fierce fighting. I cannot remember whether people ever paused, at that time, to consider the suffering of the Aceh people caused by the Dutch military campaigns.

The cataclysmic tsunami of Dec. 26, 2004, brought the name of Banda Aceh back into world news. One towering wall of sea roared over Aceh—its cruel fury beyond all description—sweeping entire villages from the face of the earth. Thousands died, their bodies never found.

Yet a remarkable series of events took place soon after.

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), the diaconal arm of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, took initiative in bringing aid to the tsunami victims. Gifts flooded in from Canada and the United States. The cooperation of Development Canada and the Canadian Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia's capital city on the central island of Java, as well as of many nongovernmental agencies, was secured. Prominent among those who donated so generously to this cause were many descendants of the Dutch citizens who, through their government, brought so much distress to the Aceh people more than a century earlier.

These donors may not have been aware of those historic connections—gestures of mercy often come with a touch of reconciliation not immediately visible. In retrospect we may now speak, symbolically, of *Aceh's redemption*.

In June 2009, CRWRC concluded its work on behalf of the tsunami survivors. The total amount of money CRWRC invested in Aceh came to more than \$10 million (provided apart from the regular CRWRC budget). Here's how those gifts benefited Aceh:

- temporary shelters for 425 households
- emergency kits for 5,300 people
- medical camps to treat 6,500 people
- income assistance to 17,500 people
- artesian wells in 15 villages
- electrical power to 4,400 people in 18 villages
- school access for 2,300 children
- textbooks and typewriters to schools in four villages
- more than 1,140 earthquake-resistant houses
- 600 livelihoods restored.

Dutch Colonial Rule

The history of Dutch colonialism is recorded from many different perspectives. Historians have traditionally pointed out that the Dutch brought order, safety, and a system of legal justice. The Reformed churches prided themselves in having brought the gospel, and the many churches across the island empire are a testimony to that ministry today.

But there remains one overriding question: by what standard of justice could one nation impose its governmental structures on a multitude of other people groups?

The Dutch ruled the archipelago for more than 300 years. The presence of the Dutch in the South Pacific region goes back to the spice trade of the late 16th century. Trade centers needed defending against attacks by the island populations, as well as by the British and the Portuguese navies, so the Dutch stationed troops all around. The reasoning was, of course, that if the Dutch didn't provide protection for their trade, other nations would take over.

Gradually, Dutch military leaders found it reasonable to unite the entire area under one government and make it part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. That Indonesia's individual people groups never wanted government by a foreign nation was never seriously considered by successive administrations.

And that's how Aceh comes into the picture. The Sultanate of Aceh, from the very beginning, objected strenuously to becoming part of one huge Dutch kingdom. Their relationship with the colonial authorities in Batavia, now Jakarta, were often strained and always complex.

True, the Acehnese were a warlike people. And their own governmental structures were at times nonfunctional, so ad hoc agreements with Batavia were repeatedly violated. The Acehnese also often resorted to piracy on the high seas.

All through the three centuries of colonial rule, the Dutch maintained that it was their duty to maintain order in that strategic part of the globe.

And so it was that on March 26, 1873, an expedition of Dutch gun boats bombarded the villages of Aceh from the sea. Colonial army units soon followed with attacks on the settlements of the Aceh district. Though greatly outnumbered, the Acehnese never fully surrendered.

In 1898 the Dutch government appointed General J.B. van Heutsz governor of Aceh. He was a man of action and a military genius. In 1904, after 163 days of fierce fighting, all resistance was finally broken.

Among the Dutch delegation that accepted the surrender was a young captain named Hendrikus Colijn. His

Gestures of mercy often come with a touch of reconciliation not immediately visible.

meteoric career brought him to London as the president of Shell Oil Company. He then became head of the main Christian Party, and, finally, prime minister of the Netherlands.

How many Acehnese died in the many military campaigns till that year has never been established. Present-day Dutch online sources point out that the authorities in Batavia were very conservative in reporting casualties. Researchers today maintain that the number is upward of 70,000. Some historians believe 100,000 is more likely.

Following his "successes" in Aceh, General van Heutsz was appointed governor general of all Indonesia (then known as the Dutch East Indies). He applied the Aceh strategies to many other islands of the huge region. From then till the beginning of World War II, the Dutch faced no uprisings of significant consequences. Van Heutsz was honored as a great national hero. He died in 1924 and was given a state funeral in Amsterdam, until that time afforded only to members of the royal family.

After Colonialism

The Dutch colonial policies likely had a significant impact on the realities of Indonesia today. When Sukarno proclaimed himself president, following the surrender of Japan in 1945, he insisted that his regime was the rightful successor of the Dutch and that the many people groups did not have the right to self-determination. When the Acehnese once again expressed aspirations toward independence, he was quick to send in the troops.

While Sukarno was able to stem the initial uprisings, the peoples' desire for independence was not defeated. Sukarno's successor, Suharto, soon faced the much firmer opposition of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), a rebel group determined to win independence.

The period of 1976 to 2005 was marked by continued violence. It gave Banda Aceh the reputation as a belligerent and hostile region. Increased rebellion, in turn, led to greater repression and control by Jakarta. It left Aceh a closed and isolated area.

Unexpected Consequences

The 2004 tsunami had an unforeseen but wonderfully healing impact on conditions in Aceh. The overwhelming needs that resulted from the flood brought scores of international organizations and fellow Indonesians to Aceh to help. Among them was CRWRC, which soon employed more than 50 workers for nearly five years.

Within a year of the tsunami, the civil war in Aceh subsided, and a peace agreement was signed. The region was given the freedom to have its own regional political parties, and those who had been GAM soldiers now participated in the political process.

For decades the people of Aceh had not dared to venture into the hills to buy their favored durian fruit. Now they could, to everybody's delight. Scooters and motorbikes appeared on the country roads in great numbers, their riders no longer fearful of being shot at from above.

And all the while a warm cooperation grew between the Acehnese and those who stood side by side with them to help repair and heal. Local people became involved in decision making at all levels. They discovered a different kind of power—"power over them" had been transformed into "power with them."

In many respects, history has come full circle. Redemption for Aceh, yes. But also for us.



Rev. Louis Tamminga is a retired minister in the CRC and a "pastor to missionaries" for the denomination.



Mona Sarionsong, a native Indonesian, has been senior program manager for CRWRC's Tsunami Relief Program. She was

one of 1,000 Women of Peace nominated for this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

Advertising Information

Deadlines: January 2010 issue is 12/2/09. February issue is 1/4/10. Visit www.thebanner.org for complete details.

Prices: Most ads are \$0.33^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.26^{US} per character applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements. Photos are \$22^{US} extra.

To Advertise: Place your classified ad online at www.TheBanner.org/classifieds. If you are unable to submit your ad online you may continue to email it to classifieds@ TheBanner.org or fax it to 616-224-0834. If you have questions, call 616-224-0725.

Publication of advertisements implies neither endorsement nor approval by *The Banner*, Faith Alive Christian Resources, or the Christian Reformed Church. We reserve the right to refuse or edit any ad for appropriateness.

Denominational and Classical Announcements

New from the Faith Formation Committee The committee encourages churches to check out our website for resources to engage members in study and conversation around the issues of sacramental practice and faith formation. For years the 1 Cor. 11 passage has been central in shaping the practice of Communion in the CRC, yet many wonder if its interpretation truly honors the intent of the passage. Visit our website (www.crcna.org/faithformation) for a downloadable, five-session Bible study on 1 Cor. 11 that will help your congregation explore these significant verses.

Qualifying persons who wish to be candidates in 2010 for ordained CRC ministry should request application procedures by December 15, 2009. For further information, please email Karlene Werner at kaw5@calvinseminary.edu or write her at Calvin Theological Seminary, 3233 Burton Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.

Available for Call

REV. JANA VANDER LAAN Rev. Jana Vander Laan has completed a two-year residency program as pastor at Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, MI. Acknowledging her remarkable gifts both as preacher and pastor, the COS Council takes hearty delight in recommending her to the churches for a call.

Eligible for Call

TONY MAAN ELIGIBLE FOR CALL: On October 20, 2009 Classis Alberta North with the concurrence of the Synodical Deputies accepted Tony Maan's request to be declared eligible again for call as Minister of the Word according to C. O. Article 14e. Tony has been out of full-time ordained ministry for several years due to study leave. Tony can be contacted at 780-471-3760 or by email t_maan@hotmail.com

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS HOLLAND will meet in regular session January 21, 2010 at Central Avenue CRC, Holland, MI. Agenda items are due December 4, 2009 and should be sent to: Rev. Tony Louwerse, Stated Clerk. FAX: 616-494-6054; email: louwerse@macatawa.org

CLASSIS KALAMAZOO WILL be meeting in regular session January 26, 2010 at Southern Heights CRC, 4141 East Hillandale Dr. Kalamazoo. Please have all materials to the Stated Clerk (1782 5th St. Martin, MI 49070 or jweeda@mcn.net) by December 10, 2009. Jake Weeda, SC 269-672-9821

CLASSIS ZEELAND will meet on Thursday, January 21, 2010, 4PM, at the Rusk CRC. Agenda deadline is December 10.

Rev. Ronald J. Meyer, S. C.

The next meeting of **Classis Niagara** is planned for Wednesday, February 17, 2010, at 2:00 pm, at the Providence CRC of Beamsville. Agenda items, including requests to address Classis, should be received by the Stated Clerk before January 1, 2010. John TeBrake, SC, statedclerk@classisniagara.ca; phone 905-892-8059

Congregational Announcements

Looking to escape the northern cold winter? Consider warm, sunny paradise on the S. W. coast of Florida at Venice. Enjoy warm, friendly welcome at the Reformed Church, 1600 Banyan Dr. (US Highway 41 and Center Rd.) Sunday morning worship, 10:30, 941-493-3075.



THE SMALL CLASS SIZES ENABLE ME TO WORK CLOSELY

with my professors, who equip me with the skills to thrive in today's workplace and the support to incorporate my beliefs into all that I do. Being close to Chicago opens up a number of great opportunities."

– Kyle Geenen '10 Student Association President Hometown: Holland, Michigan

> CHRISTIAN COLLEGE Palos Heights, Illinois 60463 WWW.TRNTY.EDU • 866.TRIN.4.ME

MESA & APACHE JCT. WINTER VISITORS: Worship with us at Maranatha CRC Dec. 6 through April 11, 10:00 A. M. at 6159 E. University Dr., Mesa, AZ. Rev. Gary Hutt, Pastor. Info: 480-668-0478

CENTRAL FLORIDA LOCATION—**CRC/RCA**, **MINISTRY** Winter Haven-Orlando area off Rt. 17/92. Services at 10:30 a.m. and 5:50 p.m. Nov.-Dec. Gene Los; Jan. Ralph Robrahn; Feb. Peter Hogeterp; Mar.-Apr. Allen Jongsma. For info call 863-422-6442 or go to www.lakealfredministry.org

Birthdays

100th Birthday

CHARLES JOHN VAN DELLEN celebrates his 100th Birthday on Dec 3. An open house will be held on Dec 6 at Aurora Pond, 2380 Aurora Pond Dr, Wyoming MI 49519 from 2-5.

95th Birthday

ELIZABETH (BETSY) WOLTJER will celebrate her 95th birthday on Dec. 6. Her husband, Theodore, went to be with his Lord in 2002 after 66 years of marriage. Celebrating her life are her children Jerry & Donna, Ted & Mary, Ken & Mary, Margaret, Jim & Marilyn, and Patricia & Jim Beelen, along with 23 grandchildren, 64 great-grandchildren, and 6 great-great-grandchildren. Birthday wishes may be sent to Sunset Manor, 725 Baldwin, Jenison, MI 49428

90th Birthday

CORNELIA BOUMA, 3600 Fulton St. East, CC-245, Grand Rapids, MI 40546-1322, celebrates her 90th birthday on Dec. 12. Husband Rev. Hessel Bouma Jr. (deceased). Children: Gerald & Margery Frens, Bruce & JoAnne, Hessel III & Ruth, Penthea, Rolf & Sandy. 14 grandchildren and six greatgrandchildren. Her children give thanks to God for her faithful life.

ROY BULTMAN: Room 343, 2121 Raybrook SE G. R. Mi. 49546, celebrated his 90th Birthday Nov. 14. Married to Tena (Bouwer). Recently celebrated their 65th Anniversary.

JOHN DE BOER of 134E. Adams, Elmhurst, II.60126, celebrates his 90th birthday on Dec.20th. His wife Edith, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren thank God for his long life of health, faith, service and love to all.

GRACE KOSTER GELDERLOOS 909 "B" Grover Street, Lynden, WA 98264 will celebrate her 90th birthday on December 12. Congratulations from your daughters, grandchildren and great-grandson

DR. HENRY PETER IPPEL of 2121 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546, celebrated his 90th birthday on November 16, 2009. His wife, Marian, 7 children, 24 grandchildren and 20 great grandchildren praise God for his life and good health. An open house will be held in the Friendship Room of Raybrook Manor, 2121 Raybrook SE from 2 - 4 PM on Nov. 27, 2009

85th Birthday

JOHANNA DE JONG of Hamilton, ON celebrates her 85th birthday on Dec. 7. Thanks to God for your faith & love to us. Congratulations from your 7 children, 19 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren.

80th Birthday

ELEANOR JONGSMA (STOB), 1209 Howard Circle, Wheaton, IL 60187, will celebrate her 80th Birthday on Dec. 20. Her husband Ed, children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren thank God for her faith and love to us and so many others over the years.

BERNARD C. MEMMELAAR SR. of 2696 Meadowlake Dr., Toms River, NJ 08755 will celebrate his 80th birthday on November 8. His wife, Marion (Vander Wende) and children Bernard Jr. (Pam), Edward (Anna), Donna (Phil), Robin (Gary), and Todd (Dale), 17 grandchildren, & 5 great-grandchildren thank the Lord for his Christian life. To God be the glory for the things he has done

Anniversaries

65th Anniversary

ALGERA, Albert and Kay (Van Beekum) celebrated 65 years November 23. Children: Rev. John & Deb, Robert & Pam. 4 grandchildren, 2 greatgrandchildren. God is good and we are thankful for his blessings.



New Hope Community CRC, Kincheloe, MI, is seeking a pastor. We have an exciting, diverse congregation with a passion for community outreach. We have strong ministries in place, and there is the potential for more to be developed. We are a small rural community in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Our current membership is about 40 member families. To obtain more information or a church profile please contact Joni Andary at 906-478-3205 or jandary@centurytel.net.

The **Owen Sound First CRC** is located on beautiful Georgian Bay in Southwest Ontario. We are seeking an experienced pastor who is an effective preacher and good communicator committed to the Reformed faith. You should be a nurturing care giver, a caring mentor for our youth, and be willing and able to challenge us to obedience in our daily lives. We offer a congregation with a high number of willing and gifted members that has given 60 years of service to our area, and is eager to be led once more. If you sense God calling you to be part of His plan for this community, please send us your profile c/o the Calling Committee at office@owensoundcrc.com or call 519-376-2787.

ARE YOU OUR ANSWER TO PRAYER? Duncan CRC on Vancouver Island, British Columbia is seeking an Associate Pastor of Congregational Life passionate about young families. If you are enthusiastic about helping others discover their gifts, facilitating church programs, building relationships and preaching occasionally.... the Spirit may be calling you to work alongside our senior pastor. Innovative and energetic persons to apply to: Duncan CRC 930 Trunk Rd. Duncan, BC V9L 2S1 Attn: Bill Wikkerink. Or Call 250-748-2122, or email: crc.duncan@shawcable.com

CHURCH PLANTER Fellowship CRC has been led to reach out with the gospel in a fresh way to the large sector of our area population who are unchurched. We are inviting applicants who may be interested in planting a church in St. Thomas, ON to contact our church plant team. churchplant@fellowship-church.ca

CAMPUS PASTOR Campus Edge is seeking a full time campus pastor to creatively expand an emerging ministry among graduate students and faculty at Michigan State University in East Lansing, MI. For more information, contact sean@riverterrace.org.

DRENTHE CRC, located near Zeeland, Michigan, is seeking a full-time pastor. We are a multi-generational congregation of about 330 members. The person to fill this position should be grounded in Biblical truth, an effective and engaging Bible-based preacher who will challenge us to obedience in our daily lives. You should be able to relate to and connect with people of all ages, especially youth. Our congregation offers many gifted and willing volunteers who have sustained our church for over 125 years. If you feel God calling you

to this position, please e-mail your profile to jobs@drenthecrc.org or call Rick Lobbes, Search Committee Chair, at (616) 901-8057.

KOOY, John and Dena (Withage) of 1511

C St., Lynden WA, 98264, married Novem-

ber 1, 1944-will celebrate 65 years of

marriage. They are the only living couple

who were baptized, professed their faith,

and married in Nobleford, AB, CRC (1st CRC

in Canada). Congratulations from Wayne

(Mary); Bea (Mike); Brenda; Greg (Diana); Garth (Andrea); and Ted,

13 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren. We acknowledge God's

NIEHOF, Philip and Thelma (Terpstra), December 15, 2009. Celebrating the joys of today, the memories of yesterday, and the hopes of

tomorrow with their friends, family, children, grandchildren, and

DEVRIES, Rev. Willard and Alice, celebrated 50 years on Sept. 11.

Children: Margaret and Warren Rice, Kate and Jon Fuller. Grandchildren:

Nathan, Jessica and Sam. Great is thy faithfulness.

faithfulness in your lives!

60th Anniversary

great-grandchildren.

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FIRST CRC in Rock Valley, IA is seeking to fill a pastoral vacancy. If interested contact Vern Van Beek at 712-753-4939, vanbeek@ alliancecom.net or send information to First CRC, 1401 16th St, Rock Valley, IA 51247.

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Dordt College is an equal opportunity institution that strongly encourages the applications of women, minorities, and disabled persons. **GROS**, Harry and Barbara (Bakker) of Pine Bush, NY will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on December 4, 2009. With love and gratitude from your children and grandchildren. God is so good! His blessings never cease.

SCHUMACHER, Charles and Judy (Koppel) of Kingston, Ontario, will celebrate 50 years of marriage on December 11, 2009. Children: Carolyn and Ralph. We give thanks to God for all His blessings.

Obituaries

DE KORNE, Baldwin Lewis; aged 93; October 20, 2009; 2111 Raybrook SE, Apt. 2009, Grand Rapids, MI 49546; He is survived by his wife: Thelma (Grevengoed); children: Kathleen (John) Mezoff, Carol (Richard) Lenger, Janet (Tom) Smies, James De Korne; 9 grandchildren; 6+ great grandchildren. He was pre-deceased by brother, Melvin DeKorne and great grandson, Kyle Handlogten.

DELEEUW, Ann M., age 75, Walker, MI, went to be with the Lord on October 17, 2009. She is survived by her husband Ted, son Charles (Gail), daughter Julie (Clay), daughter Kristi (Dan), son Jack (Kellie), 10 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren. Much loved and greatly missed by all.

DEVRIES, Frank, age 92, Cedar Lake, IN, Oct. 8. Survived by wife Grace (Eenigenburg nee Kuipers), children Sid (Judy), Tom (Janell), Fran (Paul) Zuidema, Jim (Cyndee), Doreen (Al) Bultema & Clairine (Joe) Kusbel, stepchildren Linda (Terry) VanDerAa, Wes Eenigenburg, Cheryl (Jeremy) Gil, Dorinda (late Doug) Eenigenburg, Kurt (Cheryl) Eenigenburg, 22 grandchildren, 50 great grandchildren, 16 step grandchildren, 13 step great grandchildren. Preceded in death by first wife Theresa (nee Wichers), Doug Eenigenburg and Wayne Eenigenburg.

DYKMAN Lena 94, Manhattan, MT died on Oct.23, 2009. Preceded by husband Herman & daughter Arlene Byker. Survived by Ralph Byker, Gary & Karen Dykman, Pat & Con Holleman, Marcia & Dennis McClung, 13 grandchildren, 17 greatgrandchildren. **KOK**, Raymond, 80, Went to be with his Lord, Oct. 16 2009. 685 E. 4th st. Corsica S. Dak 57328. He is survived by his wife Berdine of 51 years Father of Terry (Twyla), Brent, Kevin, Kristie. and 4 grand childern.

KOOISTRA, Janette (Jantje), was born Jantje Feddema, the youngest of 9 children, in Anjum, Freisland, the Netheralnds. She trained and worked in missions for some years and then married Rev. Dr. Remkes Kooistra just before Rem was installed as pastor in their first congregation. In a complimentary roll to her husband, Jantje was active in congregation life in her own special way. She had a gift for hospitality that she practiced throughout her life. She had a beautiful voice and loved music and art. Janette was married to Rem for over 60 years and has lived in many different communities in the Netherlands and Canada serving churches and other ministries, the longest and last being in Waterloo, Ontario. They raised four children, Dorothy (John) Kralt, Jacky (Theo) VandePutte, Clare Kooistra and John (Gail) Kooistra and have the blessing of many grand children and great grandchildren. Janette has one surviving sibling, her older sister Siep, who lives in the Netherlands. Janette passed away September 6, 2009 just after her 95th birthday in the peace and knowledge of her Lord. (cmkooistra@shaw.ca)

MULDER, Mrs. Gertrude Faye; age 84; October 31, 2009; 547 Mae-Thy St. SE, Wyoming, MI 49548; She was preceded in death by her husband, William Mulder, Jr. She is survived by her children: James and Nancy Mulder of Holland, Marilyn and Craig Vander Hoff of Comstock Park, and Tom and Dawn Mulder of Kentwood; 6 grandchildren; 4 great grandchildren; sister: Wilma and Roger Vande Kopple; and brotherin-law: Raymond and Mildred Mulder.

OKMA, Peter, 79 from NJ passed away Friday, October 9, 2009. Peter is survived by his loving wife, Tina; his son, Roy his daughter, Karin and both of their families..

RINZEMA, Jack; Home with his Lord on his 82nd birthday (10/13). Preceded in death by his wife, Bernice (Kok) of 38 years. Deeply missed by his wife, Roma (Cheadle) of 15 years, and many children, stepchildren, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Those who remember Jack and his extraordinary gift for music are invited to download a CD of him playing his favorites at: http://foreverjack.home.comcast.net.

VANDER MEULEN, James, Age 84, Denver, CO. Went to meet his Lord on October 6, 2009. Born in Friesland, Netherlands. Formerly of Grand Rapids, MI and Lansing, IL. Christian school educator for 40 years (Illiana Chr. HS, Denver Chr. HS and Middle School). Preceded in death by son Timothy and wife Helen (Fokkens). Beloved father of David (Laurel), Bruce (Patricia), Barbara (Gregory Kunce), Michael (Irene) and Gregory (all of Denver), grandfather of 7, great-grandfather of 1. Brother of Betty (John Voortman).

VANDERSLOOT, Arlis J., passed away in her home October 1, 2009. Survivors include her husband, Marv Vandersloot, daughter Vicki Longhini and son Dr Jim Vandersloot. A memorial service was held on October 15th at Calvary Church in Edina, Minnesota.

ZAAGMAN Clarence, 78, 1071 N 50 E, Chesterton, IN 46304, formerly of Maywood, IL. Husband of the late Pearl, nee Bakker. Father of Sadie (Florian) Steciuch and Clarence, Jr. (Laura) Zaagman. Grandfather of Brett (Melody) Winnell, Alexander, Lydia and Christian Steciuch, Michaela, Kenzie, Garrett and Austin Zaagman. Great-grandfather of 6. Brother of Tony and Dick Zaagman.

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> A Presidential Search Committee has been appointed to recommend the next

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Punch Lines

Azaeleah was 3 years old, she asked her dad, "Papa, was Joseph a shepherd?"

"No, honey. He was a carpenter," her dad told her.

"Oh, then Mary was a shepherd," she said.

"No, honey. I don't think she was one either."

"Yes she was," stated Azaeleah matter of factly. "Mary had a little lamb."

—Sandie Van Dyke

Chad was a new Christian and a new church member. He was eager to serve his church, so he asked his elder what he could do. The elder suggested that he be a greeter. Chad asked what that involved. The elder told him, "You know, shake hands, say 'Howdy,' introduce yourself." So Chad said, "You mean I'd be doing Howdy duty?"

—Dot Besteman

📊 he church in which my nephew and family are members was commemorating the last week of Christ's life on earth, part of their Lenten observance. They were doing a dramatization of the events of that week. My nephew helped with the production, and one of his tasks was to provide the props that were needed. His little son, Jacob, sat with his mother during the program. While the people up front were acting out the Last Supper, Jacob poked his mother and asked, "Why is Jesus washing

that man's feet in our popcorn bowl?"

—Marilyn Piebenga

second-grader came home from school and said to her grandmother, "Grandma, guess what? We learned how to make babies today."

More than a little surprised, the grandmother tried to keep her cool. "That's interesting," she said. "How do you make babies?"

"It's simple," replied the girl." You just change the y to i and add es." —George Vander Weit

An effusive lady brought a litter of golden retriever puppies to a veterinary clinic for inoculations. She loved them so much, she couldn't stop remarking about their cute habits.

As the look-alike pups squirmed over and under one another in their box, the vet realized it would be difficult to tell the treated ones from the rest. So he turned on the faucet and moistened each dog's head when he had finished.

After the fourth puppy he noticed his hitherto talkative client had grown silent. As he sprinkled the last pup's head, the woman leaned forward and whispered, "I never realized they had to be baptized."

—John Veltkamp





John Calvin takes a break from his whirlwind world tour honoring his 500th birthday. Always a lover of words, here he bests opponents Stuart and Marian Williams, who have perhaps taken John more places this year than any other CRC members. The Williamses belong to Fellowship CRC in Edmonton, Alberta.

This is an Easter story.

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