

BANNER

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¹⁸ Reading the Bible Well

³² The Empty Nest

³⁸ Got Religion?



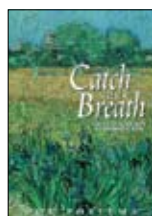
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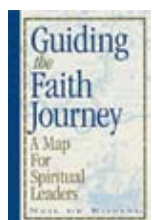
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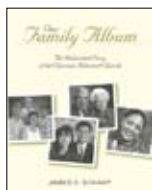
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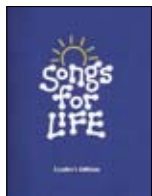


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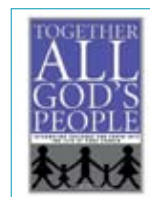
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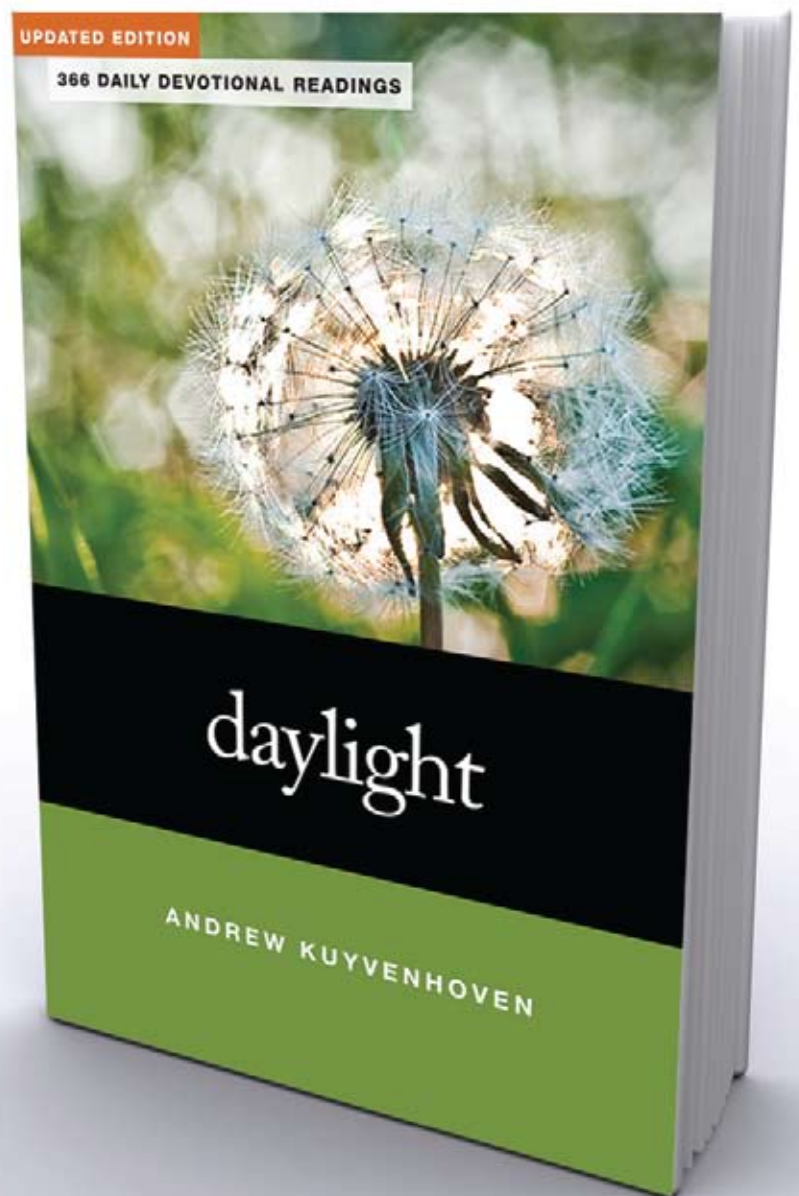
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Cover: Traditional dance is still part of community celebrations in Aceh, on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, thanks in part to one young woman who was orphaned by the 2004 tsunami and to strong community programs funded by CRWRC. See Armanisah's story, p. 22.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK VOLKERS

In the Shadow of the Almighty

A GENERATIONS-OLD NEW YEAR'S TRADITION has the De Moors reading Psalm 91 right after the clock has struck 12 and the hugs have gone around: "You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say of the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust'" (Ps. 91:1-2, NRSV).

As a child facing a new year, I found that psalm comforting. When I got older I found it strangely unreal and naïve:

- "A thousand may fall at your side . . . but it will not come near you" (v. 7).
- "No evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent" (v. 10).
- "For [God] will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways" (v. 11). Really?

As new years clicked by, I realized that our family was not immune from the horrors that struck others. In some years death *did* come near us. The scourge *did* find our tent.

I thought the devil quite right in applying this psalm directly and solely to the Messiah (Matt. 4:6). Maybe *Jesus* could expect divine intervention when hurling himself into space. But no angels caught *me* when I fell. I thought we might as well stop reading Psalm 91.

We persisted.

Finally it dawned on me that the psalmist isn't quite as naïve and Disneyesque as I'd thought:

- "Those who love me, I will deliver" (v. 14)—so we *can* get in deep doo from which God needs to deliver us!
- "I will be with them in trouble" (v. 15)—so we *can* expect enduring hardship.

I now believe Psalm 91 applies to all who find shelter under God's wings. The psalm is child-like, not childish, using images meaningful to a desert wanderer. It expresses confidence in God despite the hardships. God *will* ultimately show us salvation (v. 16)—if not now, then later.

I remember a camping trip when our two oldest kids first got to sleep in their own tent. They were *so* excited . . . until the flashlight was turned off. It was pitch dark. Fear made that

tent zipper go up and down numerous times as they scouted for bears and axe murderers.

Then their mom spoke. The thin nylon of two tents makes it *look* like there's a world of separation between children and parents. But speaking makes it clear that we're still sharing

the same space we always did. They got the regular exhortation we always gave when they couldn't sleep: "Snuggle in, look up at the ceiling, and think pleasant thoughts." A few minutes later—snoring (at least in *their* tent).

In their darkness the voice reassured them they weren't alone. That made all the difference.

In Jesus the wall between earth and heaven is now thinner than nylon. Throughout A.D. 2010 and whatever it brings, may you hear the voice of the Almighty.

A Psalm 91 New Year to each and every one of you! ■



Rev. Bob De Moor is editor of *The Banner* and pastor of preaching and administration for West End CRC, Edmonton, Alberta. See his blog at www.thebanner.org.

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Burglary in Progress



AN EPIPHANY is a burglary in progress. It is the actions of God to steal the very things we've been trying to safeguard from the grace of Jesus. Once God commits the crime and takes our goods, our lives are never the same.

I was about to be robbed.

Hector was my enemy. His family played their music until the wee hours of the morning. His sons were known gang members. Beer cans littered the sidewalk near his house like unwanted lottery tickets that failed to fulfill the promise of new fortunes.

Hector was my enemy, and I wanted God to smite him from the neighborhood—though not from the world. That would be too harsh.

If only the family would move to another street, I reasoned, I would be so grateful to God I'd make the vacant home into a park or a Dairy Queen franchise. (I like DQ.)

For five years I wanted God to get rid of Hector's family. He said no. I begged God to be more specific in his answer because I was not getting it. If I serve you, Jesus, you will reward me with a quiet street. If I preach the Word, you will provide for all of my needs—especially rid me of all my fears and frustrations. If I turn my cheek even when it's slapped, you will slap a few people around for me. Right?

For five years I waited, like Jonah sitting under his vine waiting for Nineveh to be stricken from the earth. I was set up for a burglary by God.

Hector walked over to my house and asked to talk to me. I felt uneasy, not sure what his agenda was. His face was bright. His words were measured and sincere. He asked if I would help his son by letting him work at our church to complete community service hours for a school infraction. This was the first time Hector had ever done something like this. My face relaxed. Hector extended his hand to me as a gesture of friendship. Did Corrie ten

Boom feel this way with the Nazi officer who asked for forgiveness?

"Will you help me?" Hector asked. The burglary was in progress. I could not reject an opportunity from God to give the son—and the father—a chance to begin again. I said yes.

I was set up by God's appearing in my neighbor. I needed outside help to realize my own sin. I wanted to punish my neighbor, not extend him grace as God has done for me many times over. I didn't want to give up being judge and jury of others.

But then I found myself saying, "OK, kid, show up on Monday," and I believe God is making all things new. ■



Rev. Reginald Smith is pastor of Roosevelt Park Community CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.



Christianity preaches
the unending worth
of the apparently
worthless and
the unending
worthlessness
of what is apparently
so valuable.

— DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Worship Amid the Olympics

The Olympics do not come free of serious injustice.



PHOTO BY DALE SIMONSON

ON SUNDAY MORNINGS the community of First Christian Reformed Church, Vancouver, gathers to worship the triune God, Creator and Redeemer of all that is. We stop from our work to direct praise to the ascended Lord.

In this new year, our worship will take place during the Vancouver Winter Olympics. As the media have continually reminded us, the Olympics are coming to Vancouver—traffic will be redirected, parties will be hosted, games will be played, medals will be won and lost.

In the words of the International Olympic Committee, a “unique and inspiring” two weeks await us in February. More than just unique and inspiring, however—the Olympics hope to do no less than “build a peaceful and better world through sport.”

Do weekly worship and the upcoming Olympics have anything to do with one another? Can we participate in one without questioning our participation in the other?

I’m not going to exhaustively list all the problems that come with hosting

the Olympic Games. Others have done that much better than I can, with more force and poetry than I can muster. Yet it seems to me that any event that requires the destruction of a significant amount of wilderness between Vancouver and Whistler, British Columbia, and that requires millions of dollars worth of security in a city that can barely scrape together enough money to house its own residents, may be justifiably questioned.

Other issues could be raised as well: use of native land, the passing of legislation that borders closely on infringement of basic civil liberties, corporate greed, and irresponsible spending on infrastructure, to name a few.

Those of us who call Vancouver home, subject as we are to almost-weekly reports of minor deceptions and major mis-spending, are justifiably wary about the upcoming Games.

All of this is not to say that watching Olympic events or attending festivities in the city is to be denounced on all counts. But the Olympics do not come free of serious injustice.

A question worth asking, then, is whether our worship informs our life in the world in such a way that we can engage the Olympics properly, or—to use a more theologically appropriate term—faithfully.

I think that worship does inform our engagement with events like the Olympics.

Continued on p. 39 »



Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning is studying toward an M.Div. at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia. He is a member of First CRC, Vancouver.



Too Busy?

How sad when we get caught in the commercial busyness trap of Christmas (“Sooooo Busy!” December 2009). In the church I pastor, we declare each year that December is a “fallow month.” We hold no meetings or churchwide programs except the normal Sunday worship services (and we plan those services with a minimum of busyness). We instead encourage people to use the time to invite friends and family into their homes and to attend parties and other celebrations of the season with those they love. We also suggest that they spend much time alone with God. I am always surprised by the resistance we receive from those who demand busyness as a way of avoiding sweet intimacy with God and with each other. I also see and enjoy the benefits of a wonderfully rested and refreshed congregation at the beginning of each new year.

—Rod Hugen
The Village
Tucson, Ariz.

Watch Your Language

While the point of parents and grandparents desiring to see a commitment in their children and grandchildren to embrace their faith is wonderful, the embellishments in “The Nightmare of Christmas” story (December 2009) are

LETTERS

embarrassing. Have *The Banner* and James Schaap stooped to the level of Hollywood that you feel the need to add sex and foul language to reach a broader audience? Shame on you both.

—Pat Hansma
Drayton, Ontario

Justice for Cuba

Regarding “CRC Advocates for Travel to Cuba” (December 2009) and the CRC’s continued lobbying for an end to the U.S. government embargo that it calls “an injustice that causes suffering for the very weakest people,” I would like you to have the opportunity to stay in just one of the many foreign-owned hotels in Cuba.

As a guest there you would have access to cars and all of the food and technology you find at home. How can that be if there is an embargo? It is because the Cuban government trades with all the world, even in a limited amount with the United States.

The Cuban people face hardship and lack what North Americans take for granted, but please don’t blame that on the U.S. embargo! The hardships of the Cuban people are caused by the repressive Cuban government.

—Armando Perez
South Kendall Community Church CRC
Miami, Fla.

Peacemaking

I appreciated November’s “The Suffering of Iraqi Christians” and December’s “May There Be Peace.” They instruct our denomination about what is happening in the Middle East.

Both articles ended similarly: “Pray for our brothers and sisters in Iraq” and “Pray for peace in Bethlehem.” There is no call for action in either article other than prayer?

I continue to pray for the day when the CRC will take an active peacemaking

role; just praying has not made peace happen. The U.S. invaded Iraq, creating the mess described in the November article. U.S. Christians are also culpable for the lack of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. I do realize there are numerous active peacemakers in our denomination, but I again challenge the CRC to become a peacemaker. Lead us into action, as would the Good Shepherd.

—Neal Bierling
Ada, Mich.

Pub Theology

In the spirit of unity and fellowship, we’d like to express our concern with “Theological Points and Pints” in the November *Banner*. Alcohol can be a stumbling block for many. Families have lost loved ones to alcoholism and to accidents due to drunk driving. In consideration, then, of members of our denomination who do not condone the use of alcohol, more discretion would be advised when considering the printing of articles such as these.

—The Consistory
First Christian Reformed Church
DeMotte, Ind.

Finding God Outside Church

Please be careful of the words you use. Talking about “leaving the church” or “Finding God Outside Church” (November 2009) is dangerous language. What you and the Mosleys mean is that the church exists even where there is no brick-and-mortar building. So what the Mosleys really discovered was not how to leave the church, but rather how to become a part of it. It turns out the church is not just a place “where you expect to find friends,” but rather a community “transformed by the Word of God [that reaches] out to those who are struggling.”

—Matt Viel
Edgerton, Minn.

Academic Freedom

I cannot understand why the Calvin College faculty has a problem with a statement of its board that’s based on a clear stand of the Christian Reformed Church regarding homosexuality (“Calvin Faculty Wants Homosexuality Statement Withdrawn,” November 2009).

The board’s statement said, in part, that advocacy by faculty and staff, both in and out of the classroom, for homosexual practice and same-sex marriage is unacceptable. How can we argue with that statement? I want to thank the board for it. What bothers me is the reply by a faculty member that “the issue is understanding how an academic community works, and it is one in which difficult topics are talked about, and wholesale bans are not helpful and don’t work in an academic context” (“Calvin College Memo About Homosexuality Draws Fire,” October 2009). Does that mean the official stand of the CRC on moral issues does not apply to the academic community?

—Hans Visser
Taber, Alberta

Corrections

Rather than being “released from CRC ministry” (“News from Fall Classis Meetings,” December 2009), Revs. Richard Jones, Rich Kim, and Tim Kwon were welcomed by Classis Greater Los Angeles into the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the Christian Reformed Church via Article 8 (ministers from other denominations).

A pie chart on page 33 of the 2009 Annual Ministry Report (December) showed an incorrect balance between spending on support services and program services. It should have indicated that 89 percent of CRWRC’s spending goes toward program services and 11 percent for support services.

The Banner apologizes for the errors.

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Canadian Christians Look for Euthanasia Alternatives

As legislation to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide makes its way through the Canadian Parliament, the Christian Reformed Church's Disability Concerns ministry issued an action alert asking church members to contact their Members of Parliament (M.P.).

"[The legislation] poses danger to people with disabilities," explained Rev. Mark Stephenson, the director of that ministry.

M.P. Francine Lalonde introduced a bill called the Right to Die with Dignity Act, seeking to amend Canada's criminal code to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide.



According to the action alert, the bill contains appealing notions such as dignity and relief from suffering, "making euthanasia seem like an act of compassion. Without measurable standards, the most vulnerable in society, including some people with disabilities, are left without protection," explained Catherine Cooper from the Christian Reformed

Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action, who prepared the alert.

Conservative M.P. David Sweet spoke to this, saying, "at best this bill can be called irresponsible. Wouldn't we be better off as a society discussing how to comfort those in pain, to support the families that are struggling with caring for a terminally ill family member, or how we can better

CRWRC Faces Rare Funding Shortfall

Things are tough all over. That old adage is certainly true today as most people feel the effects of a depressed economy.

But the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee wants to remind donors that the people who were already in a tight spot during good economic times are the ones really getting squeezed now.

People already plagued by chronic disasters, AIDS, and rising food prices are even more desperate, wondering how they will feed their families each day.

Donations to CRWRC, the CRC's relief and development agency, are running about \$1.8 million behind what was conservatively budgeted for this fiscal year. (CRWRC receives no regular funding from churches through ministry shares, only donations.)

That shortfall means that aid to some of the world's poorest people will have to be cut.

And because CRWRC leverages most of its money by partnering with governments and other organizations, a shortfall of \$2 million results in an actual loss of double or even triple that amount in programming, affecting millions of lives.

Andrew Ryskamp, CRWRC's U.S. director, said that income has been sliding for the past year as the economy sank, but the organization has been able to maintain core programming by delaying any new programs, using reserves, freezing salaries, and cutting pensions and benefits of employees. But even with all those cuts, donations are still coming up short.

CRWRC has posted a rare plea to donors on its website (www.crwrc.org) and sent a letter to Christian Reformed churches.

Ryskamp said he and CRWRC Canada director Ida Mutoigo resisted publishing such a letter for as long as possible.

"We had to let people know we are adjusting to these realities," he said. "We want people to be aware of what the reality is, and if they are in a place to help, that's wonderful, but we also understand these economic times are difficult."

—Gayla R. Postma

support the valiant efforts of nurses and doctors who are providing hospice care across this country?"

Hon. John McKay, a Liberal M.P. and an evangelical Christian, agreed, stating that "there will be mistakes made—society's mistakes. We should be extraordinarily leery of Bill C-384, but the larger issue really is that we don't think maturely about the end of life. We may be prematurely terminating lives when there really are other issues at hand."

According to the action alert, the CRC is clear in its position on the subject of euthanasia and assisted suicide, affirming that "life is both a gift and a commitment, even in times of great suffering. The role of the church is to reach out to those for whom the gift of life has become a burden, to show the compassion of Christ in those times, and to link hands as a community with the suffering and dying."

(The Christian Reformed Church has made no formal statement on euthanasia. However a report on end-of-life issues presented to Synod 2000 was referred to the churches as pastoral advice. The report can be found in the *Agenda* for Synod 2000, available on the denomination's website at www.crcna.org/pages/synodical.cfm.)

Mike Hogeterp, Research and Communications Manager for the Committee for Contact with the Government for the CRC in Canada explained, "CCG has seen great value in encouraging legislators to consider alternatives in debates like this. And the CRC does just that by emphasizing responsibility and community at the end of life, (i.e. a strong commitment to palliative care)."

—Rachel deKoning Kraay



First Lt. Pete Woreck received more than 29 boxes of school supplies for Afghan children.

Wisconsin Church Aids Afghanistan

First Lt. Pete Woreck never doubted that his hometown friends and family in Randolph, Wis., would respond in a big way to his request for school supplies for Afghan children.

"I knew the Randolph community would come through. I live in a wonderful, caring community," he said.

Woreck, an Army Reservist stationed in Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, and in civilian life a social studies teacher at Beaver Dam High School, believes education has the power to change lives for the better.

After seeing the plight of the children in Kandahar Province firsthand, Woreck decided to ask his supporters to send school supplies rather than care packages for himself. The resulting effort became known as "Operation Randolph Cares."

Woreck was also inspired by Colonel Haji Toor Jan, who started a School Supplies Project for Afghanistan in 2002. Toor Jan

started using a weapon at age 13 and has sustained 16 gunshot wounds in his lifetime. He has said that "if I had been given a pencil instead of a weapon, my life would have been much different."

Members of Woreck's church, Second Christian Reformed Church; friends and family from around the country; and many others in the Randolph community, including Randolph Christian School; collected more than 1,000 pounds of school supplies.

Woreck's deployment ends in January 2010, and he looks forward to returning home to his wife, Jaime, and their three young children. When he leaves Afghanistan, he hopes some children there will now be encouraged to pick up a pencil instead of a weapon.

—Doug Evenhouse

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Arthur Pontier

1918-2009

Rev. Arthur Pontier, 90, decorated World War II veteran, able pastor, effective Bible teacher, and student of history, passed away from causes associated with advanced age.

Pontier grew up in Passaic, N.J., and joined the U.S. Army during WW II. He participated in the Normandy invasion and other battles. Promoted to first lieutenant, he was awarded the Bronze Star medal for heroic service.

After the war, Pontier studied for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church, graduating from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1952.

He served churches in Ohio, New York, Iowa, and Michigan, retiring in 1981.

Pontier was a man of considerable gifts, publishing study resources on public worship and the Heidelberg Catechism. Gifted with a fine voice, he loved to sing. During his last pastoral charge in Michigan, he was instrumental in founding Potter's House Christian School.

Pontier was preceded in death by his wife, Jessie, and one daughter. He is survived by his son and daughter-in-law, five grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

—Louis M. Tamminga

For more on the life and ministry of Rev. Pontier, 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.

CALLS ACCEPTED

Candidate **Paul Birnbaum** to La Glace (Alta.) CRC.

Rev. Doug Nieuwstraten of Ebenezer Reformed Church, Stoney Creek, Ontario, to Community CRC, Richmond Hill.

Candidate **Jonathan Spronk** to Austinville (Iowa) CRC.

Candidate **Paul Van Stralen** to Edson-Peers (Alta.) CRC.

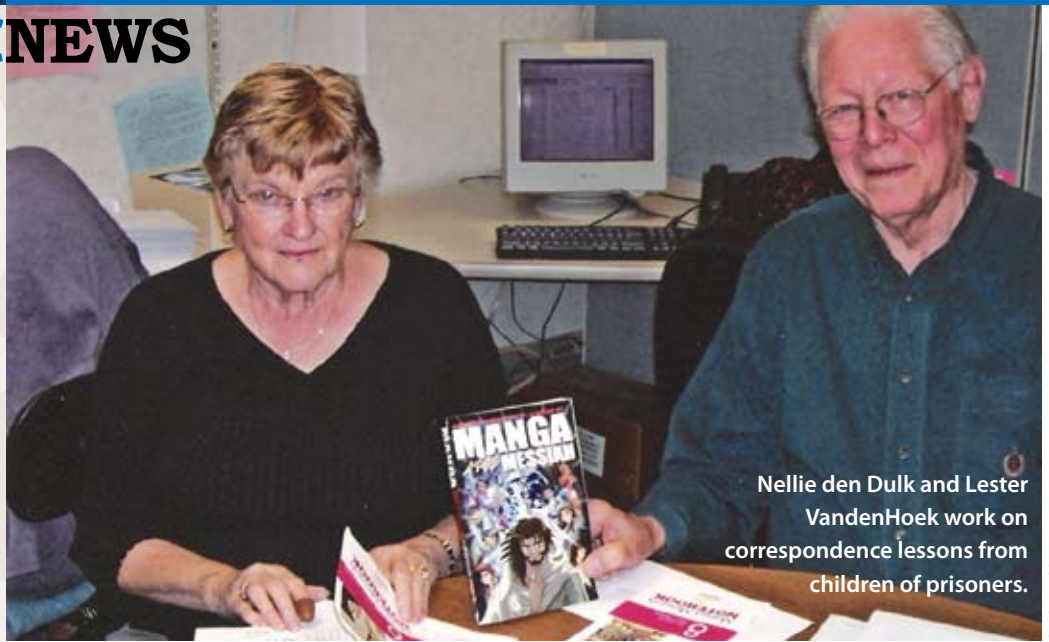
Ken Vis of First CRC, Taber, Alberta, to Covenant CRC, Edmonton, as Pastor of Education and Development (Ministry Associate).

Candidate **Timothy Wood** to Fellowship CRC, Edmonton, Alberta, to serve as chaplain at The King's University College, Edmonton.

Banner News Writer Needed

The Banner is looking for a news correspondent to cover Classes Arizona and Red Mesa and write about Christian Reformed people and activities of interest to our readers. We especially welcome writers from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

All expressions of interest should be sent via e-mail only (no phone calls, please) to Gayla Postma, news editor, at gpostma@crcna.org.



Nellie den Dulk and Lester VandenHoek work on correspondence lessons from children of prisoners.

CAROLYN YOST

Bible Lessons for Prisoners' Children

Children of prison inmates are learning about God through new cartoon-style correspondence Bible lessons from Crossroad Bible Institute (CBI) in Grandville, Mich.

CBI, headed by Christian Reformed minister Rev. David Schuringa, recently launched a children's program called "Manga Messiah," a gospel-based course with learning games and collecting cards that also builds literacy skills. Manga, from the Japanese word for "comics," is a popular comic book illustration style.

CBI has offered reentry-friendly courses to imprisoned men and women for 25 years, relying on 5,000 volunteers to check lessons and write enrollees a personal letter. About half the volunteers are Christian Reformed.

Incarcerated parents in CBI's adult program yearn for their children's spiritual well-being, said volunteer instructor Florence Dahnke, who attends Lafayette, Ind., Christian Reformed Church. "Prisoners ask for lessons for their children.

One prisoner wrote, 'I want my daughter to know about Jesus.'"

Schuringa emphasized the critical nature of reaching inmates' children. "They are at risk for school truancy, educational difficulty, drug and alcohol abuse, and delinquency," he said. "For years we have had people asking for something for prisoners' children. It kept coming up."

Volunteer Karen Vandenbrink from Calvin CRC in Holland, Mich., praises the course. "I'm thrilled with the depth and practicality of what they are learning." One child wrote, "How did you find out about me?" Vandenbrink replied, "God planned that I would get your lesson."

—Carolyn Koster Yost

Staff Remain on Alert in Guinea, Honduras

After time to monitor the situation, the Christian Reformed Church's crisis management team has downgraded the risk warnings for both Honduras and Guinea. However, staff in those countries remain alert to possible dangers.

CRC staff members in both countries were put on alert and under restricted travel in recent months due to political upheaval (see *Banner News*, November and December 2009).

In Guinea, in-country travel restrictions for staff have been eased, but staff must still take more precautions than normal, said Ron Geerlings of Christian Reformed World Missions. Restrictions for non-staff and non-essential travel to Guinea remain in effect.

In Honduras, violence continued in the lead-up to the national elections at the end of November. Staff there were advised to stock up on supplies in the event of possible disruption of essential services.

The CRC asked volunteer groups and work teams to consider postponing travel to that country until after the elections.

—Gayla R. Postma

Dordt College Receives \$3.9 Million Gift

Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, has received an estate gift worth nearly \$4 million.

It comes from Lowell Andreas, former president of Archer Daniels Midland, a company that processes agricultural products. Andreas died April 4 at the age of 87.

The \$3.98 million gift is the largest in the college's history. President Carl Zylstra remarked, "This generous gift from his estate will help grow Dordt College as an international leader in the field of Reformed Christian education."

In recent years Andreas had already donated more than half a million dollars to Dordt College, funds which established the Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service in 2008.

—Dordt College



PHOTO CREDIT: WILMA MOL

Ontario Harvest Feeds World's Hungry
Farmers from Christian Reformed churches in Thunder Bay, Ontario, banded together with other local farmers to grow a field of barley that will help people in need of food aid. The farmers grew 45 acres of barley on donated land with donated seed, time, and equipment. Worth \$11,000, the barley was sold and the money given to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, where it was matched 4 to 1 by the Canadian government, resulting in \$55,000 of actual funding to help feed hungry people.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Jack Van Dyken, Sr.
1918-2009

Rev. Jack Van Dyken, Sr., 90, a much-decorated military chaplain, Viet Nam veteran, church planter, and joyful Christian, passed away on January 9, 2009, from failing health in Portage, Mich.

Van Dyken served two Reformed Church in America congregations in Michigan during the 1950s.

From 1961-1978, Van Dyken served as a chaplain in the U.S. Army, achieving the rank of colonel. While in Viet Nam, he served not only U.S. armed forces personnel, but also the Mutyards, a tribal people nearby.

Van Dyken then settled in Ripon, Calif., planting the Almond Valley Christian Reformed Church. He served that congregation until his retirement in 1984, and remained active in various ministerial activities well into his eighties.

Van Dyken was a gifted preacher and teacher. His children remember him as a loving, adventurous man. They have many sweet memories of family travel.

Van Dyken was preceded in death by his wife, Henrietta, and is survived by six children and their spouses as well as several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

—Louis M. Tamminga



ROSE HUTTEN

Kentville, Nova Scotia's Common Grounds Coffee House attracts a diverse group of people.

Nova Scotia Coffee House Finds Common Ground(s)

Coffee, music, and talent combined for an evening of casual outreach and worship at the Kentville (Nova Scotia) Christian Reformed Church.

The event, called Common Grounds Coffee House, included

a performance by Chelsea Nisbett, the winner of the 2008 Gospel Recording of the Year in the prestigious East Coast Music Awards. An earlier coffee house featured Don Amero, a nominee for the Aboriginal Peoples Choice Awards.

A large volunteer effort went into planning the event. Kids were involved and given space to sing,

dance, and play. For others, sofas, tables, and chairs provided a place to relax and chat. Soft lighting helped enhance the mood.

Rev. Mike Veenema said, "We are gradually learning to be more confident and effective in speaking to the community in which God has placed us."

Attracting a diverse group of people, the atmosphere of the coffee house was one of comradeship and enjoyment. Jackie VanderTuin, a member of the church, said that the event exceeded her expectations, and that she is looking forward to future coffee houses.

"My family, who do not attend church at all and question God's existence, came and are looking forward to more events," she said. "This is a prime example of where God is working outside of the traditional church walls."

—Brenda Visser

Befriending Bethlehem Believers

Three dozen adults from Christian Reformed churches across North America traveled to the West Bank in Palestine this past summer to encourage Christians there.

Led by Bart and Pat DenBoer of Calvary CRC in Holland, Mich., and Jeff and Karen Blamer from Third CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich., group members hailed from British Columbia, Ontario, Washington, California, Ohio, Iowa, and Michigan.

They served alongside believers in Bethlehem, working at a refugee camp, helping local farmers, assisting at medical clinics, and more. They also worshiped with Palestinian Christians.

Marcel DeRegt, youth pastor at Cornerstone CRC in Chilliwack, British Columbia, said the trip, organized by IDEA Ministries, changed his mental image of the area. "It took all my childhood



PAT DENBOER

Dining with a Palestinian Christian host family are Doug Depies from Milwaukee, Wisc., Karen and Jeff Blamer from Kalamazoo, Mich., and Bart DenBoer from Holland, Mich.

imagery of Bible stories and shattered it—the trip rebuilt the stories," he said.

Pat DenBoer said she now has a greater understanding of the culture and geography of what used to be "just names" in the Bible.

Jeff Blamer recalled watching a farmer in the West Bank being

squeezed out by Israeli settlements. "It was heart-wrenching," he said.

"The very presence of other Christian believers from around the world encourages these Palestinian believers," said Bart DenBoer.

—Karen Gorter

The Banner on Facebook and Twitter

- If you are a Facebook user, join the *Banner* community at www.facebook.com/crcbanner. For *Banner* news on Facebook, go to <http://tinyurl.com/ygg3joj>.
- On Twitter you can follow us at "crcbanner."
- While you're online, don't forget to check out *Banner* editor Bob De Moor's blog! Visit www.thebanner.org for a link.

Iowa Church Feeds Starving Children

For the second year in a row, Trinity Christian Reformed Church of Rock Valley, Iowa, bought and packaged meals for the Feed My Starving Children organization.

Brenda Beernink and other members of the church's outreach team had seen photos of starving children in magazines and television commercials, but they wanted their effort to be an outreach to their own community.

So members of the outreach team fanned out, inviting



(l-r) Chloe Koedam, Brady Faber, Clay Van Tol, Nicholas Kooima, and Melinda Faber helped package meals for starving children.

churches, schools, community clubs, and nearby Western Christian High School to participate.

Collection jugs were distributed throughout the small town. Rock Valley Christian School's eighth graders grew \$200 of "seed money" into \$5,500 for the project.

Together, the groups raised enough money to provide 125,000 meal packets, which consist of a mixture of rice, soy, vegetables, and a vitamin and mineral vegetarian chicken flavoring mix. A single bag provides one meal for six children for one dollar.

Volunteers did the packaging over a period of three days. "People throughout the community came," said Rev. Mark Beernink, Trinity's church life pastor. "If I walked in there on a given afternoon when they were packaging, I probably didn't know fifty percent of the people," he said. "It was an intergenerational ministry; it said we're kind of all in this together," said Beernink.

"It's such an easy way to do hands-on," said Brenda Beernink. "When everyone chips in it is amazing what you can do," she said.

—Sherry Kooiker



Elise Van Pelt raised money to buy bicycles for missionaries in Asia.

Colorado Girl Helps Put Missionaries on Wheels

Elise Van Pelt, 8, earned \$50 doing chores and wanted to put it to God's use. Could she buy Bibles for the homeless? Her mom got on the internet and did some research.

In the end, they settled on a program called "Push the Pedal," a ministry through Gospel for Asia that buys bicycles for indigenous missionaries.

Elise asked her pastor, Rev. Richard Ebbers of The Journey Christian Reformed Church in Longmont, Colo., if she could share her desire to raise money for "Push the Pedal" with the congregation. She was allowed to ride her bike to the front of the church and tell the congregation about the program.

The church's children spent five weeks learning more about "Push the Pedal" and about what God is doing in Asia. They learned that in one day, a missionary with a bike can reach many villages with the gospel, but without a bike might reach only one.

They had a penny competition between the boys and girls to raise money, and Elise's bike sat in the church lobby so the adults could place donations in the bicycle basket. Altogether they collected \$880—enough for eight bicycles.

—Alice Durfee

Michigan Church Celebrates 125 Years

New Era (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church celebrated its 125th anniversary in late summer of 2009.

Five former pastors, along with members from the New Era congregation who have become pastors, spoke to the 300 who were in attendance. "It was wonderful to hear the voices of the old pastors," said member Janis Pickard.

Following the celebration service, a dinner was served at the nearby school with cakes made by a former pastor's wife.

A video showed an overview of the years since the church was founded as well as a skit performed at the church's 100th anniversary celebration.

—Karen Gorter



CHRIS DANIEL

Making Restitution in Oregon

Inmates at a correctional facility near Portland, Ore., helped make restitution when they contributed to opening a men's homeless shelter in the same community where one of them committed his crime.

The seven young men are inmates at Hillcrest Youth Correctional Facility who were baptized recently. Each said their lives were a dead-end street until they met Jesus, according to Rev. Virgil Michael, pastor of Christ Community Christian Reformed Church near Portland.

Sam Stukey, a member of Christ Community, is one of the volunteers who has spent five years discipling an inmate. That inmate has been discipling other youths, leading to the baptisms.

When the men were looking for a way to give back, Michael pointed them to the new Jubilee Transition Home for homeless men in Tigard, Ore.

The young men pledged money from their prison accounts and will ask neighboring churches to match their gifts. They have asked to have their pictures and testimonies posted on a bulletin board in the new home. They also want to correspond with the homeless men.

The location of the new home drew the inmates to support this project. The leader of the group said in a letter to Michael, "On a personal level, Tigard is where I committed the crime that put me here, so I feel like this is maybe an opportunity for me to pay some restitution and give back to that community."

—Evangeline Magee DeMaster

Seattle Coffeehouse Reopens After Fire

After an arsonist destroyed Seattle's popular Green Bean coffeehouse on October 23, it reopened in a new temporary location at the end of November.

The Green Bean is run by Sanctuary Christian Reformed Church in Seattle and is supported by Christian Reformed Home Missions (see *Banner*, Nov. 2009). It has a temporary spot in another coffee business, where it will remain for six months.

Meanwhile, Rev. Randy Rowland, pastor of Sanctuary CRC, said he and other Green Bean staff have planned a visit to the incarcerated arsonist, who has admitted to setting the fire. The suspect has also claimed to have started some of the 68 fires set around the area in the past two years. "We will go to jail to visit him, and ask him how we can pray for him," Rowland said.

The church's meeting place was also heavily damaged in the fire, but worship has been continued in a nearby space.

Over the next six months, Rowland and a six-person taskforce will be evaluating permanent sites, including other coffeehouse spaces, and will be looking at resources required for the possible purchase of a new space.

—Ben Van Houten

Fellowship and Mentoring for Special-Needs Teens

While coordinating a service trip for her son and others with special needs back in 2005, Donna Bunce, a member of Haven Christian Reformed Church in Zeeland, Mich., recognized a desire for teens and young adults with special needs to connect with peers and mentors.

Bunce's compassion and initiative led to the founding of Compassionate Heart Ministry, which opened its doors in early 2007. Compassionate Heart Ministry enables those with special needs to socialize with peers and gain encouragement from mentors while growing in the knowledge of Christ.

The majority of the students, Bunce said, have cognitive impairments, but some have physical

disabilities. She added, "We try to make it inclusive to anyone with a disability."

Activities for mentors and their students include students attending basketball and hockey games as well as parades in the summer months. During school months, playing Wii, PlayStation, pool, foosball, and air hockey are favorites.

Today the ministry has two staff members, 25 mentors, and 75 students. It is housed at City on a Hill, a complex in Zeeland, Mich., that provides space for non-profit organizations.

Mentors must be 16 years of age, love those with special needs, and love God.



DONNA BUNCE

Courtney Bunce (left) and Courtney Scheuerman enjoy connecting at Compassionate Heart Ministry.

Amy Hoekstra, a member of Calvary CRC in Holland, Mich., sustained a brain injury as a result of cancer treatment. Stephanie Hoekstra, Amy's mom, laughingly describes Amy as a "charter member" at Compassionate Heart.

Amy's mom reflected on the ministry. "It's not what it did for us, but what it does for Amy."

—Karen Gorter

Cobourg Church Recovers from Break-in

When the secretary of Grace Christian Reformed Church of Cobourg, Ontario, arrived at church on Friday, November 13, she was in for a surprise.

Parking at the back of the church, she noticed broken windows as well as muddy ruts in the lawn where a large vehicle had apparently sped out.

Police investigation discovered smashed windows in all classroom doors. The pastor's office door was kicked in, and the filing cabinet had been rifled through. In the sanctuary, the soundboard, speakers, and recording devices had been stolen. The PowerPoint projector and microphones were left untouched.

No money was kept on the premises, but Christmas care parcels that the congregation had been putting together for Montreal's Seaway Ministry were ransacked.

There are no suspects in the break-in. Insurance will cover damages, and the church is currently obtaining quotes on an alarm system. —Brenda Visser

Using YouTube to Spread the Word

A Florida church began creating its own discipleship videos to reach members who are too busy—or otherwise unable—to attend Bible studies.

Now, thanks to YouTube, those videos are finding a worldwide audience.

"We've had a significant amount of views outside the U.S., like Germany, the Netherlands, and Saudi Arabia," said Aaron Mamuyac, who creates and films the videos for Sunlight Community Christian Reformed Church in Port St. Lucie, Fla.

So far, the church has filmed three videos based on the Belgic Confession addressing general and special revelation and intelligent design, and a

fourth video called "Four Reasons God Wants Us to Tithe."

The videos are filmed in a creative, engaging manner designed to "introduce concepts in a fresh way," Mamuyac said.

In addition to YouTube, the videos are posted on the church's discipleship website at www.sunchurch.tv, along with recorded sermons and Bible studies.

The church plans to continue creating discipleship videos, about one each month. Upcoming videos will explain Reformed systematic theology, according to Rev. Scott Vander Ploeg. "It would be fantastic if other churches start to use them," he said.

Vander Ploeg says he has no way to tell why there are so many YouTube viewers from Saudi Arabia, a country closed to missionaries, but he is thrilled by that fact. Some Saudis have even subscribed to the church's videos, meaning that they are notified whenever the church posts a new video.

"The videos generate feedback from non-Christians too, so they're obviously generating a diverse audience," said Lauren Lynch, Sunlight's communications director.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Rev. Scott Vander Ploeg's teaching videos find a worldwide audience on YouTube.

FAQS

Finances

Q This economy is choking the life out of us. Can you share any insights about how we can approach our finances from a spiritual perspective?

A In an article titled “A Surefire Investment” in *Christianity Today* magazine (January 2009), Christian author Philip Yancey shared that in one of the most turbulent weeks of our current financial challenges, an editor at *Time* magazine called him and asked, “How should a person pray during a crisis like this?” Three compelling insights emerged in that conversation:

1. *Pray.* Yancey explains that when we face major challenges in our lives, we tend to cry out for help. Prayer gives voice to these fears and worries.
2. *Meditate.* Yancey observes that times of uncertainty provide an opportunity to evaluate what we truly put our faith in. He advises not only talking but listening in our prayers, asking God to show us what he wants us to learn from the current economic challenges we face.
3. *Have compassion for others.* This is perhaps the most difficult—taking our eyes off our own financial worries and looking with compassion on the staggering needs of others. Yancey concludes with a surprising challenge: “What a testimony it would be if . . . Christians resolved to increase their giving to build houses for the poor, combat AIDS in Africa, and announce kingdom values to a decadent, celebrity-driven culture. Such a response defies all logic and common sense.”

Bottom line: God is using the financial challenges we’re facing to remind us that he is near and that he longs for us to seek him and draw closer to him.

—Mike Buwalda

Mike Buwalda (mike@barnabasfoundation.com) is a stewardship consultant to the Barnabas Foundation.

Health

Q I have recently been diagnosed with arthritis in my knees. Please give me some information on joint problems.

A The most likely kind of arthritis you have is *osteoarthritis*. It is the “wear and tear” problem that affects the cartilage in the joint as well as the ligaments, muscles, joint lining, and other structures around the joint.

The causes are a previous injury, obesity, and overuse, and it is more common in females and older age groups. There is also a probable genetic factor that hasn’t been completely worked out yet.

God is using the financial challenges we’re facing to remind us that he is near.

Features that suggest the diagnosis are pain, stiffness, reduced range of movement, swelling, and sometimes a grating sound in the joint. Most often the diagnosis lies in taking a medical history and X-rays of the affected joint.

There are a variety of treatments for osteoarthritis:

- Non-pharmacological—weight loss, exercise, physiotherapy, braces and/or orthotics.
- Pharmacological—anti-inflammatory drugs, acetaminophen (Tylenol), and sometimes narcotics. Glucosamine and chondroitin are of questionable benefit.
- Surgery—arthroscopy (putting a scope into the joint) to remove any loose or unstable tissue, or joint replacement.

The aim of these treatments is to control pain, improve function, and limit the progression of the arthritis.

This is a good reminder to make access to our church buildings friendly to the physically handicapped, especially entrances, bathrooms, and the sanctuary.

—Herman Borkent

Dr. Herman Borkent practices medicine at Misericordia Hospital in Edmonton, Alberta.

Culture

Q As a young person, how do I negotiate my religious life, trusting my own instincts over what my parents want for me?

A When you separate from your parents, you will need to determine what being a Christian means for you. If you make a choice unlike your parents’ choice, it will be a hard moment, most likely, for them. If you give up their religious culture, they may feel that you’re giving them up, so please be gentle with them.

If the traditional worship and church of your parents no longer stirs your spirit and keeps you close to the knowledge and experience of God, it may be time for a change.

Consider, though, a way to remain connected with your tradition within a changing culture. If there is a church plant in town (a new church, often one that “does church” differently, started by your denomination), attend there and see if it is a place where God can use you. Being part of a vibrant God- and Bible-believing community is a very good thing.

If, though, you finally believe your parents’ faith traditions and your parents’ church do not bring you closer to God, be open with them and caring about the pain they may feel when you leave.

If you leave to go to another Christian church, I hope your parents will be glad and will support you. After all, no denomination “owns” God.

—Helen Sterk

Dr. Helen Sterk is chair of communication arts and sciences at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich. ■

BY AMINAH AL-ATTAS BRADFORD AND MARY HULST

Reading the Bible WELL



LAST WEEK a colleague walked into one of our offices and asked, “Just how important is reading the Bible?” The response: “That all depends on just how much you hope to be transformed!”

We also told our colleague that for transformation to happen, she would need to read the Bible *well*. The idea of “reading the Bible well” led to a longer conversation about biblical interpretation and the Reformed approach to it.

Our colleague, however, came with an inherent mistrust of the idea that Scripture needed interpretation. “I don’t need to work to interpret the Bible,” she said. “I just read it literally and do what it says.”

The conversation then turned to the wisdom of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Data, one of the show’s characters, is a product of artificial intelligence who has no emotions. Data never laughs at any of the jokes told on the Starship Enterprise because he can only interpret literally. Because of his literal approach to everything, Data doesn’t understand humor, he can’t pick up on innuendo or idioms, and he often misses the point of an encounter altogether. Sometimes, we pointed out, a literal interpretation actually leads to the wrong interpretation, or *away* from the truth.

Having convinced our colleague that good interpretation of the Bible is indeed necessary, our conversation then turned to how to read the Bible well. We noted two realities: first, the books of the Bible were written in particular times and places, and second, those books represent a variety of literary genres.

Too often we ask the Bible to be something **IT IS NOT.**

Bridging the Historical Gap

The books in the Bible are from particular times and places, and some of those times were more than 3,500 years ago. This does not mean the Bible isn’t relevant. The Bible reveals truth entirely relevant to our lives today. But that truth

comes to us embodied in historical and cultural situations.

God used human words in human history to give us eternal truths. So if we want to know what a text means today, we first have to do our best to figure out what it meant for readers then.

Think about Paul’s warning to women against wearing braided hair (1 Tim. 2:9). Was his point to forbid braids, pigtails, and dreadlocks for millennia to come? No. His point was that in that specific time and place, braids signified a wealthy status that should not be paraded in church. The timeless truth that Christians shouldn’t flaunt their wealth during worship is embodied in a historical particularity. Figuring out what Paul’s words meant for first century Christians helps us figure out what it means for us now.

Bridging this historical gap between the Bible then and now means asking good questions about the historical and cultural context of the passage in question. Questions like these:

- When was it written?
- What was going on in the world then?
- Who was doing the writing?
- To whom were they writing?

The easiest way to get at this kind of information is to find a good study Bible that includes it at the start of each book. Investing in a good “Introduction to the Bible” textbook or Bible dictionary and referring to it as you read can also help you find the answers to these questions.

Answering historical context questions gets you closer to knowing what the text might have meant to its earliest audience and thus what it means for us today.

As we read, it’s helpful to remember that the Scriptures are perfect in every way God needs them to be. So while some of the historical particularities might forever be lost on modern readers, we can take heart that God in his sovereignty chose to reveal his story to us this way.

The fact that mystery and questions are forever part of reading the Bible is not the result of Yahweh goofing up.

That may be what Gregory of Nyssa was getting at when he wrote, “Concepts create idols, only wonder understands.” The Bible is less concerned with giving us airtight arguments than with provoking worship and transformation through our reading. It’s true that without addressing a bit of the Bible’s historical context, you are unlikely to interpret it well. But at the same time remember that any mystery you’re left with is not a mistake but an invitation.

Pick a Genre

Beyond the matter of historical context, we also need to read the Bible in light of the fact that it is a collection of books written in many different genres. If the Bible were written only in propositional statements, literal interpretation would serve just fine. But God brings us his truth through any number of genres such as poetry, song, law, letters, and narrative—which means we have to learn how to interpret according to what kind of literature we are reading.

A proverb, for example, is different from a promise. “Train up children in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6) is a guide, not a guarantee. A poem stating that God “shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble” (Job 9:6) isn’t meant for a geological textbook. And reading an epistle is reading someone else’s mail without having the full set of back-and-forth correspondence in front of you—“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord” (Phil. 4:2). Remembering to ask yourself “What genre am I reading?” lays the groundwork for good interpretation.

Reading in Light of the Whole

As important as it is to remember that the Bible is a collection of many distinct books, good interpretation also requires attending to the Bible as one whole book.

Because the church of Christ believes that God is the author of Scripture and that the Holy Spirit guided the process »

Any mystery you're left with is not a mistake BUT AN INVITATION.

of canonization (choosing the books of the Bible), we find truth not only in each distinct biblical book, but also in the canon as a whole.

There is, after all, an overarching message or narrative that weaves its way through the Scriptures. It begins with Creation and the Fall and moves to Redemption and Consummation, the fulfillment of God's plan.

The message of the Bible is found in the story of God creating and saving and finally revealing his kingdom on earth. It is found in the promise of Yahweh moving in history through the person of Jesus to take all that is broken and make it whole. Our interpretation should never be in conflict with the grand story of the Bible. Healthy Bible reading involves checking our interpretation against it. In other words, let the Bible interpret the Bible.

It's Not About You

Reading the Bible well is not merely an external exercise. First we take into account the nature of the biblical text, interpreting each passage based on its historical context and genre.

But second we must take into account what *we* are like. This is the difference between reading for information and reading for transformation.

Too often we ask the Bible to be something it is not. We go to it looking for tips for sustaining a Christian marriage. We ask it to be a parenting manual or ask it to tell us how to pick the right job, the right college, or the right house. If we want to interpret the Bible well, however, we have to ask it the questions it is meant to answer.

For example, consider the creation account in Genesis 1. Christians have long used that text to argue over *when* and *how* the world was created. But that text was never intended to answer those questions. The historical and cultural context of the book of Genesis suggests that the creation story was written to help Israel (and now us) address the questions of *who* created the world and *why*.

Essentially, we must read both the black and the white of the text. We read what is printed in black letters, but we also read the empty white space on the page, taking stock of what is *not* written in the biblical text and letting the text be silent where it will.

Just as we need to be aware that the Bible is not a Magic 8-Ball we can simply shake and ask for the answers, Augustine reminds us also to consider our own posture and inclinations as we read.

Augustine compared the Bible to a very large room with a very low door. As big and brilliant and impressive as the Scriptures are, we must be willing to humble ourselves, to get low to the ground, if we want to enter into the wisdom of the text.

That means we allow the Scriptures to surprise us—we go in humbly, without the answers ready. In preaching, this manifests itself in a preacher who lets the text guide the sermon, rather than allowing his or her preconceived ideas to force the text to say something that it doesn't (topical sermons too often fall into this category). Just as we want preachers who let the text speak, we want to practice such humility as we read the Scriptures for ourselves.

One of the ways to know whether you're reading the Scriptures openly and in humility is to watch and see if God is realigning your view of who God is and who we are. If the Scriptures are actually "lenses of faith" the way John Calvin said they were, then they should change the way we see the world. When you put on a pair of glasses, you know they are doing their job when they change what you see. If you are reading the Scriptures and they aren't impacting how you see all manner of things—like health care, sexuality, marriage, money, how you spend your time, sin, grace—then that's a sign that your lens (your Bible reading) isn't having the kind of impact or authority that it should.

Reading with humility means not going to the Scriptures to confirm our own thoughts about God, but instead

asking God to form our thoughts through his Word. Consider asking God to use Scripture to change your mind about one thing this year.

Read with Others

Before believers each had their own personal copies of the Bible, the Scriptures were only ever heard in community. This remains an excellent way to hear God's Word afresh.

We tend to hear things differently when we read with others, and a brother or sister can alert you to something in the text that you missed.

Better still, if you really want to make sure you aren't just interpreting in such a way that you reaffirm everything you already believe, read the Bible with people who are different than you. Find people older or younger, richer or poorer, more urban or country than you. Find people of a different ethnicity or from a different political party or a different denomination and read the Scriptures with them!

Pray First

We end with the most important thing: pray first. As you sit to read—in the morning with your oatmeal, around the dinner table with family, in the quiet of your office, with friends over coffee—invite God's Holy Spirit to guide you. Pray that you will hear what the Lord is saying, that the Spirit will weed out thoughts that are not from God and replace them with the vibrancy of the living Word. Pray for insight, for counsel, for comfort, for truth, but pray most of all to be transformed. ■



Dr. Mary Hulst is college chaplain for Calvin College and assistant professor of homiletics at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich.



Aminah Al-Attas Bradford is associate chaplain for residence life at Calvin College, Grand Rapids.

Today I Laughed in Church

MY PARKINSON'S DISEASE puts me in some unpredictable predicaments, such as a new rigid prescription drug schedule that necessitates a rigid food-intake schedule to alleviate the nasty nausea.

People in our church have become accustomed to hearing my watch beeping in the middle of the morning service, telling me to take my pill box and water bottle out of my purse and sneakily swallow my meds.

Our second worship time is a little trickier because my schedule has me taking pills at the start of the service and nibbling some food halfway through. So it seemed simpler to stay home.

Finally, encouraged by our pastor, who said God understood and so would the people,

I attended the 5 p.m. service.

Looking over the order of worship I figured out that the song following the long prayer provided the best timing for food.

So staying seated at the end of the prayer, with the rest of the worshipers standing to sing, I quietly got out my crackers.

The organist, in a slow, stately manner, played the prelude for no. 282 in the gray *Psalter Hymnal*.

I quickly swallowed a bite of saltine, not daring to peek at my husband, snickering beside me, while all around us were flowing these words:

“Break now the bread of life, dear Lord, to me.”

My discomfort disappeared.

My spirits rose.

My soul sang.

I delighted in the Lord's ways.

Today I laughed in church! ■



Patricia Haveman is a member of Hope Christian Reformed Church at Hull, Iowa.

by Stephanie Tombari



MARK VOLKERS

South Asia Tsunami

FIVE YEARS LATER

In Aceh, on the northern tip of the Indonesian island of Sumatra, there is a village called Teungoh Blang Mee.

This village was near the epicenter of the earthquake that caused the 2004 tsunami, a succession of three destructive waves that claimed more than 300,000 lives in South Asia. Before the waves hit, Teungoh Blang Mee had 300 children. Afterward, there were only two.

In the face of such devastation, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee responded in a more comprehen-

sive way than ever before, a response requiring a long-term presence in the area. CRWRC's tsunami relief and rehabilitation efforts in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and India spanned five years, from December 2004 through June 2009, and included everything from emergency supplies to rebuilt homes, from desalinated fields to new boats for fishermen.

There were many stories of destruction and loss of life in the months immediately after the tsunami, but slowly stories of hope and new life began to emerge.

The story of Armanisah is one such example.

Armanisah moved away from Teungoh Blang Mee about six months after the tsunami took the lives of her parents and siblings.

Before the tsunami, Armanisah was single and a teacher of traditional dance. But without her family, and with only two children remaining in the village, she moved to the city to look for work, recalls Mona Saroinsong, CRWRC program manager for tsunami relief in Indonesia.

Then the village asked her to move back.

In Indonesia, particularly in Aceh province, inheriting the family home is

Armanisah and her village had even more to celebrate than just the restoration of their community.



Armanisah, shown here at her wedding, was orphaned by the tsunami. She now has hope, thanks in part to strong community programs funded by CRWRC.

(left) Traditional Indonesian dance is still part of community celebrations.

not only an asset but a cultural value. Surviving family members must take over the home of their relatives to maintain their family's dignity. While sons inherit land, daughters inherit the house.

"In Aceh, land is a family thing," Saroinsong says. "You can't just give it away to someone else."

For Armanisah, returning home meant returning to a life that no longer existed. Not only was her family gone, the tsunami had also wiped out the homes in the village that Armanisah once knew. Hundreds of people had died, and the fields were covered with silt and salt from the ocean, making farming difficult.

"They asked her to come back," Saroinsong explains, "because her family home would not be rebuilt [one of the CRWRC-funded rebuilt homes] if she did not come back.

"The village had lost many people in the tsunami, and many traditions were disrupted. In order to preserve their community, they wanted surviving members to stay. »

Stages of Disaster Response

When disasters strike, CRWRC must make a decision about how best to respond. That decision depends on a variety of circumstances: the size and scale of the disaster, the size and scale of CRWRC's resources, and the availability of funding and local partners.

In areas where CRWRC is already working with partners on long-term development projects, these partners often shift their focus to disaster response. CRWRC then works through existing staff and local leaders to carry out its response.

In areas where CRWRC does not have an established presence, it works with other Christian organizations or coalitions to identify local partners. This could result in CRWRC funding the work of another coalition member, or in CRWRC staff and international relief members establishing a presence with a new partner for the duration of the disaster response.

Once CRWRC gets involved, it works with local churches and partners to craft each response to the needs of the situation, keeping in mind the anticipated funding available. This could include the following:

Emergency Aid – Immediately following a disaster, a community may be in need of food, water, blankets, tarps, or other supplies. While some of these needs may be met by the government or international community, CRWRC and its local partners identify remaining needs and distribute supplies to those most vulnerable. In the case of the 2004 tsunami, CRWRC provided 5,300 emergency kits, treated 6,500 people for medical needs, dug 15 wells, and provided temporary shelter for 941 families.

Reconstruction – After immediate needs are met, people begin to think about rebuilding their lives. For CRWRC this means helping families repair or rebuild homes destroyed by a disaster. This stage can take a couple of years to complete. Following the tsunami, CRWRC built 2,004 homes over four years in Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

Rehabilitation – In addition to repairing homes, disaster survivors often need help to rebuild their livelihoods. This could include seed and tools for farmers, boats and nets for fishing families, or loans and materials for small businesses. For the tsunami response, CRWRC's program included providing income assistance to 11,365 families, restoring electricity to 18 villages, and distributing school uniforms for 2,300 children as well as supplies to their schools.

Food Security – Some areas suffer from drought and hunger every year. CRWRC helps these regions improve their food production and irrigation so that they can better meet their own food needs on a regular basis.

Disaster Preparedness – Some areas are frequently hit by typhoons, earthquakes, floods, or drought. In these regions, CRWRC works with local partners to train people in how to prepare for and respond to natural disasters. In the areas hit by the tsunami, this included reconstructing the homes to be earthquake resistant, developing an early warning system for future earthquakes, and practicing emergency drills.

Kristen deRoo VanderBerg is communications and marketing coordinator for CRWRC.

CRWRC Disaster Response at Work Today

In southern Sudan, thousands of people are returning home after spending more than 20 years in refugee camps. CRWRC is working with them to rebuild the agricultural system and improve food security.

“During the course of the conflict, nearly every southern Sudanese person was forced from their home and displaced to neighboring states or refugee camps in other countries,” said Nate Engle, a CRWRC staff member in the region.

“Now, with the coming of peace, many people are returning to their homes to rebuild their lives.”

Yet for those who have spent 20 or more years in a refugee camp, that is no easy task.

“The region’s robust agriculture base that once fed much of Sudan and beyond is in shambles,” explained Engle. “Young men, never able to learn or develop an interest in farming because of the war, are moving to cities to look for work. This is creating a labor shortage on existing farms.

“Roads, not maintained for so long, are in extremely poor condition. This is resulting in exorbitant transportation charges to move local foodstuffs from farms to urban centers.”

As a result, there is a huge market for food in urban centers but few local farmers growing or transporting their crops there. Instead, cities are importing food from nearby Uganda.

CRWRC is launching a program that will look at the whole system of food production, from farming to processing and marketing, to identify areas of improvement. It then plans to spend two to five years working with local communities to improve food production and marketing.

In addition to this program in southern Sudan, CRWRC Disaster Response is also providing emergency relief and food security programming in the following countries:

- Ethiopia – food and orphan care in response to drought
- Indonesia – emergency supplies in response to earthquakes
- Kenya – food aid, food for work, goats, and trauma healing in response to conflict and drought
- Laos – tools, seed, and food programs in areas of chronic drought
- Liberia – improving agriculture in an area of chronic hunger
- Malawi – food aid and grain banks in an area of chronic hunger
- Mali – improving agriculture in an area of chronic drought
- Myanmar – housing for cyclone survivors
- Nicaragua – restoring agriculture in response to storms
- Niger – irrigation and improving agriculture in an area of chronic drought
- Philippines – emergency food, water, and medical supplies in response to typhoons
- Sudan – supplemental nutrition in Darfur for those affected by conflict
- Uganda – food security programs for people returning after conflict; introducing cassava in response to chronic drought
- Zimbabwe – food for school children in response to drought.

For more information or to support any of these programs, please visit www.crwrc.org. ■

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg



A succession of three destructive waves wiped out entire villages and claimed the lives of more than 300,000 people in December 2004.

» The village persuaded Armanisah to come back.”

One important tradition in Indonesia is dance, which is often the centerpiece of festivals and community celebrations. But the tsunami left many dance troupes without enough members. Armanisah formed a group with two other women to teach traditional dancing to additional children in nearby villages and soon new dance troupes formed.

In June 2009 the villages came together for a week of celebration. “There was dinner and cultural performance, and all 28 villages in the district participated,” says Saroin-song. “Every afternoon we had games and activities for the children. Thousands of people came every night. It was a wonderful thing to see.”

Hope had returned to the village. Homes had been rebuilt, there was a harvest of rice from fields that had been cleared of silt, and businesses had been restored. But Armanisah and her village had even more to celebrate than just the restoration of their community. Armanisah was getting married.



Close to 1,500 families in India received temporary shelter made of blocks that they could later use to expand their permanent homes.



People take pride in the new homes and communities that they helped to build. Many families have painted and decorated their homes to give them their own personal stamp.



Christians and Muslims worked alongside each other to rebuild communities.



CRWRC built 2,004 homes over four years for tsunami survivors in Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

“There was lots of food, and the children danced for their teacher,” says Saroinsong of the wedding celebration. “The community was so proud when she got married. She had been orphaned, but they all came together on behalf of her parents. And she was so happy to get the house. It meant that she and her husband had somewhere to live.”

Relief Aid as Christian Witness

Indonesia is largely Islamic, with some 85 percent of the population identifying themselves as Muslims. Accepting help from a Christian organization raised some eyebrows and suspicion among villagers.

That was not without reason. Tensions between Indonesian Christians and Muslims can sometimes run so high that violent clashes break out between the two groups, killing many and forcing families to flee for safety. A Christian group serving a Muslim population is not common.

Given this reality, CRWRC partnered with a local organization, Percik, to form

GenAssist. Short for “General Assistance,” GenAssist also offered a play on the word “Genesis” or “new beginning,” which is what CRWRC hoped to offer this devastated land.

“They know that we are a Christian organization,” says Saroinsong. “I always said that if they want to accept our help, OK, but if not, that’s no problem.”

Yet almost all the affected communities did accept CRWRC’s help. They were impressed by what they saw. CRWRC’s GenAssist staff comprised about 50 people—Muslims and Christians alike—who worked side by side to carry out community programs.

“The work of GenAssist was a testimony of what can happen when people recognize the humanity in each other, put aside their differences, and work together,” said Grace Weibe, CRWRC international disaster response program manager.

“Hopefully, the memory of GenAssist will continue to foster greater peace in the region.”

Though CRWRC does not evangelize in the traditional sense, its presence has been a strong witness to Christ’s love in many regions of the world not familiar with the gospel, including Indonesia.

“One of our implementing partners said that she was wondering why most of the aid coming to Aceh was not coming from Muslim countries,” recalls Saroinsong. “It’s amazing,” she said. “Muslims have to learn that kind of giving too.”

When asked why Christians give so generously, Saroinsong would say that it comes from having faith in Jesus Christ. “Love is something to share what we have and try to make the person we love to live better and to have love for others,” she explained to those who asked. “They’d say, ‘So love is the basis for your religion?’ And I said, ‘Yes.’” ■



Stephanie Tombari is a senior writer with CRWRC.

Adjust!

One of the greatest joys in my work is the opportunity to visit churches across North America and meet the folks who are the heart and face of the Christian Reformed Church. In the few years that I have served the church as executive director, I have traveled from Florida to Nova Scotia to British Columbia to New Mexico and beyond. From rural towns to suburbia to inner cities, I have seen the church in all her struggles and in all her glory.

In every place I stop, I discover men and women of all ages and backgrounds enthusiastically engaged in their congregations. These folks are committed to bringing the power of the gospel and the love of Christ into their churches and communities. I wish that every person in the CRC could have the opportunity to engage the church in the way that I do.

In my journeys I have talked with a wide variety of those who call the CRC “home.” I have learned that I never know what to expect and that I cannot judge a person’s heart or passion by outward appearances. Any stereotypes I’ve had about people have been quickly washed away.

In my recent travels I encountered a delightful senior citizen. Though we did not have the opportunity to talk at length, she had taken the time to write down her thoughts about the Christian Reformed Church and about her congregation. She has been a member of her church for more than 50 years.

Reflecting on her experiences, she described the changes she had seen and shared her personal journey. That journey has taken her from traditional psalm singing to praise and worship songs; from a council of men in black suits to men and women

in casual dress; from red Psalters to blue to gray, to projected words on a screen; from Dutch ethnicity to many ethnicities.

As her story unfolded, her passion and commitment became evident. She shared her story not to bemoan those changes but to celebrate them. She was pleased with what she had seen and experienced. She had a sense of pride that her church not only was willing to change but has welcomed change.

She then proceeded to offer the broader church and its leaders some very practical advice, which she summarized in one word: *adjust*.

Since reading her note, I have been reflecting on her words. One definition of *adjust* is the ability to adapt to a new environment or conditions. How appropriate. We live in a world of constant and ever-increasing change. A great part of our lives is little more than a blur. It becomes more and more challenging just to keep up with the latest technology. This is certainly not the world of 40 years ago. If we are to survive, adjusting will be a part of our daily existence.

So it is with the church. Jesus calls us to be salt and light. To be salt and light is more than just adding flavor and brightening our world. It is also to preserve and expose. In a world that is increasingly hostile to the gospel, it would seem we are called to adjust, to bend and flex in ways that engage our world with the unchanging truth of Jesus.

As I reflect, I wonder. Can we find new and creative ways to make disciples and transform the world? Is it possible to adjust our customs and habits in ways that bring hope and healing to a broken world? Are there methods that transcend the boundaries of our culture and redeem God’s creation?

Those are not easy questions, nor are they quickly answered. But I believe that we, as the Christian Reformed Church, can adjust to the present-day reality. In so doing, we will be changed. We will become all things to all people for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:22)—always faithful to the truth of our Lord and always ready to adjust. ■



ISTOCKPHOTO

“ We need to bend and flex in ways that engage our world with the unchanging truth of Jesus. ”



Rev. Jerry Dykstra is executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Words of Glory

Sunil, a young man from a Hindu family in India, discovered *Mahima Ke Vachan*, and it changed his life. *Mahima Ke Vachan* (*Words of Glory*) is the Hindi-language radio program produced by the collaborative partnership of Back to God Ministries International, Words of Hope, and Good Books Ministries in India.

Sunil suffers from epilepsy and seeks physical healing for his body. But he has found eternal hope in *Words of Glory*. After hearing the radio program, Sunil began sending text messages to the Hindi discipleship staff, asking questions about



Listeners in India meet in homes to discuss *Words of Glory*.

faith and the messages he heard. Staff members responded to his messages and encouraged Sunil with Bible texts.

It wasn't long before Sunil wrote, "My life has changed through your program. I have accepted the Lord Jesus as my personal Savior!"

CRC media ministry in India began in July 2009, fol-

lowing synod's approval for BTGMI to expand ministry in the Hindi language. The media ministry is made possible through BTGMI's partnership with Good Books Ministries and Words of Hope, the media ministry of the Reformed Church in America.

Because Hindi is also understood and used in the

neighboring countries of Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, *Words of Glory* is opening doors for broader outreach in this region of the world.

Words of Glory also reaches listeners in central India. Anil, a faithful listener, uses the radio program to witness to his neighbors. He set up a "Listeners Club," which brings people together to listen to and discuss the weekly radio program. "Your program is a beacon of light in this dark age," writes Anil. ■

—Nancy Vander Meer is a staff writer for *Back to God Ministries International*

Facing Your Future Firsthand

Last summer I participated in "Facing Your Future" (FYF) at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Through this three-week-long program, I realized that the call to ministry can be a part of everyone's life, regardless of vocation. I was looking forward to growing spiritually, but I found the entire experience rewarding.

Thirty-six students—incoming high school seniors and college freshmen from Canada and the U.S.—gathered at Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich. We heard presentations from seminary professors on topics such as baptism, communion, proper uses of media, and components of the Reformed worldview.

In our small groups, led by seminary students, we shared devotions, prayer, and stimulating discussions. Each small group also planned and led a chapel service.

We worshiped in local congregations, toured the CRC offices in Grand Rapids, and discussed books on a range of spiritual topics. We spent a day in Dearborn, Mich., home of a ministry to the Muslim community.

Our group eventually split to sites in Portland, Ore.; Paterson, N.J.; and Toronto, Ontario. I was part of the Toronto group, which ministered at Friendship Community Church, a small congregation about 30 minutes from the city center.

We were involved in a transitional housing ministry for refugees, a food pantry, a community center, a day camp for children, a soup kitchen, and a ministry to people who are homeless.



Hannah Brenton (front row, fourth from right) with 2009 FYF students and seminarians.

We then returned to Calvin Seminary, where we concluded our experience with a chapel service that included washing each other's feet.

These experiences challenged my complacency and frustration with the church. I came away with a renewed sense of hope that our church really can be faithful in the calling to love God and love others. ■

—Hannah Brenton is a freshman at Calvin College from Minneapolis, Minn.

CHUR

Templeton Funds Values and Virtues in China

For Calvin philosophy professor Kelly Clark, it began on a lark. “I wanted to go to the exotic country of China, and our department was looking for a university in China to partner with,” Clark says.

“I had a friend at Xiamen University, so I set up an exchange with Xiamen in 1998.” Clark went to China, along with another Calvin philosopher, to teach Christian philosophy to Chinese graduate students.

Clark had no idea that the visit would expand into many cross-cultural seminars and courses and \$5.4 million in grants from the John Temple-

ton Foundation to help bring the study of philosophy from a Christian perspective to China.

Why such interest?

“Intellectuals in China are eager to find frameworks for managing the rise of capitalism,” explained Joel Carpenter, director of the Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity at Calvin College.

Since his first trip, Clark has been part of Calvin’s efforts, in partnership with the Society of Christian Philosophers, to teach Western philosophy in China from a Christian perspective—and also to learn about China, the world’s oldest continuing civilization. Over time, nearly every Calvin philosophy professor has been to

China, some more than once.

In efforts funded since 2007 with help from a \$2 million Templeton grant, Chinese scholars have come to study at Calvin and other Christian institutions, North American philosophers have taught and held seminars at Chinese universities, and thousands of Western philosophy texts »



Comedian Hosts New York Pastor

Every weekday morning, New York City listeners tune in to Victor Cruz’s Internet radio show to hear the comedian’s jokes and funny commentary on urban black and Latino culture.

But listeners tuning in one morning this past summer heard something that may have shocked them: a Puerto Rican pastor talking about Jesus. And he wasn’t joking.

The pastor was Johnny Acevedo, who leads Open Door Fellowship of East Harlem, a new Christian Reformed Home Missions-supported church in Manhattan. Through community events that the church puts on at the local East Harlem Café, Acevedo became acquainted with Cruz, whom he recognized from television shows and commercials.

“Victor told me that he thought I had a great sense of humor, so he wanted to have me on his radio show,” recalls Acevedo. “He also had some church background, so I think he was intrigued by that—the faith angle.”

Soon after the invite, Acevedo was a guest on the show on the Urban Latino Internet radio network. “I thought it would be a great opportunity to share the gospel,” Acevedo explains. During the show, listeners sent e-mails and instant messages, which Acevedo did his best to answer: “I was amazed at how well I was set up to share Jesus through the questions that either Victor or his listeners asked.”

At one point, Cruz asked Acevedo to respond to an audio excerpt from the late comedian George Carlin’s comedy routine “Religion,” a stinging critique of faith. “I did my best to respond to some of the issues Carlin raised,” says Acevedo.

Acevedo was especially interested in being on the show because Cruz typically provides insightful words about race relations in New York City, in which Acevedo is extremely interested. “We are a multicultural church that reflects the rich cultural diversity of the East Harlem community,” he says.

Acevedo says his time on the radio left him both exhilarated and exhausted, and he’s eager to return. “Victor gave me a great deal of positive feedback and invited me to come back on the air again in the future,” he says.

To listen to Johnny Acevedo on the radio show, visit the “News and Events” section of the Open Door Fellowship website, www.opendoornyc.org. Please note, the excerpt from “Religion” contains profanity. ■

—Ben Van Houten is a senior writer with Christian Reformed Home Missions

» have been placed in Chinese university libraries.

Now Calvin will be expanding its work with help of a three-year, \$3.4 million Templeton grant to the Nagel Institute. The grant allows for the formation of “Values and Virtues in Contemporary China,” a program with three emphases.

The first, “Evolution and Ethics,” explores the question of whether morality can exist in a godless universe.

The second, “The Foundations of Morality,” builds upon the first, Clark said. “We will look at various natural and supernatural accounts of the foundations of morality and assess their adequacy.”

The third component, “Creating Character,” Clark said, will be especially crucial. “How do you teach or train people to be virtuous?” he said.

The new grant will also help Calvin put on conferences that focus on the art and craft of teaching. “Chinese professors long to be more creative teachers,” said Clark.

Clark is grateful that the grant also allows Calvin to offer scholarly opportunities to former students of the exchange programs, which will help him and others stay connected to Chinese scholars. “Since relationships are as or more important as information, we work hard to continue relationship building,” he said. ■

—Myrna Anderson is a senior writer for Calvin communications and marketing.

Ministry Shares Promote Missions

Rev. Steve Van Zanen was serving as pastor of a Christian Reformed congregation in Minnesota when the Missionary Union sponsored an event featuring CRC missionaries at his church.

It was an exciting event that drew representatives from several CRC congregations in the area. Van Zanen says he was impressed by the energy that the gathering generated. Missionaries spoke, people prayed for missions work, and everyone gathered for a meal.

Fast forward to 2009. The Missionary Union, which served its purpose for many years, has been disbanded. Meanwhile, Van Zanen is no longer a pastor in Minnesota. Instead, under the auspices of another program, he is now one of the representatives visiting churches to promote the cause of CRC missions.

Based in the Grand Rapids, Mich., office of the Christian Reformed Church, Van Zanen leads a team whose primary aim is to educate and motivate churches for global outreach. Titled the “Missions Education and Engagement Team” (MEET), the team is part of the ministry of Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM).

This new effort is funded in part by CRC ministry shares. Christian Reformed congregations provide approximately 40 percent of World Missions’ income through this system, in which congregations contribute a certain amount of money per year to help pay for the shared programs of the denomination

“Because of the generosity of God’s people through the

use of the ministry-shares system, World Missions is able to provide many services and resources to CRC congregations at no additional cost,” says Van Zanen

A variety of resources are available, including speakers that can preach and teach on missions in worship services and adult, teen, or children’s classes.

“We provide missions education resources that are not aimed at gaining support for CRWM work but rather are more broadly about the global mission of a congregation,” says Van Zanen. Van Zanen himself visits 20 to 25 churches per year.

“Our vision at World Missions is to walk alongside local congregations to enhance their vision for global outreach,” he says. “We want to see local congregations actively engaged in global ministry. Through tailored resources, training, and consultation services, we strive to assist local church leaders in stimulating a deeper vision for and involvement in missions.”

To learn more and obtain resources, please see www.crwmm.org. ■

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



Steve Van Zanen speaks about the work of Christian Reformed World Missions to a group at Eastern Hills Community Church of Aurora, Colo.

Interior Design

This is all about you. It's about your insides and how well they were designed.

Think you know this already? Well, think again.

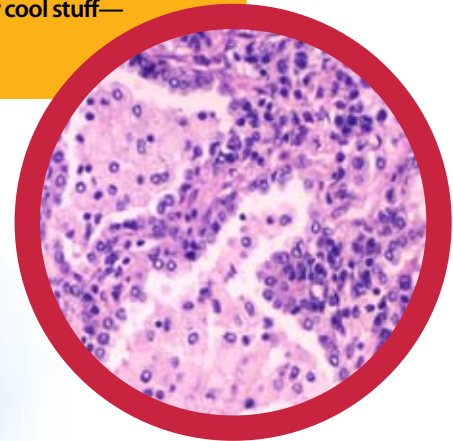
Did you know that you have six hundred million tiny air sacs inside your lungs? That's 600,000,000. Stretch them out and you could cover a tennis court with them.

The air you breathe can be hot or cold, dry or wet. But when it enters your lungs, it's always body

temperature with 75 to 80 percent moisture. The inside of your nose makes those changes.

In the time it takes you to read this paragraph, your body will make at least four million—that's 4,000,000—new blood cells. This happens inside your bones.

Here's a good one: What are Kupffer cells? You'll find the answer—and a lot of other cool stuff—right here. Read on.



Killer Cells . . .

. . . lurk in your body. Don't worry, you need them. They're good guys looking for bad germs. When they see a germ, your white blood cells stalk it, surround it, and eat it! In fact, scientists call some of these cells *macrophages*, which means "big eaters."

Other white cells creep up on a germ and explode. They spill chemicals over the germ to make it harmless.

Some killer cells are part of your liver. They don't stalk germs. They sit and wait for poisons to pass by. Lots of blood flows through your liver. When these cells see a poison cell passing, they reach out, grab the bad cell, and eat it.

The killer cells in your liver are called Kupffer cells. Someone with the last name of Kupffer first described them.

How do these killer cells know what's bad for you? How do they know what to do?

We don't really know. That's just the way they're made.



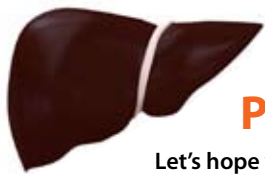
Joanne DeJonge is a U.S. National Park ranger in northern Michigan. She belongs to West Valley Christian Fellowship in Phoenix, Ariz.



SCOTTHOLLADAY

Food for Thought

Someday someone may tell you that your body evolved, that no one designed it. Do you think something as intricate as your body can "just happen"?



More Liver, Please

Let's hope you don't have to say that some day, especially about your own liver. Put your hand near the bottom of your ribs, near the right front part of your body. There's your liver.

Your liver stores sugar and vitamins, helps your digestion and helps your blood to clot, cleans your blood, makes bile, stores iron, and more. You get the idea. Scientists say that your liver has about 500 separate jobs to do.

You can't live more than a day—or two at the most—without your liver.

Maybe that's why God designed it to make more of itself. If half your liver is injured somehow, the other half will grow more cells to make you a whole liver. If three-quarters of your liver doesn't work, the other quarter will grow you a new liver. You don't even have to say, "More liver, please."

What a marvelous design for such an important part of your body!



You've Got Gas . . .

. . . in your lungs, and that's as it should be.

Every cell in your body needs oxygen, a gas. Your lungs deliver that oxygen to your body.

Deep down inside your lungs lie tiny, thin-walled sacs called alveoli (al-VEE-oh-lye). The air you breathe goes into those sacs.

Outside those sacs lie lots of tiny blood vessels.

Those vessels are so tiny, blood has to squeeze through them one cell at a time.

Picture a train with lots of boxcars moving down a track.

Blood coming into your lungs carries carbon dioxide (one molecule per "boxcar"). Your body needs to get rid of that. So the alveoli pick carbon dioxide off the blood cells and put oxygen on.

How do alveoli know just what to do? How do they work so perfectly? That's just the way they were designed.

Your Turn: See how long you can hold your breath. Not forever, right? Your body is designed to breathe automatically, whether or not you tell it to. That's for your own good.

Something Slimy

That's your stomach again, and for a very good reason. It's just doing its job.

To break down your food, your stomach makes lots of acid. That acid is so strong it can eat metal.

If it can eat metal, why doesn't the acid eat your stomach? Because your stomach is slimy inside. That slime protects it from the acid.

That's really a perfect stomach design.



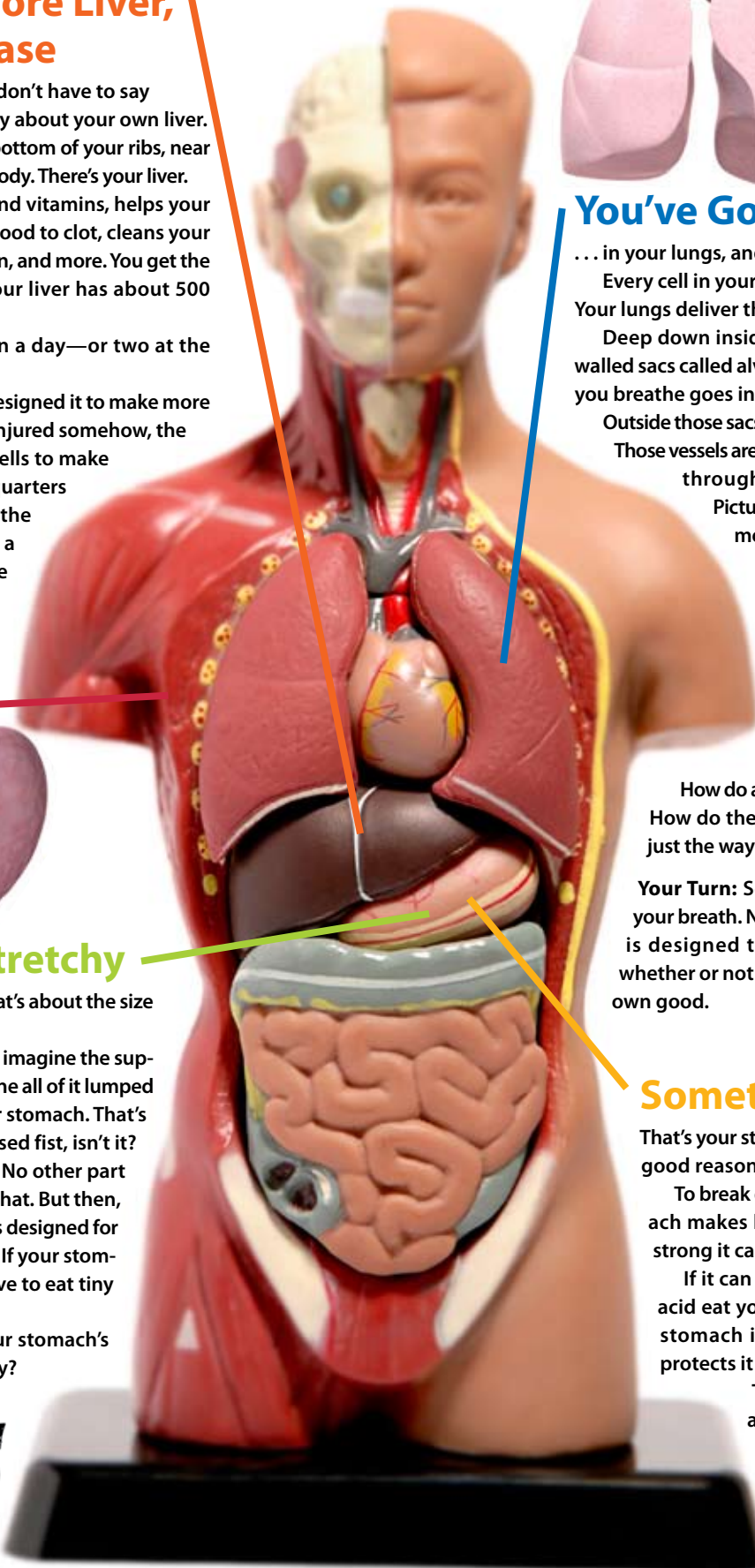
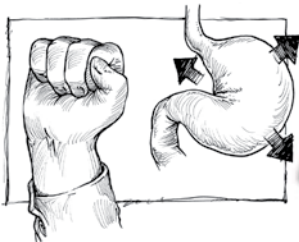
Something Stretchy

Make a fist and look at it. That's about the size of your empty stomach.

Now close your eyes and imagine the supper you ate last night. Imagine all of it lumped together and sitting in your stomach. That's a little bigger than your closed fist, isn't it?

Your stomach stretches. No other part of your body stretches like that. But then, no other part of your body is designed for short-term storage of food. If your stomach didn't stretch, you'd have to eat tiny meals several times a day.

Aren't you glad that your stomach's made of something stretchy?





The Empty Nest

OPENING the closet door to look for wrapping paper, I saw it hanging in solitude. Cheery lilac fabric with flowers hand-stitched on the bodice—her high school dance costume.

The material had been chosen with care, sewn by a friend, and worn through dozens of performances through the years.

Those years, those moments, are now in the past.

It was all past—and it slapped my consciousness as I closed the closet door and left the room, forgetting about the wrapping paper I came for.

Our children have grown up and moved out.

The nest is empty, and that full, rich time of our lives that took us on a whirlwind ride of activities and anticipations has suddenly come to a halt.

This new stage of empty nesting, in its infancy, includes walking into her bedroom, halting, and scanning the room. The bedroom is missing its heart. Our last

child has moved out to attend college. Moving on in life is all well and good—and it definitely should happen. But the painful reality remains: the nest is empty, and it won't be filled the same way again.

I admit, this stage in my life has been and continues to be an adjustment. This time in life is messy. *The Eight Seasons of Parenthood* describes it well, tagging it the “family remodeler.”

I am a fairly upbeat, happy person who enjoys life and wants to be a student of it. During this past year, however, I've met another person in the mirror. This

is what I have found and what I am learning about this new stage of being an empty nester:

Everyone handles the stage of launching adults-in-training differently. Some may say how a parent handles the empty nest is gender-related. Fathers are ready for it and look forward to what is next. Mothers grieve for what was and won't be again. No matter what, we are all wired differently and must respect our different ways of walking through this time of messy adjustment.

Give yourself time. It's a grieving process—at least it is for many of us. I find myself watching with tender, sometimes misty eyes little girls in their pink and purple outfits or those gleefully bouncing out of the swimming pool.

Grief takes time, and no one can give you the exact timeline for yourself. But acknowledge it is grief. Not all groan and wail, but tears are understandable. There is a loss of being needed and being present for those we love most. The adjustment can be a two-steps-forward-one-step-back process.

Anticipate how to fill your extra mental and/or physical time. The spring prior to our fall of becoming empty nesters, I decided to move from a part-time to a full-time teaching position. I knew I would have a lot more mental and physical time in the fall, which has been true.

However, I didn't anticipate the emotional aspect of leaving one teaching position I thoroughly enjoyed at the same time as our youngest left home. Looking back, I now see that I set myself up for two "losses"—yet I wanted to be intentional in making plans to fill the space I knew I'd have.

Know that you may have to wrestle with who you are. Who is that in the mirror? Again, this may pertain more to women. Even with a vocation I love, I have wrestled with who I now am. Many women grow up dreaming of being a mom, yearning for that "someday" of motherhood. That was certainly me. I realize I am still a mother, now of two college-age daughters; but it is, and should be, different. Connecting with them occurs more with phone calls, Facebook (the reason I signed up), and yes, at times, texting.

Be prepared for an emotional low. I know of depression. I have several dear people in my life who have struggled with this "flu of the soul." I had never personally been in this pit until the autumn of our empty nest. Did the depressing times come and go? Yes, although I understand they can last indefinitely for some. Can they throw you "under the bus" with your own thoughts? Most definitely.

Acknowledge the low times, talk about them. Journal your thoughts. Write your

people around you who are out on their own for the first time just as your children are. Do something for the generation ahead of us who walked through this stage decades ago. Write a note, fill a need, be present. Look for those you aren't related to who need a connection.

Be patient with yourself—and your spouse. This is new terrain for both of you. Give yourself time. Give your spouse time. Most likely, the two of you will handle the empty nesting differently. Plan

I don't know how long it will take to feel settled.

prayers to God, who knows your heart. Writing gets anguish and anxiety out in healthy ways. So does scrubbing a tub, I'll admit, but writing brings more peace to the heart.

The summer before the empty nest, I read *Cold Tangerines* by Shauna Niequist. It was a great read, especially the page where she writes about God being in the depths with us. I returned to it repeatedly in the first months of empty nesting.

Be patient, be sensible, and see your doctor if the shadows and despair stay with you too long. Talk with a close friend or a counselor. Exercise regularly. I have found that exercise helps my brain even more than my body.

Do something for yourself. This may involve "pacing" the time to get through the weeks or months that seem long without your son or daughter around. After so many years of thinking first of our children, it takes time to even answer what we may enjoy ourselves. Again, exercise is something I do for myself. Buy the nice coffee at the end of the week. Purchase the item you may need anyway, but get it at the end of the week or month as something to look forward to.

Do something for someone else. Choose someone or a family in a different stage of life and be Christ to that person or family. We all see families who are struggling through the very times we now grieve—do something for them. Remember the young

things to do together. Go on a date. Take a walk. Meet for coffee. Take a dance class (we're trying it!).

I'm still working through the empty nest thing and don't know how long it will take to feel settled. But it is coming, I am very aware of that, and that is OK. I realize I have to move through the seasons of this particular time of parenthood as we do with the calendar. Nothing really meaningful comes overnight.

This season on its own is full of meaning—and potential. I see limitless possibilities to model to others, to meet new friends and learn from old ones. To get to know my spouse deeper and revisit many of the ways we lived the years before we had our daughters.

It is a stage that in itself means days, months, years, but certainly—time. Time is precious. I want to learn how to navigate this stage well, to grieve well, and to move ahead with the knowledge that God is with me, yes, even in this. If the birds of the field are important to God, we can trust that this time in our lives and how we are doing are important to him as well. ■



Karen Gorter is an educational support services teacher for Holland (Mich.) Christian School and is a news correspondent for *The Banner*.

Dealing with Difficult People

WHEN I FIRST began writing this article, I had a specific person in mind—someone whose behavior was extremely . . . inspiring.

But since then I've moved in with a friend. Sharing her space has brought new insights—among them, the fact that I'm not as easy to get along with as I had thought when I lived alone.

Still, I like to think I'm fairly affable and people-skilled, with courtesy and respect as default positions. Sometimes, however, certain individuals rub me the wrong way. At those times I'm sure it's not me; it's them.

Dealing with difficult people can try even the wisest of us. After all, Israel's King Solomon had occasion to observe, "As . . . wood to fire; so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife" (Prov. 26:21, NRSV). And one wonders what scenarios prompted comparisons of "one who boasts of a gift never given" to clouds and wind without rain, or an unfaithful person in a crisis to "a bad tooth or a lame foot" (Prov. 25:14, 19).

If interpersonal relationships challenged even Solomon's renowned wisdom, what about the rest of us? We may sometimes indulge in revenge fantasies, but as Christians we're called to exhibit grace and love.

A few years ago I had a colleague, "Kent," who was self-centered, abrasive, and apparently oblivious. I finally had to seek counseling from a pastor friend to avoid a bitter confrontation with him.

I wasn't just angry with Kent's behavior, I told my friend; I was worried about its effect on his work relationships and on his ministry. I wondered if I should speak to him about his relational flaws—for his own good.

My friend's advice was sage. He said if I really wanted to confront Kent, I probably shouldn't. But if I really didn't want to, I probably should.

When people behave badly, a powerful impulse is to rebuke them. There are times for that, but consult the Holy Spirit for the schedule; rebukes aren't required as often as we sometimes think.

Believers are cautioned to be "quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19-20). We are to bless those who persecute us, manage our

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pride, and make every effort to "live at peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:14-18).

Along with resisting the tendency to nurse anger, we are to actively pursue peace. That often means ignoring offenses and letting go of anger, even when it's justified.

Being angry is passive, but peacemaking is active, progressive. It redirects our energy toward godly goals.

Marriage and family therapist Jim Hurley of Reformed Theological Seminary says some who find peacemaking

difficult because of anger may be laboring under a faulty definition of forgiveness. "God commands forgiveness," Hurley notes, "so failing to forgive is disobedience. However, God exhibits anger, so anger is not inherently sinful."

In fact, Hurley points out, anger can be useful in alerting a person to a threat or blocked goal. "It is important to pay attention to our anger, but also to how we act on it," he says, "because that's where sin can occur, especially if our focus is revenge."

"After you've been wronged," he adds, "you may justifiably desire vengeance. But forgiveness is not ridding yourself of anger; forgiveness is giving up your 'right' to revenge."

God makes it clear that vengeance is his purview, while our job is to extend forgiveness and grace, showing kindness even to our enemies. Thus we "leave room for God's wrath" and "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:19-21).

In the end, we should try to view fractious people as opponents of a common adversary, the devil—the true enemy of peace and unity.

Offering forgiveness and grace to difficult people may seem like a lot to ask, but the Holy Spirit provides more than sufficient resources, and we cannot forget what Christ has done for us.

Also, it pays to remember—we are doubtless on some other folks' hard-to-handle lists. ■



Jennifer Parker is a writer and children's librarian and resource teacher in Jackson, Miss. She is also former news editor for *The Banner*.

Hot Soup

It might have been Sunday evening
 Suppertime after 6:00 p.m. church
 The kids like their soup warm
 My wife just likes soup
 But I like hot soup

I take my bowl across the kitchen to the microwave
 As it heats up I turn around and watch my family minus me
 They don't notice as I view their world from mine
 Twelve feet away and out of sight everything looks so different
 Just because I like hot soup

The kids joke and giggle and play with their food
 I wonder if I am too serious or not stern enough
 They make up words and languages and French
 I wonder why I can't say the things I should
 And why do I like hot soup

The buzzer goes off and my mind jumps awake
 Yes they are my family and I need to go back
 Tell them the things I should
 Have fun with them when I can
 And every once in a while have a bowl of hot soup

—Joe Tolkamp





ISTOCKPHOTO

Learning to Tweet

RECENTLY I BECAME A TWEETER. I posted my name on Twitter purely for the purpose of engaging with other “tweeple” who are interested in developing emerging leaders in the Christian church.

Twitter is a three-year-old social-media tool that’s having a profound effect on society from politics to social awareness, from news to celebrity. “Tweets” are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author’s profile page and delivered to the author’s subscribers, who are known as “followers.”

Desiring a sense of profundity, I created my own Twitter account, customized my profile, and managed to write a 140-character personal update of my status. I then set about finding people who had some “tweet-cred” in the subject I was pursuing. I sought out authors whom I had been reading—Malcolm Gladwell, Donald Miller, and Andy Stanley. I searched for organizations of which I was a member, such as the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Alban Institute, and Habitat for Humanity. I hunted down key names of the past: John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon, and Jonathan Edwards. Finally, I added a few sources of interest just to keep the conversation current.

Twitter is usually a two-way tweet.

After one hour of inquiry, I had amassed a library of names and organizations who gladly accepted my request to follow them, but also asked if they could follow me. Twitter is usually a two-way tweet.

I soon realized the blessing of this effort as I received status updates from all the people, organizations, and events I was following. In real time, my contacts told me where they were focusing their immediate attention. I pursued their interests and then shared (re-tweeted) the information with my fellow tweeps.

Twitter has turned us into publishers and distributors of media from videos to blogs to social commentary—all with little or no overhead. In other words, we have become virtual birds of a feather who have e-flocked together. ■

If you’re looking for a perch alongside birds of a similar ilk as yourself, you might like “The Beginner’s Guide to Twitter,” an Internet post by Michael Hyatt (michaelhyatt.com) and *Twitter Tips, Tricks and Tweets*, a book by Paul McFedries (Wiley).



Rev. Jeff Klingenberg is a husband, a father, and a pastor currently serving the people and places of the greater Hamilton, Ontario, area through Ancaster CRC.



The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate

by **Jacqueline Kelly**
reviewed by **Sandy Swartzentruber**

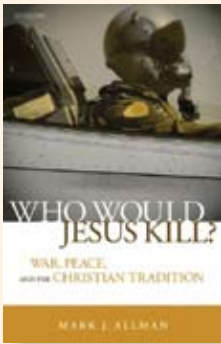
To the townsfolk of Fentress, Texas, 11-year-old Calpurnia Virginia Tate is an enigma. She can’t sew or cook, and she doesn’t have the graces a young lady should have in 1899. What she *does* have is spunk, smarts, and loads of curiosity. When Callie “discovers” her cantankerous grandfather and his backyard laboratory, the world opens up for her—but is her world ready for a female scientist? In this debut novel, Calpurnia Tate joins the ranks of Jo March, Caddie Woodlawn, and Laura Ingalls Wilder to the delight of tomboys everywhere. The theme of Calpurnia’s “evolution” does include a nod to Darwin; he is quoted at the start of each chapter. Ages 9-12. (Henry Holt & Co.)



iMinds

reviewed by **Ron DeBoer**

According to the iMinds website (*iminds.com*), each year we spend 3,960 minutes cutting the grass and 2,555 minutes trying to fall asleep. The site boasts that iMinds, a tiny MP3 player with headphones, was born for these moments. So I ordered one. The player came with 76 eight-minute “bursts of knowledge” about topics ranging from the Bermuda Triangle to the life of Andy Warhol to the history of the New York Yankees. Additional bursts of knowledge can be downloaded from iTunes. With professional voiceovers and fitting background music, mowing my lawn has never been so educational.



Who Would Jesus Kill?

by **Mark J. Allman**
reviewed by **Wayne Brouwer**

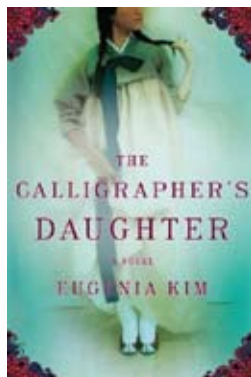
Jesus is both conquering King and Prince of Peace. How do Christians understand the incessant human tendencies toward war and attempt to be peacemakers, while holding citizenship in militarily-engaged societies? Allman’s summary of the three major theological responses to war (pacifism, holy war, just war) are extremely clear and concise, balanced, and informative. This would be a great book to study in a church group—and certainly can be read with enormous profit by any thoughtful Christian. The author pushes no political agendas, while he does offer criteria for evaluating public decision making. (Anselm Academic)



Absence

by **Paper Route**
reviewed by **Robert N. Hosack**

Nashville-based quartet Paper Route’s *Absence* is a paean to 1980s electronic rock, but one which provides a unique balance of the electronic and organic. With roots at Greenville College (Illinois), this is Paper Route’s first full-length album. The ’80s bands New Order and Joy Division are clear precursors to this group’s melodic, emotional synth-rock sound that pulses with an ambient undercurrent. Contemporary band comparisons range from Elbow to Coldplay. *Absence* is a dance-pop record that combines heart-wrenching, lush, and moody arrangements with deeply spiritual lyrics that wrestle with life’s myriad miracles and mysteries. (Universal Motown)



The Calligrapher’s Daughter: A Novel

by **Eugenia Kim**
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

From 1915 to 1945, Najin, daughter of the respected calligrapher Han, suffers along with her Korean countrymen under Japan’s escalating domination. As she experiences suffering at the hands of the oppressors, she questions her

mother’s Christian faith, even while longing to embrace it. Though raised by her parents to embody the womanly virtues of decorum, quietude, and acceptance, Najin forges her own unique path and learns to accept her faith struggle, “rather than to deny or pretend.” (Henry Holt)

THE LOWDOWN



A Stout Faith: In *The Search for God and Guinness*, Stephen Mansfield recounts the story of Guinness beer, founded centuries ago by Arthur Guinness as he worked to serve God and his fellow human beings. (Thomas Nelson)



Spoken Word: *Unleashing the Word*, by Max McLean and Warren Bird, is a book and DVD combination intended to train church leaders for reading the Bible aloud in a more powerful way. (Zondervan)



Frenetic Forecast: The new children’s-book-turned-movie *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* moves into your region on DVD and Blu-ray this month. (Sony)



Not So Blue: Bluegrass band Blue Highway is celebrating 15 years of togetherness with their anniversary album *Some Day*, featuring past favorites and new tunes. (Rounder Records)



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

Got Religion?

I'M ABOUT TO SAY SOMETHING JUST A BIT SHOCKING.

It's highly controversial.

Here it is: We Reformed people are *religious*. The Christian faith is a *religion*. There, I said it.

Why is that so controversial?

It's because *religion* has become a bad word in Christian circles. People outside the church want to be spiritual but not religious; and people inside the church want to have a relationship but not religion. In his wildly popular book *The Shack*, William Young has Jesus say, "I'm not too big on religion, and not very fond of politics or economics either." It has become common for Christian leaders to claim that the good news of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with religion.

But it's a mistake to talk about religion like that, a big mistake, with big consequences. Religion refers to the universal human characteristic of making something, or someone, ultimate in our lives, and pursuing the object of our devotion as the ultimate good. Every person, then, is religious. God made all people with a religious receptacle at our core.

Because we are designed to be in relationship to God, designed for worship and reverence, people are inescapably religious. But because of our sin, our rebellion against God, we seek to replace God with something or someone else. We direct our religion, our devotion and reverence, toward created things rather than the Creator. We create self-serving spiritualities because sin has tainted our religious longings, just as it has tainted our politics and economics and sexuality. We create alternate stories to explain the world and our place in it.

But that doesn't mean *religion* is a bad word. We are religiously broken, but God's good news in Jesus Christ enables us to experience religious wholeness. The gospel is not the enemy of religion but its true form. The gospel is the answer—a surprising and radically unique answer—to our deepest spiritual longings.

If I say that I am spiritual but not religious, what I really mean is that my homemade religious opinions are better than yours. If I say that I am rational, not religious, I mean that my faith in science is much more respectable than your belief in a God who has never made an appearance in any photos from the Hubble telescope. If I say I prefer a personal relationship with Jesus to "organized religion," I likely mean that I have a self-centered, private kind of religion and have little use for the messiness of living in a community of worship and discipleship.

Even though all people are religious, many people deny that aspect of their humanity with an almost evangelical passion.

It's extremely important
for our witness to
the world that we reclaim
the word **religion**.

All people have a "seed of religion" buried in their hearts, John Calvin said. Left to grow wild that seed ends up yielding nothing but weeds. But watered with the gospel and cultivated by God's Spirit, it grows into devotion to God, blooms into discipleship, and bears fruit in service to the least and the lost of the world.

It's extremely important for our witness to the world that we reclaim the word *religion*. Why? Because the gospel calls people to find the answer to their deepest longings, their religious longings, in Jesus Christ.

When Paul brought the good news to the sophisticated people of Athens, he grabbed their attention by saying, "I notice that you are very religious" (Acts 17:22). Paul used the universal human longing for relationship with the Creator—our desire for a story that makes sense of the world and history and human life—as an entry for the story of Jesus. Then he introduced the Athenians to the one God, the "unknown God," who created them, loved them, and sent his own Son to die for them.

Rather than a human effort to obtain salvation, the Christian faith is the one religion in which God seeks us out and finds us. It is the one religion in which God comes to broken people and makes them whole again. It is the one true story about the meaning of life in this world, and it turns out to be a love story. ■

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



Dr. Raymond A. (Randy) Blacketer is pastor of Neerlandia CRC, Alberta.

Continued from p. 8

How? In worship we learn to speak truthfully about God and our world, so that we may name injustices when we see them and call for repentance when necessary.

Michael Northcott is right to suggest that to the extent that God is truthfully worshiped, Christians are invited and empowered “to engage responsibly with God’s world in such a way as to resist the principalities and powers and the worship of idols which bring death, and to promote the path of peace and of divine, rather than merely human, justice” (*The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*).

Northcott points out that worship allows us to re-imagine the world in light of Christ’s resurrection and the coming new creation so that we may, in the words of William Stringfellow, “interpret ordinary events in both apocalyptic and eschatological connotations, to see portents of death where others find progress or success but, simultaneously, to behold tokens of the reality of the Resurrection of hope where others are consigned to confusion or despair.”

As those who worship the ascended Lord, we are given eyes to see the Olympics not only as a global celebration of sport, but also as an event that carries with it injustices toward the creation and toward a significant number of marginalized peoples. Worship can form us into the kind of people who hear the goal of the Olympics “to build a peaceful and better world through sport” as more than simply misguided but as bordering on the idolatrous.

To say that we can build a better world through an event that is inaccessible to most of the world by nature of the costs involved is an untruth. To attempt to

It may be the responsibility of Christian communities this February to raise awkward questions about the Olympics.

build a peaceful world while at the same time trying to hide the socioeconomic disparities in Vancouver from the world is unjust. The city of Vancouver recently passed a law that creates “bubble zones” throughout the city in which no display of signs other than those of a “celebratory” or directional nature will be tolerated during the Olympics.

Having discussions with neighbors or friends about the Olympics that are not of a “celebratory” nature can be awkward. Yet theologian Oliver O’donovan reminds us that the work of the Spirit alerts Christians to those aspects of reality—including the reality of the Olympics—that stand in contradiction to Jesus’ resurrection and those that stand in continuity with God’s kingdom (*Resurrection and Moral Order*).

It may be the responsibility of Christian communities this February to discern those contradictions and continuities, to raise awkward questions about the Olympics, to have uncomfortable conversations, and maybe even to ignore “bubble zones” when need be. ■

Advertising Information

Deadlines: Feb. 2010 issue is 1/4/10. March 2010 issue is 2/1/10. 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.

Admitted into the Ministry

At a Nov. 19, 2009 meeting of Classis Georgetown, **Candidate Kevin Vande Streek** was examined for admittance to the Ministry of the Word in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Mr. Vande Streek gracefully sustained this exam and was unanimously approved by Classis. This action also received unanimous concurrence of the Synodical Deputies from Classes Grand Rapids North, Grandville and Zeeland. Mr. Vande Streek has accepted the call to become the Youth Pastor of the Ridgewood Christian Reformed Church of Jenison, Mich. He will be ordained and installed at the morning service on Jan. 10, 2010. Harold Postma, S. C.

At a special meeting of Classis Zeeland on November 12, 2009, **Candidate Steve Bussis** sustained an examination and will be ordained and installed as the next pastor of the Coopersville CRC (MI) on Sunday, December 6, 2009. This examination was witnessed and approved by the Synodical Deputies of Classes Georgetown, Grand Rapids North and South.

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

DAN KRUIS ELIGIBLE FOR CALL: At its fall session Classis Red Mesa with concurrence of the synodical deputies accepted Kruis' request to be declared eligible again for call as minister of the Word according to C. O. article 14e. Dan can be reached at dkruis@yahoo.com.

Financial Aid

CLASSIS GRAND RAPIDS SOUTH invites students from their Classis who are planning to pursue full-time ministry in the CRC (undergraduate or graduate level) and are in need of financial assistance for the academic year 2010-2011 to apply for a classical grant. Applications must be received prior to February 15, 2010. For information and application forms, please contact Rev. Paul Sausser by phone at 616-530-9143, or by email at pastorpaul@discoverycrc.org.

CLASSIS KALAMAZOO invites students from their Classis (undergraduate or graduate level) who are planning to pursue full-time ministry in the CRC and are in need of financial aid for the academic year 2010-2011 to apply no later than February 28, 2010 by contacting Paul Vander Kamp, 2221 Ridgfield Rd., Portage, MI 49024, phone 269-321-0709, vdrkmp@juno.com. Undergraduate students must be at least in their junior year during 2010-2011. Students presently receiving aid must reapply.

STUDENTS FROM ZEELAND CLASSIS preparing for ordained/non-ordained ministry in the CRC are invited to apply for financial aid to the

Classis Ministry Leadership Team for the 2010-2011 school year. For information, contact Judi Steenwyk, 880 Mid Bluff Drive, Zeeland, MI, 49464 (616) 772-1772. All requests to be received by April 1, 2010.

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS COLUMBIA convenes in Oak Hills Church, Tuesday, February 23, 2010. Agenda deadline: January 22, 2010.

CLASSIS GEORGETOWN will hold its February 2010 meeting at the Prince Conference Center on the campus of Calvin College. The meeting will begin at 8:30 AM. All items for the agenda must be received by January 7, 2010. Harold Postma, S. C.

CLASSIS ILLIANA will meet in regular session Tuesday, March 2, 2010 at 9:00 a.m. at the First Christian Reformed Church of Crownpoint, IN. Agenda items are due January 26, 2010 and should be sent to Rev. Robert Jipping, Stated Clerk, 1212 Blue Bell Trail, Schererville, IN 46375. E-mail bandajipping@aol.com

CLASSIS OF THE HEARTLAND will meet in regular session on Saturday, March 6, 2010, at the newly constructed facility of the Friendship Community Church at 305 Sergeant Square Drive, Sergeant Bluff, Iowa. Please forward all items for inclusion in the agenda to me by January 16, 2010. Rev. David Heilman, Stated Clerk.

New Addresses

CHANGE OF ADDRESS for Rev. John VanderLugt: 8111 E Broadway #247, Tucson, Arizona 85710.

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.

MESA & APACHE JCT. WINTER VISITORS: Worship with us at Marantha 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

CHURCH'S 125TH ANNIVERSARY South Olive CRC, Holland, MI will commemorate 125 years of God's faithfulness with a year-long celebration of events and gatherings beginning on January 10, 2010 at our 9:30 a.m. service. All friends and former members are welcome to join us. For more information, contact the church office (616-875-8645) or go to: southolivecrc.org

Retirement

RETIREMENT: The children of Rev. Peter and Carol De Jong would like to announce their retirement from ministry after 38 years in the CRC. They have moved to their new home at 7559 W. Dublin Rd, Freeport, IL 61032. We are thankful for their commitment to follow Christ's calling and for the impact they have had on our lives as well as many others.

With gratitude for his faithful leadership, the Board of Trustees of Calvin Theological Seminary has accepted the decision of Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. to step down as President following the academic year 2010-2011.

A Presidential Search Committee has been appointed to recommend the next

President of Calvin Theological Seminary

Nominations and applications may be submitted to presidentsearch@calvinseminary.edu before February 1, 2010.

Please visit www.calvinseminary.edu/presidentsearch for further information.



CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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Birthdays

105th Birthday



BESSTOLSMA of 2111 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 (Apt 4018) will celebrate her 105th birthday February 4, 2010. Her children, Betty (deceased) and John Schurman, Mary and Roger Boerema, together with her grandchildren Jack and Mary Lou Schurman, Mary and Richard Mencarelli,

Betsy and Todd Kingma, Jan and Scott Spoelhof, Richard and Wende Boerema, Jill and Robert Morren and 20 great-grandchildren, wish her God's continued blessing. Her zest for life and faith is an inspiration to us all. We thank God for her.

95th Birthday

HENRY UITERDYK, 6151 Shady Rest St., Manhattan, MT 59741 will celebrate his 95th birthday on Feb. 6. God Bless you Dad. Congratulations from your family.

CATHERINE VAN EK celebrates her 95th birthday on Jan 24. Husband (Albert) deceased. Her children (1 deceased), grandchildren, great & great-great grandchildren praise God for her long life. "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine"

ANNETTE (JOLING) VAN STEDUM will celebrate her 95th birthday on Jan. 4. Her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren thank God for her steadfast faith. She is a blessing and inspiration to all who know her.

90th Birthday



HARRY GEORGE BEEZHOLD, 3443 West Clark Dr., Evergreen Park, IL 60805, son of Henry and Dena, is thankful for 90 years of God's blessings January 17. His wife, Dorothy, four children, spouses, six grandchildren and five great-grands are grateful also for his presence.

JOHN A. DEVRIES Happy 90th Birthday (Jan 18, 1920) to Dad, Grandpa and Great Grandpa from all your children. We love you!

EARL KALLEMEYN celebrated his 90th birthday Dec. 14th. His devoted wife **HARRIET** will celebrate her 90th birthday Feb. 12th. Happy Birthday from your family. Thanks be to God.



DORDT COLLEGE

Dean for the Natural Sciences &
Director of Scholarship & Research

Dordt College is seeking an innovative person with a strong track record of teaching and scholarship/research and a passion for Christian higher education to serve in this dual role on the Academic Leadership Team. Our selected candidate will lead the natural science division's academic departments in faculty hiring and development, enrollment growth, and program and curricular development. In addition, this person will have proven skills to support and encourage the entire Dordt faculty to develop scholarship and research as an integral part of their service to Dordt's mission and thereby strengthen our culture of scholarship across the campus.

A review of application materials will begin immediately. Qualified persons committed to a Reformed, Biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of interest and curriculum vita/resume to:

Dr. Erik Hoekstra, Provost • Dordt College
498 4th Avenue NE • Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697
Fax: (712) 722-6035 • E-mail: provost@dordt.edu
Web site: www.dordt.edu/offices/academic_affairs

JENNIE LANING (nee Deckinga) 525 Cumnor Rd #205 Westmont, IL 60559 Celebrates her 90th birthday on Dec 28. Husband Clarence (deceased). Her step children, 19 grandchildren, 31 great grands, 3 gr gr grands & many brothers & sisters wish her "Happy Birthday" We thank God for her faithful service to Him & the love she shows to those around her.

85th Birthday

ANDREW J. DROGE of Hudsonville, Mi, celebrated his 85th birthday on Jan. 1, 2010. His children, grandchildren and great grandchildren give thanks for his faithfulness to his Lord and his family.

Church Positions Available

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.

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

REHOBOTH CRC in Bowmanville Ontario is inviting applications for a half time position of Music and Worship Coordinator. A detailed job description with particulars can be found on our church's website at www.rehobothcrrc.com If you have a passion for this kind of work, we would love to hear from you. Please send a letter with an attached resume to Rehobothcrrc@bellnet.ca

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR Caledonia CRC is seeking applications for a part time Children's Ministries Director. Please send your resume to Caledonia CRC, Attention: Sue Sikma, 9957 Cherry Valley SE, Caledonia, MI 49316

LEAD PASTOR: We are an RCA congregation located midway between Grand Rapids and the Lakeshore. We are seeking a pastor to be our spiritual leader, preacher, and evangelism/outreach champion. We have both a spirited traditional and a casual contemporary worship service on Sunday. Check out our website at www.coopersville.reformed.com for more information. If you sense the Spirit nudging you to explore this Calling with us, please submit an RCA profile form to: Mr. Wes Busman, Coopersville Reformed Church, 423 West Randall Street, Coopersville, MI 49404.

YOUTH PASTOR We are a multi-cultural church that was planted in sunny So Cal. Our heart is to impact the community around us with the Gospel in word and deed. oasis_church@msn.com www.oasischurchmv.com 951-653-0737.

COVENANT CRC, WINNIPEG, is seeking a pastor who will lead our staff and congregation. We have just gone through and intense transition process in which we have resolved some of the issues of the past and have determined a unified direction for the future. Our new pastor needs to enjoy preaching and teaching, have leadership skills, and possess interpersonal strengths, all of which God will use to build the church as a Christ-following community. Please indicate your interest in being considered for this position to Pete Ploegman at pete.ploegman@gmail.com

YOUTH PASTOR/DIRECTOR: Grace Christian Reformed Church of Chatham, Ontario has an exciting leadership opportunity. The individual we are looking for will need a strong ability to pastor, encourage and develop the faith of our young people. We are looking for an individual with the appropriate seminary education, post secondary degree, or equivalent experience to lead our youth in a full time staff position. To inquire or apply contact Patrick at mcnamara.family@sympatico.ca or mail your resume and cover-letter to: Grace CRC YP Search Committee, c/o Patrick McNamara, 255 Tweedsmuir Ave. W., P.O. Box 337, Chatham, ON (Canada) N7M 5K4

CORNERSTONE CRC, Chilliwack, BC is looking for a full time Youth Pastor (ordained or not) with a passion for the Lord and youth ministry. We have a vibrant, unique youth program. We are located

Anniversaries

65th Anniversary

MULDER, J. Richard and Effie, celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary on Dec. 11, 2009 in Marianna, FL where they reside. We thank God for parents who exemplify dedicating one's life to serving God through family and church devotion and ministering in employment - dad as 1st CEO of Rest Haven in IL and mom as Bethshan's DON. Congratulations from your children, 17 grandchildren, and 42 great-grandchildren. We love you lots!

in the Fraser Valley an hour east of Vancouver. Information can be obtained from Melissa at our church office at 604-792-2517 or office@cornerstonecrrc.ca

SUMMITVIEW CRC, on the sunny side of the Cascade Mountains in Yakima, Washington, is searching for a full-time pastor due to the approaching retirement of our pastor. Our small, loving, intergenerational congregation is looking for solid Bible based preaching to guide us on our spiritual journey and encourage us as we grow. Our church profile is available from Jerry Kobes at 509-697-5041 or gwkweng@elltel.net

FRUITLAND CRC, located in Stoney Creek, Ontario, is now actively seeking a full-time Pastor. We are a church of 114 families made up of 290 Professing Members & 142 Non-Professing Members who are committed to exalting Jesus Christ, encouraging one another and embracing God's world. We are looking for a caring leader who will share our vision, lead us in Bible-based preaching, nurture our multi-generational members and encourage and enable our congregation as we work towards our mission. For more information and to obtain our church profile, please send inquiries or your profile to John Koornneef at jkoornneef@cogeco.ca or contact by phone at 905-309-7403. www.fruitlandcrrc.com

PLEASANT STREET CRC is a diverse and dynamic church located in Whitinsville, MA, 40 miles west of Boston. We live and worship in a region full of rich history and modern challenges. We seek a SENIOR PASTOR who is an engaging and compelling preacher, and a nurturing and stimulating pastoral caregiver. Our vision is to reach and enfold all in our community whom God would draw to himself through us. If you are a passionate and visionary leader who will approach this challenge with enthusiasm, please visit our website www.pscrc.org and contact our Search Committee Chairperson, Hugh Leahy 508-876-9642, HughLeahy@comcast.net

DIXONS CORNERS COMMUNITY CRC has an exciting ministry opportunity for a Youth Pastor. If you are passionate about leading youth to Christ, we offer a vibrant youth group eager to deepen and share their faith. For more info please visit: www.communitycrrc.ca or call 613 652 2400

LEAD PASTOR: A-pos-tle (a-pos'tl), n.1. Messenger 2. One sent forth to preach the gospel 3. A Christian leader gifted, taught, and ordained to expand the Kingdom of God. Gun Lake Community Church in Wayland, Michigan, is seeking the person God has chosen to lead our congregation in growing his Kingdom in west Michigan and around the world. We are a church for all seasons, not only the recreational seasons associated with the lake that gives our church its name, but all the varied seasons of our lives and spiritual journeys. Are you the one that God is preparing to take us through these seasons? We as a church and Search Team invite you to enter into a time of prayer and discernment with us as we seek God's will. For more information, or to submit your profile or resume, please contact: christie@gunlakechurch.org or Pastoral Search Team, Gun Lake Community Church, 12200 W. M-179 Hwy, Wayland, MI 49348.

SENIOR PASTOR-PALOS HEIGHTS CRC (IL) is seeking a spiritually gifted preacher who will lead our congregation to praise and worship heartily, to develop more fully as vibrant Christians, and to reach out and embrace those whom God is leading to our fellowship. Having been served for a year by a Specialized Interim Pastor we are now actively seeking. If you wish to explore God's call with us, contact Bill Davids, Search Team at bill.davids@clarencedavids.com. Visit our website at paloschurch.org for more info.

60th Anniversary

VAN DYK, John and Charlotte (Vander Zee) 845 NW 5th St. Gresham, Oregon 97030, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary Nov. 15, 2009. Children: Richard, Gary & Gladys, Jay, Dan & Janet. 2 grandchildren & 7 great-grandchildren. God is good and we are thankful for all his blessings.

WEESIES, Wallace and Eleanor (Dykstra) of Whitehall, MI celebrated their 60 years of marriage on Nov. 24 with their family. Thanks be to God! Chuck, Kent and Ginny, Ruth Ann and Bryan Zylstra.

55th Anniversary

VISSER, Elmer and Pearl (Cok), PO Box 215, Harrison, Montana 59735. Married Feb. 1, 1955, celebrating 55th anniversary. Sons and wives: Keith (deceased) & Peggy, Glenn & Nicolle, and Randy & DeEtte. 12 grandchildren, 8 great-grandchildren. We thank God for His many blessings.

50th Anniversary

BEEZHOLD George & Anita (Lenderink) will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on January 8, 2010. Children: Joel & Carol Van Drunen, Cathy Peerbolt (deceased), Caryn Wiltjer, Carrie Beezhold (deceased), Dale & Camie Hillegonds, Carisa Beezhold, 12 grandchildren and 1 great grandson. We thank God for our many wonderful blessings.

VANDER WERF, Bill & Jo (Van Essen) 774 4th Ave. NE, Sioux Center, IA 51250. Married Dec. 29, 1959. Son: Dave (Becky). Grandchildren: Abby, Jonathon & Sarah. God is so good!

VOS, Marion and Dorothy (Rolfs) of Oskaloosa, Iowa will celebrate their 50th anniversary on January 21. Their children are Mary and Gary De Young (Andrew & Jared), Mark (Ryan and Patsy, Raven and Matt Cross, & Trevor) & Carol and Grant Gasson (David & Elise) and 2 great grand children. We love you mom and dad, grandpa and grandma.

Obituaries

DE JONG, Bertha, age 81, Ripon, CA went to be with our Lord on October 25, 2009. She will be lovingly remembered by her husband, Cornelius, of 59 years, children Carol (Ron) Kunnen, Glenn (Marilyn) De Jong, Larry (Antine) De Jong, 8 grandchildren, 3 sisters.

DEMEY, John; age 75; November 18, 2009; 2105 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546; Surviving are his wife of 52 years, Marcia DeMey; children: Kevin and Julie Girton, Doug and Amy Byl, Don and Melanie Zandee, Dave and Mary DeMey, Gregg and Sarah DeMey; grandchildren: Joshua, Katie, Mary and Jonathan Girton, Derek, Daniel, AnneMarie and David Byl, Nathan and his wife Jessie, Jordan, Aubrie and Jesse Zandee, Mitchell, Sam and Ben DeMey, Anastasia and Will DeMey; sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law: Shirley VanDenBrink, Gord and Lillian Ludema, Jim Stull; He was preceded in death by his parents: Isaac and Grace DeMey; siblings: Marinus (June) DeMey, Minnie (Harold) Poll, Katherine (Jake) VanderHulst, Neil (Dorothy) DeMey; brothers-in-law: Fred Frieswyk, Calvin Frieswyk, Don VanDenBrink; sister-in-law: Gloria Stull.

HOOGWERF, Frank; age 90; November 19, 2009; 4310 Walnut Hills Dr. SE, Kentwood, MI 49512; He was preceded in death by his first wife, Wilhelmina ("Willie") in 1988. He is survived by his beloved second wife: Cora Zylstra (nee Pipe); son: Frank (Sharon) Van Haven of Grand Rapids; grandsons: Brett (Katherine) Van Haven and Justin Van Haven; great grandson: Tatum; brothers and sisters in The Netherlands: Karel (Bep) Hoogerwerf, Johanna (Arie) Koudstaal, and Cobie (Jos) Lambregts; step children: Mary (John) Paddinge, Phyllis Ten Elshof, Jane (Robert) Rhoda, Sally (Frank) Jonkman, Barbara (Royce) Hanberry, Sam (Tammy) Zylstra; and numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren.

GEELHOOD, Mrs. Florence A. (Ornee); aged 88; November 25, 2009; Grand Rapids, MI; She is survived by her children: Bruce and Marcia Geelhood of Falls Church, Virginia, Elaine and Richard Olson of Orland Park, Illinois, Jan and Tom Van Opstall of Grandville; grandchildren: Bonnie and Jonathan Davis, Ken and Debbie Geelhood, Steve and Jennifer Geelhood, Eric and Shannon Olson, Dirk Olson, Adam Van Opstall, and Calvin Van Opstall; great grandchildren: Sophia Davis and Madeline Olson; sister: Ruth Gritter; brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law: Mart and Bea Geelhoed, Ray Geelhoed, and Fannie and Dyke Van Solkema.

KIEFT, Elizabeth "Betty," nee Vander Molen, age 91, 419 S Harvard, Villa Park, IL 60126. Wife of the late William Kieft. Mother of Alyce (William) Grant, Thomas L. (Kathy) and the late William G. Kieft. Grandmother of Brian T. (Shonah), Melissa A. (Brook Enger) Grant, William P. Kieft, Dawn and Cher Pruett. Great-grandmother of four. Sister of Ann (the late Sam) Kingma, Bernard (Kathleen) Van Der Molen, Ella (the late Robert) Aasen, Mindy (Wallace) Niewenhuis, and preceded by Tina, Gertrude (the late Louis) Tazelaar, Bertha, Effie (the late Donald) Dykema. Memorials to Crossroads Prison Ministries.

LEO, Eleanor, age 84, November 1, 2009, South Holland, IL. She was preceded in death by her husband, Harold, her sister, Florence Koedyker, and her brother Gerard Koster. She is survived by her children: Barb (Ken) Eriks, Floyd (Laureen), Ray (Lori), 7 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren. --I know that my Redeemer liveth.

LUCAS, Jessie, 93, of Manhattan, Montana, entered into Glory, July 28, 2009. Jessie was an active, lifelong member of the Manhattan Christian Reformed Church. She is survived by her brother Harold, and sister-in-law Pauline Lucas, along with 13 nieces & nephews. Jessie was a loving, giving person. She will be missed.

MIRSMA, Harlan Eugene, 59, 8919 Chino Ave. Ontario, Calif. 91761 went to be with the Lord on Oct. 23, 2009. He was born on Nov. 6, 1949 in Artesia, CA. He is survived by his wife of 35 years, Greta (VandenBrink). Children: Vickie & Jason Seguy, Harlan & Hillary Miersma, Laura & Brian Bachar, and Cheryl & Matt Piper, 6 grandchildren, mother Dorothy (Wigboldy) Miersma, 1 sister Marlene De Jong, 4 brothers Curt, Ronald, Bob, and Henry.

RIETEMA, Arthur F., of Kanawha, IA went to be with his Lord Nov. 11, 2009. He is survived by his wife of 70 years, Henrietta Christians Rietema, two daughters—Jean (Joel) Brower of Byron Center, MI and Marilyn (Dennis) TerHark of Kanawha, IA, one son—Richard (Sally) Rietema of Zeeland, MI, daughter-in-law Peggy Rietema of Grand Rapids, MI, 9 grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren, one sister—Winifred Pommer of Pella, IA, and one sister-in-law—Grada Rietema of Grand Rapids, MI. He was preceded in death by his son Larry Rietema of Grand Rapids, MI.



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4 brothers—John Rietema of Kanawha, IA, Clarence Rietema of Grand Rapids, MI, 2 infant brothers, 3 sisters, Tena Van Otterloo of Rock Valley, IA, Minnie Christians of Kanawha, IA, and Connie DeVries of Pella IA.

SPOOLSTRA, Alice, 78, of 7397 N. 120th Ave. Holland, Mich., formerly of Evergreen Park, Ill, passed away November 10, 2009. Survived by her husband Nicholas of 53 years; children Beth & Keith Bonnes of Holland, MI, William & Twyla Spoolstra of Elmhurst, IL, Robert & Julie Spoolstra of Caledonia, MI, 9 grandchildren, 1 great-grandchild, brother and sister-in-law Gerald & Linda Spoolstra of Marion, MA.

TERBORG, Lawrence, age 78, DeMotte, IN went to be with the Lord on Nov. 17, 2009. He is survived by his wife Evelyn of 59 years. Children: Cheryl (John) Sjaardema, DeMotte, IN; Larry (Beverly) Terborg, Byron Center, MI; Brenda (Hank) Wunderink, Lowell, IN; Jim (Dee) Terborg, Wheatfield, IN; 11 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren. A memorial service was held on Nov. 20, 2009 at 1st CRC of DeMotte, IN.

TE VELDE, Harriet; Age 71 September 24, 2009. 5821 W. Prospect Dr. Visalia, Ca. 93291. Harriet is survived by husband Bernard; children; Gregory te Velde; David (Alice) te Velde; Judy (Phil) Vannette; Bernard Alan (Becky) te Velde; Linda (John) Moons; 13 grandsons; 11 granddaughters and 1 great-granddaughter.

VANDEN BERG, Hildred (PASTOOR, STOB) age 101, Nov 12, 2009. Preceded in death by 1st husband John W Stob, 2nd husband Edward Vandenberg, and son William (Helen) Stob. She is survived by children Howard (Jo Ann) Stob, Mary (Alfred) Luchtenburg and Leonard (Sharon) Stob, 13 grandchildren, 37 great-grandchildren, 2 great-great grandchildren.

Employment

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Wednesday, January 6

7:00 p.m., Xavier High, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Thursday, January 7

7:00 p.m., Oostburg Christian School

Friday, January 8

7:00 p.m., Brookfield CRC

Saturday, January 9

7:00 p.m., Central Wisconsin Christian High, Waupun, Wisconsin

Sunday, January 10

6:00 p.m., Unity Christian High, Fulton, Illinois



CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

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2010

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ANNA MARIA ISLAND FL CONDO Gulf in front, Sarasota Bay in back; 3BR/2BA; pool, fishing dock, \$1125/wk thru 2/9/09; \$800/wk after 5/1. Call 616-915-908

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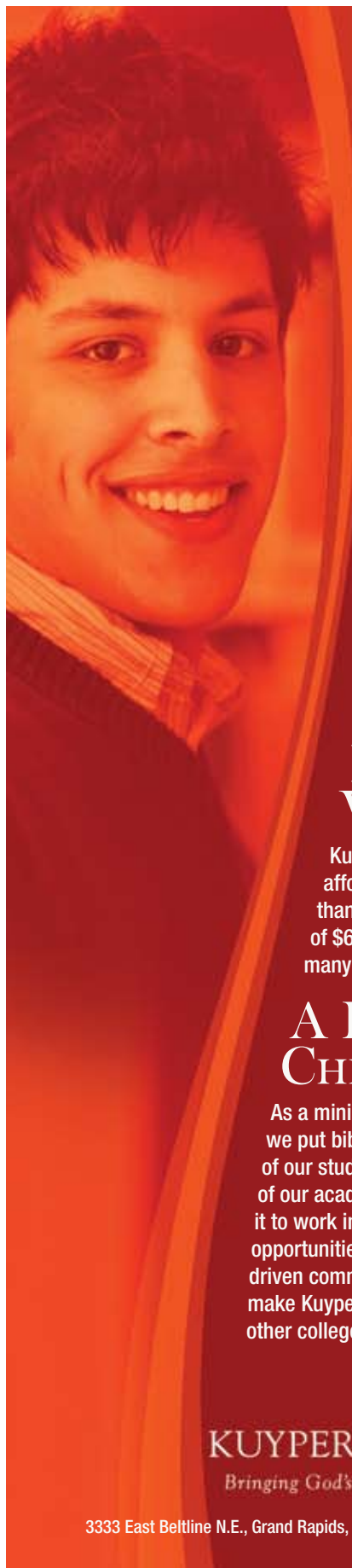
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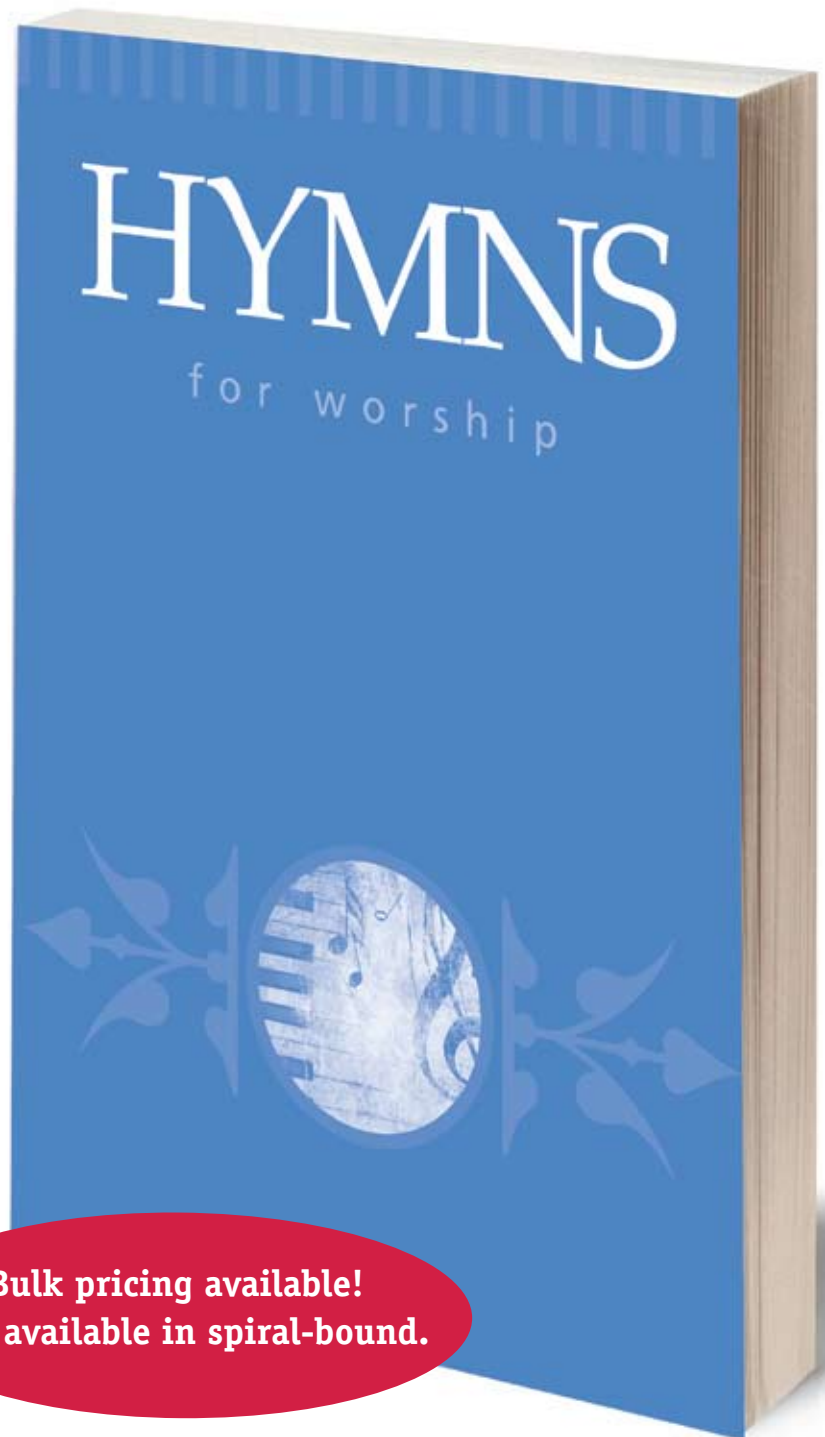
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Punch Lines

Send Us Your Photos!

Now that John Calvin's 2009 whirlwind world tour is over, *The Banner* is pleased to inaugurate a brand-new photo feature on these pages. But we need your help again!

Keep your cameras handy, because in 2010 we'd like you to send us photos of CRC- or Reformed-related items that pop up in unexpected places.

For example, Dave and Babs Veneman, who work with an organization called Rafiki in Monrovia, Liberia, sent the photo at right to the folks back home in Modesto (Calif.) CRC. Church member Carol Slager forwarded it to *The Banner*. The Venemans write:

"Many clothes that do not sell at garage sales or in stores in North America get compressed into bales and shipped to Africa. We see shirts being worn here from schools and church groups . . . but we never expected to see a Cadet shirt in Liberia! It made our day!"



I was watching my 5-year-old boy kneeling by his bed. He was saying his bedtime prayer. Soon he finished, but he tensed up and whispered a sentence over and over again. I could not figure it out. Finally he stopped, got up, and said, "You want to know what I was praying, Mom?" I nodded eagerly. "I was asking God, 'Please don't end the world tonight.'"

It was Christmas Eve.

—Frances Kok

An elderly woman, giving directions to her grown grandson who was coming to visit with his wife, said, "Come to the front door of the apartment building. On your right you'll see a panel with buttons. Use your elbow to push button 301, and I'll buzz you in. Turn left to the elevator and use your elbow to press the elevator button. Once inside, push the Floor 3 button with your elbow. When you get out, I'm on the left."

"Grandma," the grandson replied, "that sounds easy enough, but why do I need to push all those buttons with my elbow?"

She replied, "You're not coming empty-handed, are you?"

—George Vander Weit

After an accident, a man was in a coma for 10 days. When he finally woke, his faithful wife was the first to greet him. He told her, "I have faced many troubles and trials, and you have gone through each one of them with me. When we were skiing and I broke my leg, you cared for me while I recovered. When I choked on that piece of steak, your Heimlich maneuver saved my life. When I lost my job, you told me to never give up. Honey, you're wonderful."

"But you know, sweetheart, I'm beginning to think you bring me bad luck."

—Conn Witt

My husband and I often take walks, and since I have asthma he will pull me up hills. He does that with the help of a long strap that he puts on his shoulders. One day we were with our grandchildren when 7-year-old Clarissa came up beside me and asked, "May I walk Grandpa for a while?"

—Peta Velthuisen



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