

²⁰ Lopsided Mercy

³⁶ Loving the Broken

²² Witnessing
in a Facebook
World

¹⁸ **ILLEGAL**

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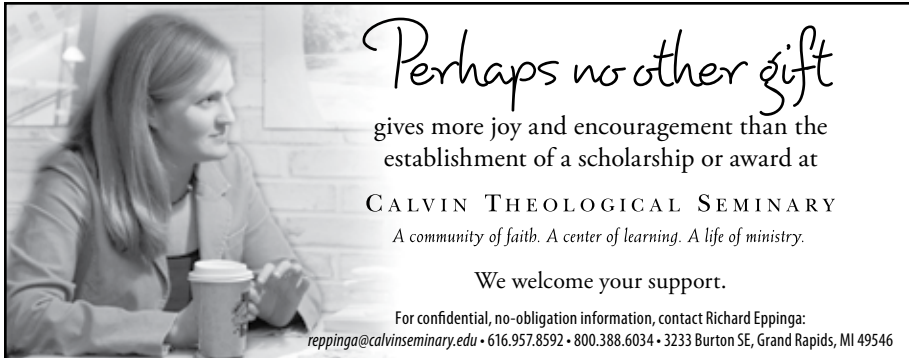
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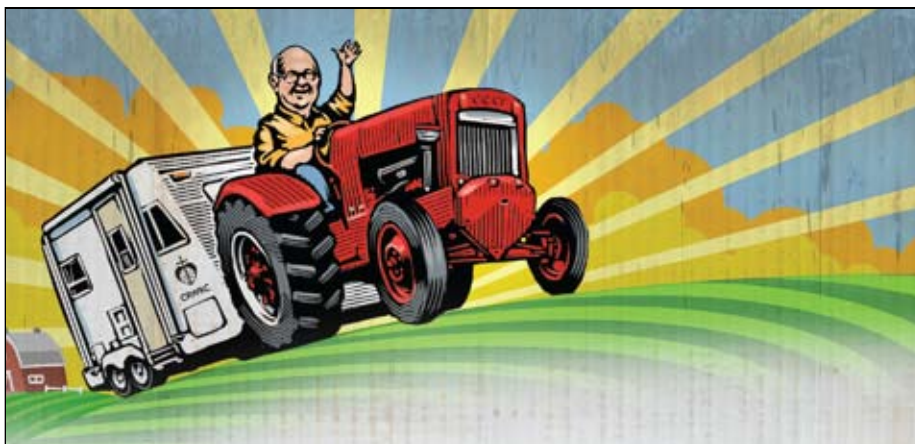
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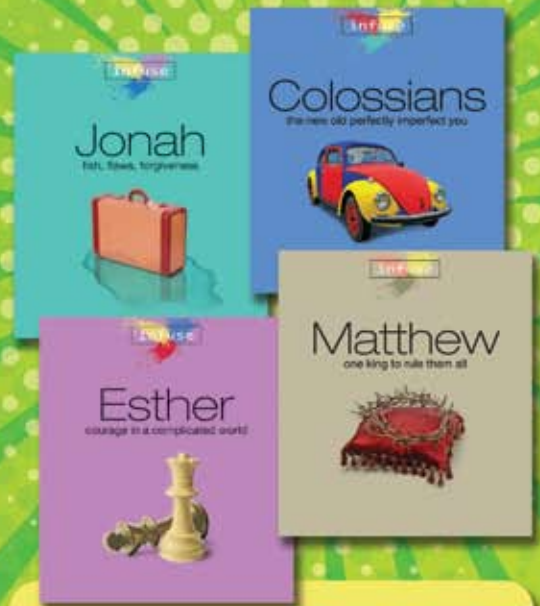
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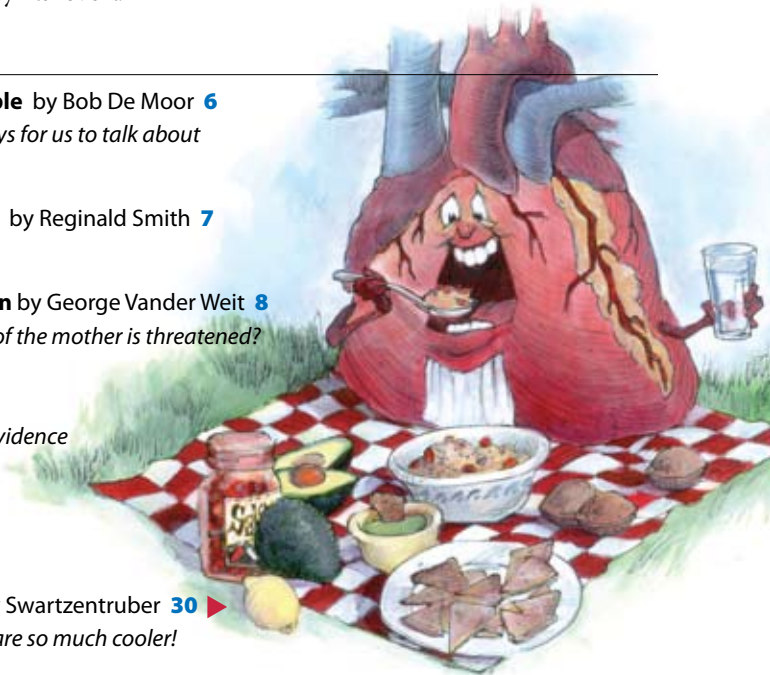
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Extending the Kitchen Table

FOR SIX YEARS the “every household *Banner*” has been privileged to serve as our denominational kitchen table—a place where church family and friends talk to each other about matters of communal interest. We’ve had everything from good-natured banter to the occasional fist slammed down in frustration. But we’ve spoken together in love for the Lord, for the church, and for each other.

For *Banner* staff it’s been a privilege to “direct traffic” in this flow of conversation around our table. But because of limited editorial space, we’ve had to turn down far too many good articles and thoughtful responses that our readers submitted.

During these six years we have been on the Web as well, at www.thebanner.org. But our webzine has only “mirrored” the print magazine. Now we’ve started to change that.

With last month’s issue we’ve added another leaf to our kitchen table by expanding the website. That allows more folks to participate in the conversation and to engage in more sustained dialogue.

We’ve also shifted our publishing paradigm. Up until now the print version of *The Banner* has been our main “engine,” and the Web version was drawn from that. That helped us to widen the reach but not the content of the print version. We have now begun to allow the Web *Banner* to serve as our basic platform of discourse and to draw from it the best of its content for the print version. Key advantages of that approach are that we can

- offer more content (news, feature articles, reviews).
- allow for more reader participation.
- and offer content in real time instead of waiting until the print version is published.

The Web allows us to expand our offerings because, unlike print pages, electrons are cheap. So the e-zine can offer more at lower cost.

Will this move erode the quality of your print *Banner*? Not a chance! We’ll just have that much more fresh content to choose from.

- We’ve already implemented some of the enhancements to www.thebanner.org:
- We offer more news stories, and they’re updated weekly.
 - We offer more feature article content, and readers can now comment on articles.
 - Tuned In now offers more media reviews and allows readers to contribute their own.
 - We offer links to the denominational website (www.crcna.org), to CRC News, to the CRC Network (network.crcna.org), and to suggestions for further reading.

As we continue to expand thebanner.org, we also hope to offer

- bilingual corners on our site featuring content and dialogue of interest to and from our Korean, Hispanic, and Chinese churches
- advertising that allows our denominational agencies and other advertisers to promote their messages using a variety of formats (flash video, sound).

Given the ever-increasing migration of our readers to the Web, we believe this is a timely move. We hope you’ll find the Web *Banner* a welcome addition. More important, we hope you’ll engage it and, through it, each other in meaningful conversation. So draw up that virtual chair and set a spell. We’ve got some more jawin’ to do, pardner. ■



Rev. Bob De Moor is editor of *The Banner* and pastor of preaching and administration for West End CRC, Edmonton, Alberta.

The new
online *Banner*
allows more
ways for us
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interest.

Bob De Moor Editor

Henry Hess Editor, Church@Work

Dean R. Heetderks Art Director

Joyce Kane Managing Editor

Jena Vander Ploeg Features Editor

Gayla R. Postma News Editor

Kristy Quist Tuned In Editor

Sandy Swartzentruber Copy Editor

Pete Euwema Graphic Design

Frank Gutbrod Graphic Design

Shelli Lokers-Calanchi Marketing
Manager

Contact Us

2850 Kalamazoo Avenue SE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49560

Address Changes and Subscriptions

800-777-7270 or visit our website at
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Editorial

616-224-0785 editorial@thebanner.org

News

613-543-3603 news@thebanner.org

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Fish and Wonder

THE HISSING of the breathing machine was the only noise in the room. A single white tube pushed oxygen down his throat to keep his body alive, even if the word *alive* seemed like a lie. Nurses moved quickly in and out of the room like cars in city traffic.

His head was turned toward the window, but he could not see the stunning display of color and the majesty of fall. His eyes were closed, shut tight by crust and sedation. How could my 33-year-old nephew end up in this hospital fighting for his life?

I sat with him, and God began to teach me at his bedside that grace comes in simple moments of holy quietness.

Marcus was the only child of my oldest sister, Rebecca. When he was young, I wanted to help my sister because Marcus' father was infrequent in visiting him. I loved my nephew. I wanted to be there for him.

I took Marcus to his first professional baseball game, where he became addicted to the lovable and ever-losing Chicago Cubs. He had never been to Shedd Aquarium, filled with every conceivable fish on the planet. Once he saw the glass cases of marine life, he was lost in the beautiful world of dolphins, penguins, sea turtles, and sharks. He never forgot it. He saw the wonder of God's good creation in the confines of a place I took for granted. He taught me to notice God's beauty again. I'll never visit those two places without thinking about Marcus.

I watched a machine, blinking with red, yellow, and blue lights, signal to nurses that Marcus needed his urine bag emptied. As the nurse made the change, I thanked God for the moments I had with Marcus—even for this painful moment now. I praised Jesus for

giving me him for those short years on the earth.

Thank you, Lord, for Marcus! As I sat by his side, God restored the gift of wonder to me again. Without wonder, we begin to see the world without hope and joy. The entire business of Jesus welcoming children was to help us adults believe again that God has the whole world in his hands. God can still surprise us, can't he?

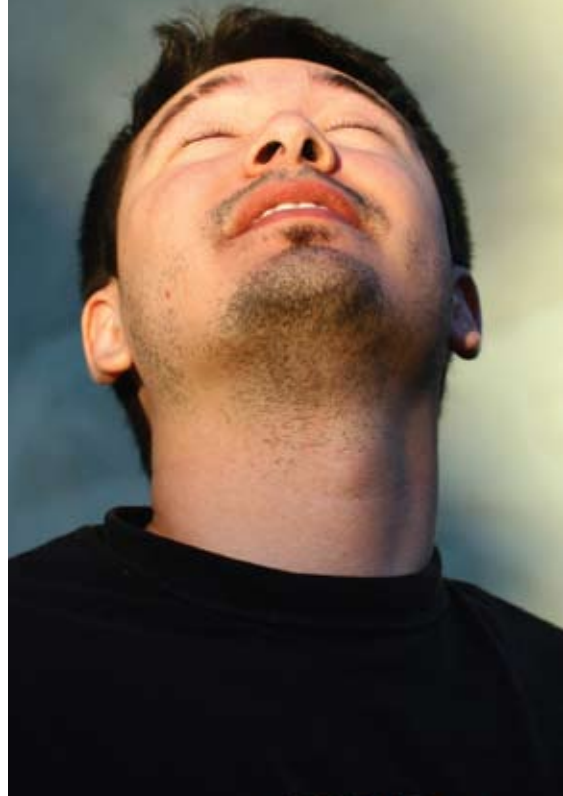
A bag of saline slowly dripped into Marcus's veins. The nurse adjusted the tube, searching it for possible kinks and knots.

I knew this would be the last time I would see Marcus in this world. I touched his swollen arm. I prayed that somehow God would allow Marcus to hear my prayer: "Oh, Jesus, take Marcus to be home with you. He knew you as his Savior and Lord. May he find you as the only lover of his soul. Bring him to the river of life, which is filled with every kind of fish. I pray that one day I will watch the fish with him. Amen."

One week later, Marcus was called home. Maybe the sound that met him in heaven was the voice of Master Jesus saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. . . . Come and share your master's happiness" (Matt. 25:23). ■



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



Every suffering can
be blessed because
it hollows out a place
in us for God and
his comfort, which
is infinite joy.

—PETER KREEFT

Our Real Position on Abortion

OPINION



Do we really allow it only when the life of the mother is threatened?

A FRIEND TOLD ME about several couples whose babies had a serious genetic condition that results in severe deformity and death. One baby died in the sixth hour of labor. Another died three days after birth. The third couple decided not to carry their baby to term and had an abortion.

Our denomination asserts that the latter couple violated the sixth commandment and is guilty of murder. It asserts the same about those who have an abortion because of rape, incest, or other “hard cases.”

In his January 2011 editorial, *Banner* editor Bob De Moor calls us to encourage the “countless CRC folks who quietly and steadfastly continue the battle against abortion” in a variety of ways. That’s excellent advice. He also calls us to bring our official position to the attention of governments in both the United States and Canada. Some of us cannot do that, however, because we believe the official position is pastorally insensitive and lacking in Christian grace toward those who wrestle with the “hard cases.”

The Christian Reformed Church’s official position is this: “An induced abortion is an allowable option only when the life of the prospective mother is genuinely

threatened by the continuation of the pregnancy.” Synod 1993 did say that our members could be guided by material in the Reformed community that indicates that abortion in the hard cases is permissible (*Acts of Synod 1993*, p. 515). Regarding in vitro fertilization, Synod 2003 was asked to declare that “it is morally wrong to intentionally cause the death of a human embryo . . . except when it must be done to save the life of the mother (our official position).” It defeated that request (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 644).

On paper, Synod 1972’s decision on abortion is still our official position. In reality, it is not. Many church members, including delegates to synod, are no longer willing to say that an induced abortion is an allowable option *only* when the life of the prospective mother is threatened. Rather, an induced abortion is also morally defensible in cases of rape, incest, severe genetic disorders, and other “hard cases”—something asserted by the 1972 study committee but not adopted by Synod 1972.

It’s past time for us to demonstrate pastoral sensitivity to fellow members who wrestle with the hard cases. It’s time for us to adopt the original recommendations of the 1972 study committee. Then all of us would have no difficulty bringing our official position to the attention of our governments. ■



Rev. George Vander Weit is a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church and a regular contributor to *The Banner*’s “Frequently Asked Questions” column.



Abortion

Thank you for your January editorial bringing light to the abortion issue (“Security for Whom?”). I work in a medical crisis pregnancy center. It can be heartbreaking when a patient chooses an abortion after counsel and an ultrasound. But it is very rewarding when a patient chooses life for her unborn baby after counsel and an ultrasound. God is still at work, changing hearts and minds one at a time.

—Beth Klimp
Cadillac, Mich.

A Modest Proposal

Banner editor Bob De Moor’s “Modest Proposal” (December 2010)—to keep our three historic Reformed confessions as is but elevate our Contemporary Testimony—might be a short-term solution for what we require officebearers to sign, but it sidesteps the larger issue of the confessional stance of the CRC. To elevate the Contemporary Testimony is an internal CRC matter. To adopt the Belhar would be an ecumenical matter, which is, after all, what any confession is: what we hold in common with other parts of the church around the world. If the CRC were a new denomination today, considering what statements we’d adopt to stand with the larger body of Christ, I could well imag-

TTERS

ine that many would discourage adopting the Canons of Dort because it comes from another geographic and cultural context—an argument being used against adopting the Belhar. To me, Bryan Berghoef’s argument in favor of adopting the Belhar (“Our Discomfort with the Belhar”) is the most compelling: our historic Forms of Unity address what we believe; the Belhar challenges us by more directly addressing how we should live.

—Emily R. Brink
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Before jumping into my opinion on the matter, I would like to congratulate *The Banner* on an excellent series. “True Confessions” has painted a portrait of the church’s history and identity that many contemporary religious publications do not provide, and for that I am extremely grateful.

The church definitely has a duty to uphold and express Christian doctrine, but requiring ministers to passively commit to the party line is not only stifling but narrow-minded. After all, any single grasp the church has of theology is at best half the story and not necessarily universally appropriate. Rather than giving a single position on issues, the confessions of the CRC should discuss the merits of multiple opinions without being dismissive and should require ministers to show congregations the case for all major positions.

—Kevin William Walker
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Your “Modest Proposal” is nothing less than an attempt to prepare the membership for cutting the Christian Reformed Church loose from its moorings. If favored, we have ceased to be Reformed. If the requirements for officebearers to uphold the creeds and confessions is eliminated, then we do not know any-

more what they stand for . . . what they truly believe.

—John VanVeen
London, Ontario

Your “Modest Proposal” seems right to me. We as churches do need to address our sins and shortcomings that emerge over the course of history, so that we change our attitudes as well as our practices. But we catch them better in our own situations and contexts. So I think that accepting the Belhar Confession as it is and adding it to our present confessions would definitely not be the best way to go. And, certainly, a review and modification of the place of our Contemporary Testimony would be a wise consideration.

—Rev. Peter Sluys
Lacombe, Alberta

Thanks to Rev. John Luth for pointing out the lack of confessional courage in our denomination (“Confessions: Cautions and Concern,” December 2010). And how great to see confessional courage demonstrated in the same issue when Bob De Moor suggests that we require officebearers to subscribe to our Contemporary Testimony without fearing that doctrinal chaos will result (“A Modest Proposal”). Our willingness until now to leave the Contemporary Testimony in no-man’s-land, confessionally speaking, while at the same time recommending the Belhar, is ironic. Once again we leave the hard work of confessional articulation to someone else either far away in time or place.

While stopping short of proposing full confessional status for the Contemporary Testimony, De Moor’s proposal would actually be quite far-reaching. Strengthen the CT by all means, even using insights from the Belhar, but let it be our own confession we confess.

—Wilma van der Leek
Surrey, British Columbia



Graham Cracker Nativity

Thank you so much for the pattern for the graham cracker nativity (Just for Kids, December 2010). This was the first Christmas that my 2-and-a-half-year-old daughter “got” the story of Jesus’ birth. She played constantly with the nativity scenes that we had set out. And when she saw the picture of the “Incredible Edible Nativity” in *The Banner* on our coffee table, she pointed to it excitedly and asked, “Please—we make this?” So we did. And it turned out great!

—Heather Dekker
Burlington, Ontario

Correction

The top photo on page 27 of the February *Banner* is of Waiyee, a woman whose life was changed by God through a radio program of Back to God Ministries International (“From Listener to Friend”). She now regularly contributes to the BTGMI blog for that program.

NEWS

NEWS CORRESPONDENTS

For correspondents' e-mail addresses, see www.thebanner.org

Gayla R. Postma News Editor
E-mail: gpostma@crna.org

Sarah Boonstra
Classes Rocky Mountain, Yellowstone
303-247-0697

Anita Brinkman
Classes Huron, Chatham
519-354-9126

Jenny deGroot
Classes BC North-West, BC South-East
604-888-5505

Larry Edsall
Classes Arizona, Red Mesa
602-300-4518

Doug Evenhouse
Classes Northern Illinois, Wisconsin
630-241-0735

Karen Gorter
Classes Holland, Zeeland,
616-399-6123

Henry Huisjen
Classes Kalamazoo, Lake Erie
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Calvin Hulstein
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Jonathan J. Kim
Classis Pacific Hammi
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Rachel deKoning Kraay
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Noah Kruis
Classes Grand Rapids East,
Grand Rapids North
616-558-8166

Amy Rycenga
Classes Muskegon, Northern Michigan
616-402-8881

Ryan Struyk
Classes Grand Rapids South,
Thornapple Valley
616-550-6723

Amy Toornstra
Classes Columbia, Pacific Northwest
503-399-9165

Roxanne Van Farowe
Classis Southeast U.S.
919-477-2084

Sophie Vandenberg
Classes Hamilton, Niagara, Toronto
905-796-3063

Brenda Visser
Classes Eastern Canada, Quinte
613-924-1792

Heidi Wicker
Classes California South,
Central California, Greater L.A.,
209-599-3799

Carolyn Koster Yost
Classes Georgetown, Grandville
616-516-9175

Louis Tamminga
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Calvin Profs Say Evolution Evidence Conflicts with Reformed Creeds

Two professors at the Christian Reformed Church's official college have published scholarly articles asserting that strong evidence from both biblical studies and science creates conflicts with parts of the historic Reformed confessions.

Daniel Harlow and John Schneider are religion professors at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich.

In particular, they question whether Adam and Eve actually existed, whether there was a literal Fall, and whether we need to reinterpret the doctrine of original sin as presented in the Reformed confessions.

Harlow wrote that he was exploring from the perspective of



Daniel Harlow

inspired story . . . that intends to teach primarily theological, not historical, truths about God, creation, and humanity."

Schneider wrote that the traditional understanding of the Fall does not fit with current science: "[The] narrative of human evolution makes it very hard, if not impossible, to maintain [the position that human and demonic creatures are responsible for evil]. For it seems, on this science, that

mainstream biblical scholarship, which is that "Adam and Eve are strictly literary figures—characters in a divinely

not just natural evils . . . but also the disposition for human moral evils, are practically part of God's original design."

Harlow and Schneider were working under authority of the college, according to Harlow. Provost Claudia Beversluis did not respond to *The Banner's* request to verify Harlow's statement.

According to an article in *Chimes*, the college's student newspaper, college president Gaylen Byker said at a faculty senate meeting that the two professors had violated the Form of Subscription, which requires Calvin College faculty to teach and write in accordance with Reformed confessions.

Ontario Church Once Again a Refuge

For the second time in a year, East Christian Reformed Church in Strathroy, Ontario, was a refuge in a snowstorm for stranded travelers. The same blizzard stranded two CRC employees.


On December 13, the church housed over 50 motorists for 48 hours when a blizzard closed a nearby major highway. The church also sheltered motorists in similar circumstances in January 2010 (see *Banner*, April 2010).

The recent storm stranded John Orkar, an employee of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee who was visiting North America from Jos, Nigeria.

Ben Vandezande, director of Christian Reformed Home Missions, was stranded as well. He spent 20 hours either in his car or

checking on occupants of cars stopped around him. Both Orkar and Vandezande were eventually brought to warm places.

Throughout the 20-hour wait, noted Vandezande, he felt secure. "I felt an amazing sense of calm

. . . a profound sense of the personal presence of God." 

—Anita Brinkman

Stranded motorists found a steady supply of food and company in the gym of East CRC.





John Schneider

In response to Byker's public statement, biology professor Stephen Matheson wrote in *Chimes* that "members

of our faculty are being attacked for taking particular positions, perceiving threats against their jobs."

In May 2010, the college adopted new rules for resolving disputes about the confessional integrity of faculty or their work. Byker told *The Banner* the college is following those guidelines.

Byker said, "It is our hope and desire that our constituency will be patient with us as we walk this deliberate path. Please be assured of our commitment to the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church."

Calvin physics professor Loren Haarsma co-wrote a book on Christianity and evolution with his wife, Deborah Haarsma. He said that a conversation between academic disciplines about hominid/human evolution is overdue on the campus.

"The fossil evidence does not point to a single pair of ancestors for the human race," he said. "We feel we have to ask these questions because our study of God's world has forced us to ask these questions."

For much more on this story, including links to the professors' articles, please visit www.thebanner.org.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Ronald Chase served communion to Jay Niebur at a Boulder Christmas Eve service that incorporated people from a local homeless shelter.

Colorado Church Makes Room on Christmas Eve

When Crestview Christian Reformed Church in Boulder, Colo., discovered that its turn to be an overnight shelter for people who live on the street coincided with its Christmas Eve service, they planned a service that would include their guests.

More than twenty people who live on the streets or in shelters participated in the service, with more at the potluck dinner following.

The church functions as an overflow facility for the Boulder Shelter for the Homeless on Friday evenings through the winter.

Dinner after the service was crowded as people mingled over casseroles, fried chicken, and Christmas cookies.

—Sarah Boonstra

Michigan Man Elected to House of Representatives

Bill Huizenga, a lifelong member at Haven Christian Reformed Church in Zeeland, Mich., was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in November.

Huizenga said he ran for the office for five main reasons: his five children. "I'm not satisfied with the world they are inheriting, and I am adamant about cleaning up the mess that has been created," he said.

Huizenga's number one goal in Washington will be to stop out-of-control spending. "We cannot borrow our way to prosperity," he said.

—Karen Gorter

Bill and Natalie Huizenga with (left to right): Alexandra, Will, Sieger, Garrett, and Adrian



British Columbia Man Wins National Research Award



Joel Pel, winner of an Innovation Challenge Award

You might not understand what Joel Pel does, but you might well see the results of his research on a future episode of "CSI."

Pel, 27, a member of First Christian Reformed Church in Vancouver, British Columbia, won a Canadian Innovation Challenge Award.

Pel developed a new technique and instrument for purifying and extracting DNA from previously too-small or contaminated samples.

"It certainly is an honor," reflected Pel. "I have worked with a great supervisor and team at [University of British Columbia], without whom this would not have been possible."

—Jenny de Groot

NEWS

SARAH BOONSTRA



Scott Shek of Trading for Treasures at First CRC's Global Bazaar.

Denver Church Acts Locally, Thinks Globally

First Christian Reformed Church in Denver, Colo., raised more than \$15,000 at its third annual Global Bazaar, which featured 29 vendors offering products from all over the world.

"I love the integration that is in this building . . . items that are distinctly African, distinctly Peruvian, distinctly Denver," said Rev. Joy Engelsman, minister of church development at First CRC. "We've layered them all together and mixed our lives with theirs."

Products for sale included jewelry made by a group of ex-prostitutes in Nepal, fabrics made by Nigerian women affected by or infected with HIV or AIDS, and soup mixes put together by residents of a Denver home for women who have been abused.

One of the organizers, Sandie Posthumus, noted that they don't charge a booth fee. "All we ask is that the vendors give ten percent back to another ministry. Basically we say 'please come and let's do this good work together.'"

—Sarah Boonstra

Coffee, Conversation, and Compassion in Edmonton

A hand up, not a handout, is what is offered at the Mosaic Centre in Northeast Edmonton, Alberta, where folks can get a cup of coffee and so much more.

Trinity Christian Reformed Church formed the center with three other local churches to help reduce the effects of poverty and homelessness.

One of the unique services the center offers is foot care. "To see the change in attitude, the transformation, in these people when someone washes and cares for their feet is truly amazing," said Megan Schuring, a member of Trinity.

Harold Thys, also a member of Trinity CRC, said, "We've tried to make Mosaic a place where people feel important and cared about, not just a number or another person in a line for a handout. It is a place where the love of God pours out." ☺

—Rachel deKoning Kraay



Doug receives foot care from Gwen Pelster, a retired nurse and volunteer at the Mosaic Centre in Edmonton, Alberta.

COURTESY OF THE MOSAIC CENTRE

Ontario Man Delivers Soccer Gear to Haiti



Jeff Bultje delivered 1,000 pairs of slightly-used soccer shoes and many uniforms to Haiti this fall, where they brought smiles to many children.

Bultje, a member of Grace Christian Reformed Church in Chatham, Ontario, collects the shoes at the end of every soccer season. "We usually make the announcement [about the opportunity to donate their used soccer gear] at the trophy presentation," said Bultje. "Some kids will literally strip right down, donate it all, and go home all smiles in their underwear!"

Nathan Wiersma and Jeff Bultje (front) and Alex Bultje (back right) with retired pro player Bobby Duval (back center).

In Haiti, many kids play soccer barefoot, which often results in injury, cuts, and infections. Some kids simply give up without equipment, often getting into trouble with gangs instead.

Bultje distributed the gear with retired pro soccer player Robert "Boby" Duval, a native of Haiti who runs a soccer camp near the slum of Cité Soleil. ☺

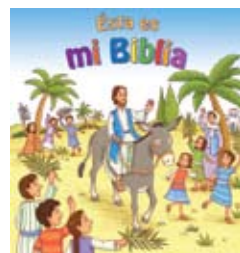
—Anita Brinkman

CRC Expands Spanish Publishing Ministry

World Literature Ministries, a division of the CRC's publishing ministry, Faith Alive Christian Resources, has published its first children's Bible in Spanish.

Esta es mi Biblia ("This is my Bible") was produced by Libros Desafío, the Spanish language line of World Literature Ministries. Director Jan Dijkman said the new children's Bible marks an important milestone for a ministry that has previously focused on Reformed materials for adults.

World Literature Ministries is also expanding its Spanish-language publishing efforts through a new agreement with Andamio, a Christian publishing house in Barcelona, Spain.



—Henry Huisjen

Woodville Community CRC's young people receive instructions for their annual Hunters' Supper.



Check thebanner.org for the expanded story.

Michigan Church Reaches Out to Hunting Community

Woodville Community Christian Reformed Church in White Cloud, Mich., has found a unique way to raise funds for its youth group: an annual Hunters' Supper.

"Woodville is a small country

church with about 80 members, and this is a big hunting area," said Shelly Werner.

This season's supper, held in November, was attended by 70 people.

The funds raised by the supper help support the youth group,

many of whom come from outside the church, attracted through friends. The fundraiser provides the youth group with weekly meals, new Bibles, and various outings during the year.

—Amy Rycenga

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. John Van Dyk

1925 – 2010

Rev. John Van Dyk, enthusiastic believer, encourager, military veteran, and gerontology specialist, passed away on September 21.

Born in the Netherlands, Van Dyk spent World War II in hiding to escape deportation, and subsequently served in the Dutch military in Indonesia. It was there that he received the Lord's call to the gospel ministry.

After studying at Calvin College and Seminary, Van Dyk entered the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church in 1956. He served congregations in Ontario, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, and Manitoba.

He received a degree from Ryerson University in gerontology and served for a time as the chaplain for Holland Christian Homes in Brampton, Ontario.

Van Dyk will be remembered for his enthusiastic and warm personality. To be in his presence meant to be uplifted and encouraged. He loved to talk about God's Word, always expecting to discover new riches.

Van Dyk is survived by his wife, Paula, two children and their spouses, and three grandchildren.

—Louis M. Tamminga

Further information on recently deceased ministers is available each year in the front pages of the Christian Reformed Church's annual Yearbook.

Bishops Approve Catholic-Reformed Baptism Agreement

U.S. Roman Catholic bishops have approved an agreement with four Protestant denominations, including the Christian Reformed Church, to recognize each other's baptisms as valid.

Declaring that baptism is "the sacramental gateway into the Christian life," the agreement affirms that the sacrament is to be performed only once in a person's lifetime. It also calls for the use of a common baptismal certificate.

Synod, the annual leadership meeting of the Christian Reformed Church, will consider the agreement for approval at its meeting in June 2011.

While the CRC and the Roman Catholic Church already recognize each other's baptisms in practice, formal recognition removes any lingering uncertainties about the validity of original baptisms, said Rev. Lyle Bierma, a professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, the seminary of the CRC.

The seven-year dialogue leading to the baptism agreement has produced two longer documents on baptism and the Lord's Supper that, Bierma said, "demonstrate a greater convergence in our sacramental theologies and liturgies than any of us would have imagined at the beginning."

—Henry Huisjen

Canadian High Schools Win Provincial Gold

In British Columbia it was girls and in Ontario it was boys, but in both provinces, Christian high schools won the provincial titles for volleyball.

Quinte Christian High School in Belleville, Ontario, won its first-ever gold in any event when the boys team brought home the Ontario volleyball title.

The team came back from 0-2 to win the last three games in a "best of five" series.

In Surrey, British Columbia, Surrey Christian School (formerly Fraser Valley Christian High) brought home gold with the girls volleyball title.

Two players, Katy Klomps and Krista Hogewoning, were named top female players in the province. Hogewoning was also named the tournament's most valuable player.

—Jenny de Groot and Brenda Visser



Quinte Christian High School provincial volleyball champions



The girls' volleyball team of Surrey (B. C.) Christian School.

NEWS



San Diego Church Serves Those Who Serve

Meeka Postman and Zach Brewer from Oakdale Park CRC in Michigan unwind at San Diego CRC.

San Diego (Calif.) Christian Reformed Church is serving those who serve by opening its facilities to mission teams from all over the U.S. and Canada.

Teams traveling to and from Mexico, as well as those serving in San Diego, have found a home-away-from-home at San Diego CRC. "We have a pool at the parsonage, a large field to play soccer and volleyball, two guest houses, a large fellowship hall, and, of course, the beach," said Cyndi Boss, church secretary of San Diego CRC and coordinator of the teams.

The church hosted more than 100 people from Illinois, Michigan, California, Washington, and British Columbia in 2010.

—Heidi Wicker



AJ SPOELSTRA

Ontario Pastor Named Fire Department Chaplain

Rev. Martin Spoelstra, pastor of Discovery Christian Reformed Church in Bowmanville, Ontario, was recently named chaplain of the town's fire department.

As a volunteer, he will provide spiritual care for fire fighters when requested, including performing funerals, baptisms, and weddings.

—Brenda Visser

Worshipping to the Beat of a Different Drum

Worshippers at Cornerstone Christian Reformed Church in Chilliwack, British Columbia, went beyond their own roots to those of the First Nations people groups.

For one Sunday in November, the piano, guitar, and drum set were replaced with a large handmade drum and the familiar spoken and sung words with chants.

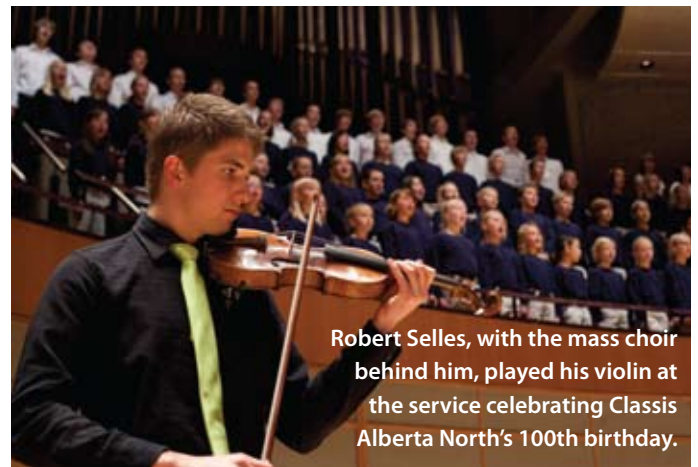
Ministry associate Harold Roscher, a member of the Cree Nation, led the services. Roscher is director of the Edmonton (Alberta) Native Healing Centre, a ministry of the CRC.

Participants were invited to join the drumming circle while those in the pew participated in a worship chant.

"The young children heartily and in a carefree manner beat the communal drum," said John Vugteveen, a member at Cornerstone, "but for many of us it was an intense and not always comfortable experience."

—Jenny deGroot

Children at Cornerstone CRC eagerly joined the native drumming circle.



Robert Selles, with the mass choir behind him, played his violin at the service celebrating Classis Alberta North's 100th birthday.

CHARLENE NANNINGA

Celebrating a Century of Grace in Northern Alberta

One hundred years ago Classis Alberta North (a regional group of churches) started out as one lone congregation worshipping in a tent.

The classis now has over 30 congregations with 9,500 members. In October, nearly 2,000 of them gathered in Edmonton to celebrate a century of grace.

Ron Knol, one of the organizers, pointed out the good wisdom that *The Banner* used in its August 31, 1913, edition, when it stated: "Edmonton is a strategic place for our Church in the great northwest. It may become the mother of many churches."

—Rachel deKoning Kraay

Mark Nonkes shows the hundreds of bikes collected for Namibia.



Check thebanner.org for the expanded story.

Calvin College Cuts Staff Due to Low Enrollment

Responding to declining enrollment, Calvin College cut the equivalent of 20 full-time positions, effective June 2011.

Calvin is the Grand Rapids, Mich., college owned by the Christian Reformed Church.


According to spokesman Matt Kucinski, some administrators and faculty accepted early retirement incentives and those laid off involuntarily were non-teaching staff only.

In a letter written in November explaining the cuts, college president Gaylen Byker said, "We knew we could not continue to balance the budget by freezing the salaries of our employees, [many] of whom have had no pay increases for two years."

Calvin College's enrollment has dropped 6.5 percent in the last ten years, according to the college's Office of Institutional and Enrollment Research.

Last fall, the provost's office hosted several meetings with students, asking for their input on ways for the college to save money. Solita Hoogendam, 21, who attended one of those meetings, said that students' ideas were all over the map.

"Provost Beversluis pointed out that our differing opinions are exactly what they are dealing with higher up, as they have this exact same discussion. Each person values different things and those values are reflected in where they think Calvin's money should be spent," she said.

But the "one overarching sentiment" among students at the meeting was "that professors are essentially what make Calvin as great as it is," Hoogendam said. "Their commitment and willingness to be on a pay freeze is greatly appreciated by students." 

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Ontario Man Collects Hundreds of Bikes for Africa

Working with friends and family, Mark Nonkes collected more than 500 bicycles destined for Namibia. A member of Blyth (Ontario) Christian Reformed Church, Nonkes lived in Namibia for the past three years and saw firsthand how bicycles help improve life there. By cutting down travel time, bikes can help people get to jobs and help children get to school. They also help healthcare workers see twice as many people in a day.

Churches in several southern Ontario towns served as collection sites where people could donate bikes of any size and condition.

Nonkes works with Bicycles for Humanity, an organization that collects bikes for Africa (www.bicycles-for-humanity.org).


—Anita Brinkman

Family Worshiping Together Again After 16 Years

The Horneman family of Chatham, Ontario, is able to attend church together for the first time in more than 16 years, now that Calvary Christian Reformed Church has installed an elevator.

Tim Horneman uses a wheelchair to move around. But because Calvary CRC is a multi-level structure, Horneman was unable to attend services.

But this past year, the church made major revisions to the building, including the addition of an elevator that can accommodate wheelchairs.

"Tim was visibly moved when he came into church again," said Rev. Chris Schievink. At the dedication service, the congregation sang one of Horneman's poems set to music. 

—Anita Brinkman



Tim Horneman, with parents John and Rita, is glad to be able to worship regularly at church again.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. James Joose
1925 – 2010

Rev. James Joose, passionate preacher, promoter of Christian institutions, warm friend to many, and man of gentle humor, passed away on August 29.


Born in the Netherlands, Joose emigrated to Canada with his family in the 1930s, eventually joining the family farming operation.

Joose was declared a minister of the Word in the Christian Reformed Church in 1960 and served congregations in Ontario, Alberta, and Nova Scotia. He retired in 1991.

Joose's ministry was marked by devotion, love, and practical wisdom. He was widely recognized for his deep understanding of the gospel's impact on human relations in society and education.

He served the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto as president and was a founding member of the Christian Labour Association of Canada.

He loved hiking, gardening, reading, traveling, bird-watching, and fixing things.

Joose is survived by his wife, Lena, seven children and their spouses, 12 grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren. 

—Louis M. Tamminga

Senior citizens perform a liturgical dance at Fleetwood CRC.



“A Time to Dance” in British Columbia

Seniors at Fleetwood Christian Reformed Church in Surrey, British Columbia, recently contributed liturgical dance to a Sunday morning worship service.

The seniors are part of an exercise group that meets at the church. Music by Michael W. Smith that they use while stretching at the end of their sessions sparked the idea for the liturgical dance.

Rev. Lammert Slofstra is a regular participant in the group. “We confess that we belong ‘BODY and soul to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ.’ We owe it to him to keep our bodies fit as long as we can,” he said. —Jenny deGroot

Riding to Rehabilitate in Michigan

Atop a blond pony at H.U.G.S. Ranch in Byron Center, Mich., 5-year-old Gracie VanderMolen of Jamestown Christian Reformed Church says riding horses and taking mentors’ advice helped her overcome insecurity.

H.U.G.S. was started by Lisa Carter and Tami VanderMolen, who both attend Jamestown CRC, with area horse aficionado Jill Glass. Mentors counsel about 30 youngsters troubled by social, emotional, and spiritual situations who come for riding sessions.

The nonprofit ministry makes a visible difference in children, VanderMolen said. “They leave with smiles and giggles, and parents say they notice their children have more confidence.”

—Carolyn Koster Yost

Gracie VanderMolen, 5, gets help riding from Lindsey Carter, 13, at H.U.G.S. ranch in Byron Center, Mich.



Canadian MP Visits GEMS



The GEMS girls club in Athens, Ontario, presented Member of Parliament Gordon Brown with a “hands for justice” banner.

Gordon Brown, Canadian Member of Parliament (MP), accepted a “hands for justice” banner from the GEMS girls’ club at Athens (Ontario) Christian Reformed Church.

The banner is a reminder to the government that there are just five years left to meet the goals of the Millenium Declaration, said Evelina Oosterhof, coordinator of the church’s GEMS club.

The Millenium Declaration, which Canada along with many other countries and the United Nations signed in 2000, contains promises that include reducing extreme poverty by 50 percent, reducing child mortality, and more. The signatory nations agreed to make these goals a reality by 2015.

—Brenda Visser



Canadian CRC Justice Organization Renamed

The Christian Reformed Church’s Canadian Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG) is now called the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue.

Since 1968, the committee has addressed ethical, social justice, and policy matters in Canada.

For more on how the new name was chosen, visit the-banner.org.

—Sophie Vandenberg

Urban Ministry Writer Needed

Do you have a passion for what God is doing in the city through the Christian Reformed Church and its people? Do you like to write and desire to tell the untold stories of the CRC at work in urban settings? Then we’d like to hear from you. *The Banner* is seeking a correspondent who is strongly connected with urban and multicultural CRCs and their members. We’d especially welcome writers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. If you are interested, please contact Gayla Postma, News Editor, at gpostma@crcna.org.

CAROLYN KOSTER YOST

FAQs

Christian Living

Q Every morning I wake up afraid. My body is getting weaker, and my resources are shrinking. I'm afraid of what will happen in the future. How can I overcome my fear?

A To feel fear when there is a threat is entirely appropriate. The threat of a continued economic downturn, the experience of aging with the possibility of diminished capacity, and the lack of adequate financial resources to meet these challenges is a reality many people face today. So why do some respond with fear of the future, while others live in trust that things will work out?

No doubt some people are blessed with a naturally optimistic outlook combined with a rock-solid faith in God and the goodness of humanity in times of need. For the rest of us, saying no to fear is a challenge that requires determination and effort to overcome.

To meet that challenge, begin by examining what threats are "real." List what your financial resources are now (including your assets, such as your house or car if you own these), as well as your expenses. Then determine whether you are living within your means. Decide that you can (and must) make the necessary changes in your lifestyle to meet the demands of this list.

Make another list of the things that you fear but that you know are not under your control, such as your health and your employment before retirement age.

Take care of your body through healthy eating and exercise and your mental health by relaxing with family and friends and doing activities you enjoy. To avoid feeling isolated, talk about your fears with friends who might be in the same boat.

Saying no to fear is a challenge.

Above all, give your fears to Christ. Ask him for more faith to trust that he knows your needs and sees you as his beloved child whose future he desires to prosper. Before going to sleep, say to yourself several times (even out loud) something like this: "Even though I don't know what the future will bring, I am safe in God's hands." Let it sink in, and let your spirit drink in the peace that God promises when we trust in him. When you wake up, say "no" to fear if you notice it is there, and dedicate your day to God.

Trust also that your church family will want to help you—financially or otherwise—if your resources become inadequate to meet your basic needs (housing, food, medical/dental care). Resist feeling shame and accept that giving your church family the opportunity to assist you blesses both of you.

We cannot know the future, but we do know, personally, the King in charge of that future.

—Judy Cook

Judy Cook is a family therapist living in Hamilton, Ontario. She is a member of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ontario. You may e-mail her at judycook.thebannerqanda@gmail.com. All responses will be held in the strictest confidence.

Outreach

Q My church may be moving to a multisite video venue. I'm not sure how I feel about that. Will I miss out on anything?

A Great question. Surveys show that multisite churches outnumber megachurches in the United States today. But we should differentiate between multisite churches that rely solely on video and those that have live

teaching at each venue. There are pluses and minuses to each.

One of the pluses is that a large church can create smaller, more intimate communities by initiating additional sites. The downside is that the congregation is never in the same room with the preacher, and he or she becomes "larger than life" on the screen. This contributes to the increasing celebrity culture that surrounds pastors of large churches. The pastor is seen not as a friend or a teacher but as "the guy on TV." This separates preaching from context—which was never intended. New Testament preaching by Paul and others was, more often than not, context-specific; it came from a person who knew the community well.

On his blog "Reclaiming the Mission," pastor and professor David Fitch wrote an insightful article on what he calls the "video venue farce." His main concern is that video decontextualizes and commodifies preaching so that it becomes seen as simply information exchange, rather than a Word of God from *within* that community *to* that community.

There are many avenues today to receive teaching through various media. I am thankful, for example, for the ability to download podcasts of sermons from people I enjoy. But perhaps we should not too quickly abandon the kind of teaching that comes from someone we know and someone who knows us. That intimacy is often exactly what God uses to speak his words into our lives.

—Bryan Berghof

Bryan Berghoef is the pastor of Watershed Church, a new church plant in Traverse City, Mich. ■

ILLEGAL

We like to categorize people, but real life plays out in the gray areas.

MY WIFE AND I live and minister among many Hispanic immigrants, both documented and undocumented. Because of that, a number of people have asked my opinion on immigration issues and what has been happening in Arizona.

To be honest, it's a question that I'd rather avoid. It's more economically and socially appealing to plead the Fifth Amendment than to offer a polemic on immigration to friends and family who financially support our ministry.

I'd also prefer to avoid the question because quite often the storyline of immigration gets flattened. Questions of legality allow us to forget that human beings are involved. Soon immigrants are reduced to cost/benefit ratios with arguments about how they either contribute to our economy or drain government resources. The popular rejoinder "What part of 'illegal' don't you understand?" shuts the door on further conversation. Whatever corporate colonialism or personal histories give rise to people leaving their homeland for a chance at a better life are summarily dismissed before immigrants have a chance to defend themselves.

Once we classify undocumented immigrants as illegal—just as white people in the U.S. once classified people of color as less than human—our feelings are safe. We don't need to bother with stories of mothers who choose between being with their children and having nothing to feed them but a glass of sugar water. We don't have to hear how they left their children to find work in the U.S. in order to provide them a measure of material decency. We don't need to ask why they left their countries; we need only ask how we can keep them out of ours.

As writer John Steinbeck once noted, if we dared ask ourselves the tougher questions, empathy would drive us mad.

IF WE DARED ASK OURSELVES THE TOUGHER QUESTIONS, EMPATHY WOULD DRIVE US MAD.

Not So Simple

Our world is more understandable when it's "black and white." Sterile categorization makes things easier. You're either right or you're wrong. You're either liberal or conservative. You're for us or against us. You're legal or illegal.

Religion, too, loves such categorization. We see it throughout the gospels:

"Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ask the disciples.

"Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

"In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone adulterous women. What do you say?"

WHEN FOREIGNERS RESIDE AMONG YOU IN YOUR LAND, DO NOT MISTREAT THEM. THE FOREIGNERS RESIDING AMONG YOU MUST BE TREATED AS YOUR NATIVE-BORN. LOVE THEM AS YOURSELF, FOR YOU WERE FOREIGNERS IN EGYPT. I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD.

—Leviticus 19:33-34

We love categorization because we think it allows us to know exactly where we stand before God and one another. Yet at every step Jesus refuses to play that game.

Jesus, like anyone who has muddled himself or herself in the pain of the world, knows that the answers to those questions are rarely simple. Motives, lies, and complex personal and political histories blur the lines. Real life and the pain of the human experience often play out in gray areas.

Having Hispanic immigrants as neighbors and friends, I've come to see that their stories are filled with shades of gray. More than 60 percent of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. were once rural farmers, like many of my family and friends in Iowa are. Many of them came here because trade policies such as NAFTA allowed U.S.-subsidized grain into Mexico. These farmers lost their way of

life because they couldn't compete with subsidized commodities. That's difficult for me to own up to.

The very policies that have benefited me, my family, my friends, and my community are the same policies that have devastated the livelihoods of farmers and rural communities not so different from ours.

Do undocumented immigrants break a law when they cross into the United States illegally? Yes. But it seems as if crossing the border illegally isn't the only line of justice that's been transgressed.

If empathy can track with the plight of undocumented immigrants this far, we

might often concede, "I don't have a problem if they come here, but can't they just do it legally?" That seems like a fair question and a reasonable solution—that is, until you learn of the bureaucratic impossibility of obtaining a legal work visa.

Mexico is allowed up to 25,460 work visas from the United States per year. If the 1,000 Hispanic immigrants in my hometown in Iowa each received one, they alone would constitute 4 percent of the total visas allowed. Our current system simply doesn't meet the great demand.

What do I do with a truth like that? Maybe I can ignore it if I classify the plight of these immigrants as the reality of business in a global free-market economy. But I wonder how "free" it truly is when cheap goods can flow freely across borders yet labor cannot. My Reformed faith that claims we are Christ's agents of restoration and reconciliation in all areas of our lives doesn't allow me to subject the

majority of daily life and business to the rules of Darwin and only a few sacred hours a week to the rule of Christ.

Jesus' Politics

"Who sinned, this child or his parents, that he is here illegally?"

"Is it right to cross Caesar's border or not?"

"In the Law we are commanded to deport such women. What do you say?"

I imagine that Jesus would refuse to play these games. His compassion for victims of the politicians and the powerful would trump allegiance to any nation's economic interests. Jesus turned out to be a poor Roman citizen as well as a poor Jewish nationalist. I imagine his immigration policy wouldn't impress today's politicians.

Conservatives and liberals alike can claim Jesus to be on their side, but Jesus refuses to take sides. He proclaims a different kingdom altogether, one that doesn't define citizenship by political boundaries, privileges, or rights.

In God's kingdom, citizens lay down their rights, becoming servants who view others as better than themselves, who love one another as they love themselves. These are the subversive politics of Jesus. If we truly claim that our primary citizenship is in the kingdom of God, then we must let that vision of shalom, of the lion lying down with the lamb, guide and critique the politics of our worldly kingdoms. ■



Kurt Rietema, his wife, Emily, and their son, Luke, live in the ethnically diverse neighborhood of Argentine in Kansas City, Kan. As they seek God's shalom for Argentine, through Christian community development efforts for the CRC, the Rietemas hope to see a new faith community emerge.

BY DONALD OPPEWAL

Lopsided Mercy

Caring for the poor
means seeking justice too.



W CARE ABOUT THE POOR.

Through faith-based organizations and as individuals with faith-based commitments, we've found numerous ways to help people who've fallen on hard times. We offer free food.

We provide free medical services to those without health insurance. We do whatever we can for families whose marginal income keeps them from providing what all parents, rich or poor, want for their children.

Our efforts to help are acts of mercy, and their continuation represents our belief that just as God shows mercy to all his creatures, his followers also show mercy to those who live damaged lives. Though damaged, they still bear the image of their Creator.

There is, however, one big problem with acts of mercy: there is no end to the need.

Beyond Mercy

As long as we leave the *causes* of continued poverty untouched, there is no hope for the poor.

For example, as long as access to health care remains limited to those with adequate resources, there is no hope for changing the health of a nation. As long as laws allow a minimum wage that's less than a living wage, there will be no hope for those with limited skills in the marketplace.

But the pursuit of justice offers new hope, for it looks to the systems—rules and laws, economic and legal practices (like those of banks and credit companies)—that often reward the rich and powerful while ignoring the plight of the poor and powerless.

If we are all equally valuable in God's sight, then searching for ways to enhance the lives of those who need a hand up and not just another handout is just as pressing as rescuing the perishing so they can live another day.

Sometimes we forget that the idea of social justice is just as biblical as the concept of mercy—and that we have the opportunity and responsibility to create policies and practices that minimize the surging inequalities in society today.

The Old Testament prophet Micah saw that the rich and powerful often create a system that allows misuse of their power. He put it succinctly when he said, "And what does the Lord require of you, but to act justly and love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8). Micah railed against the denial of rights to widows and against the use of false measures in business. He saw that acting justly and loving mercy are inextricably joined.

Jesus himself took action when he saw the money changers at the temple misusing their power and taking advantage of people. He overturned their tables and charged them with making his Father's house a "den of thieves."

Jesus' followers who seek justice today turn their attention to the elements of their political system or economic practices that discriminate against the poor and the powerless and to policies that perpetuate the marginalization of whole classes of citizens and keep them living in hopelessness and despair.

Legislators and corporations have the power to shape policy for their own benefit. The recent fiascos involving Wall Street and the banking industry have made it all too clear that those with power tend to seek their own best interests and are blind to the effect on others. Recent efforts to discontinue unemployment benefits to those already on the edge of being destitute are but another example—as is the desire to minimize taxes while resisting efforts to increase the minimum wage.

Speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves is one of the ways Christians make a difference. When our voice is loud enough and organized enough, legislators at all levels of government will listen. By giving voice to the voiceless, we can balance the influence of rich and powerful lobbyists. And for help in these efforts we can look to those social workers, judges, political analysts, and lawyers who see more clearly than the rest of us where laws and policies damage those who are hurting rather than delivering help.

Prophetic Call

While the challenges are immense, there is a loud and clear call to action from both Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

Once again, the Old Testament prophets reinforce the Christian's sensibilities of the needs of the downtrodden. Isaiah put it strongly when he thundered, "Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people" (10:1-2).

Martin Luther King Jr. was a prophet for our own era. In a speech one year before his assassination, he looked beyond doing mercy and toward seeking justice. He said, "True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring."

Voters for whom faith is important for determining whether policies harm or help fellow citizens can pursue both mercy *and* justice. For one without the other is less than Jesus requires. ■

As long as we leave the causes of continued poverty untouched, there is no hope for the poor.



Donald Oppewal is an emeritus professor of education at Calvin College. He lives in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Witnessing in a **facebook** World by Nancy Vander Meer

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn. Some people think social media networks are passing fads. Others use them to keep in touch with family and friends. But for Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI), these revolutionary communication advances offer ways to build the church of Jesus Christ.

Kei, a 40-year-old government employee in Hong Kong, is one of nearly

9,000 Chinese-speaking people who receive daily encouragement from God's Word through Facebook.

"Life in Hong Kong is very busy and hectic," Kei told the BTGMI Chinese media team. "So I make good use of my one-hour bus ride to read the Chinese *Today* devotional each day."

Kei formerly used the printed booklet. Then last June, Kei was excited to discover the Chinese *Today* Facebook page.

"I found this community very precious," said Kei. "Fans share their faith each day and greatly encourage each other . . . and I am proud to be one of them."

The BTGMI Chinese media team launched facebook.com/ChineseToday in April 2010. "We want to build a Chinese *Today* community through which fans can share with and encourage each other in their Christian faith," explains Rev. Jimmy Lin, BTGMI Chinese ministry

leader. “Through the viral effect of Facebook, we hoped to reach our audiences and expand outreach to their friends, directing them to the *chinesetodays.org* website.”

Within a month the site attracted 2,000 Chinese-speaking “fans.” As friends shared with friends, that number multiplied at a surprising rate, and by November 2010 there were more than 9,000 fans. On average, 400 people each month leave comments about how the devotionals are touching their lives. Those who visit the site also “speak” with others who are struggling with faith or life issues.

Traffic on the Chinese *Today* website increased by 30 percent over the previous year as a result of the new Facebook site: from 77,624 visits in April through October 2009 to 108,314 visits in the same period of 2010. That means an additional 30,690 Chinese-speaking people are

accessing the daily biblical teaching and encouragement.

“Of course we are excited about the growth of our readership and participation,” notes Lin, “but we are even more excited to see these evolving pockets of ‘virtual’ communities of faith.

“While we understand this can never replace a physical community of faith like a church or a Bible study group, it is very encouraging to know that we are providing a platform for sharing and encouragement. The Lord is blessing our outreach using social media, but at the same time we are challenged with our changing role as a



Japanese social networking “friends” meet face to face at the Japanese BTGMI ministry’s open house.

What Is Social Media?

Social media is a method of communication that uses the Internet to create interactive dialogues. Social media not only allows news and information to be delivered to an audience, it allows conversations with an audience. In addition, members of the audience can interact with each other and form a community.

People use social media to interact in many ways, including reading and commenting on blogs and Internet forums, uploading media to video and photo-sharing websites, and sharing life events on micro-blogs and large social networks.

Compared to print and broadcast media, social media is relatively inexpensive, yet it can reach the same or larger audiences. Using social media usually doesn’t require specialized skills or training, it provides instant communication, and once the information is published it can be easily updated or enhanced.

Here are some statistics on the popularity of social media:

- Social networking now accounts for 22 percent of all time spent online.
- People all over the world spend more than 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook.
- There are about 90 million tweets sent each day on Twitter.
- People watch 2 billion videos a day on YouTube and upload hundreds of thousands of videos daily. In fact, every minute, 24 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube.

You can even use social media to explain social media. Check out this video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpIOCIX1jPE or tinyurl.com/crc-socmedia.

To find out more about the social media efforts of the Christian Reformed Church, see www.crcna.org/pages/blogs.cfm.

—Jonathan Wilson, CRC Communications

broadcaster in this new and exciting adventure.”

Digital Skin

So can social media be used for God’s glory and the increase of his church? The experience of BTGMI suggests it can and quite effectively.

“There is a ‘digital skin’ forming around the world that is rapidly connecting people together in ways we never thought possible,” says Rev. Bob Heerspink, BTGMI director. “If Facebook were a country, it would be the third-largest country in the world.

“Claiming the digital world for Christ allows us to share the gospel and nurture faith in ways that transcend geographical boundaries. We’re committed to using social networking tools to evangelize and disciple the country of Facebook.”

Back to God Ministries International began using social media several years ago in Japan, where Christians are isolated and technology is popular. In 2007, the BTGMI Japanese media team developed its own »

social networking site called “Pajapaja,” a word created from two simple Japanese characters that are easy to access by phone or website.

“Social networking is effective and useful both for connecting people and encouraging each other, without interference from unknown outsiders,” explains Japanese ministry leader Rev. Masao Yamashita.

“For the first five years after we launched our website, we tried to communicate with website visitors by using online chat rooms and a bulletin board system, but we experienced some trouble. Sometimes the chat room became a battlefield between Christians and anti-Christians, more of a place for arguments. Such situations often prevented people from coming to our website. So we found social media ideal for our purpose and developed Pajapaja.”

Rev. Yamashita asked Pajapaja members to tell how this ministry has encouraged their faith. A member named Shuji left this comment: “A good thing about using Pajapaja is that I never felt lonely. I’m encouraged by the fact that I’m connected to Christians all over Japan through social media.”

Another, named Teruno, added, “It’s been a very nice place to meet other Christians. When I have a bad day and write about it, I get encouragement and prayer. And I can do the same when others have bad days. I always felt alone but now I have a sense of belonging. I’m thankful for that.” Teruno also discovered the Japanese-language teaching program “Gospel Wave” through a link on Pajapaja, and now listens faithfully.

Teruko, who became a follower of Jesus at a BTGMI summer camp, said, “My family is Buddhist. I was baptized on Christmas 2001, but only recently told my family. They were very surprised. They still don’t understand about me and my belief, but I’m hoping they will one day. I hope that through the Internet more



▲ Alicia L’s Aunt Fran encouraged her on her journey back to Christ—and delights in the way Alicia shares her faith through social media.

people would know what Christianity really is.”

Added Ryo: “Everyone on Pajapaja is my wonderful family.”

BTGMI’s Indonesian and Arabic ministries are in the early stages of using social media to engage young people in faith conversations.

“Social networking is becoming more popular in Indonesia,” reports ministry leader Rev. Untung Ongkowidjaya. “It is a powerful and inexpensive way to connect with people.

“I see our users strengthening each other with Scripture. They are able to express their heart more openly on this site.”

Reframing Conversations

“Ministry is all about relationships, either in person or through media, so social media was an obvious route of expansion for us,” says Rev. Steven Koster, director of ReFrame Media, the English outreach of BTGMI.

“The whole point of social media is to engage more conversationally with people and their friends, so we consider it a key channel for all of our programming. Social media is a part of everything we do.”

ReFrame Media first ventured into social networking in 2007. Realizing the potential for increased outreach, ReFrame hired Todd Hertz in the fall of 2009 to oversee social media expansion for all its programs.

▼ Todd Hertz and Steven Koster evaluate the Facebook strategy of ReFrame Media outreach.



“We now consider our Facebook pages as crucial to our overall outreach as radio itself,” says Koster. “Radio is a one-way medium, but Facebook allows conversation—conversation between us and fans, and conversations between our fans and their friends.”

You can be part of that conversation and introduce your Facebook or Twitter contacts to faith messages using these discipleship tools, Koster explains. “We’ve included social features on every ReFrame Media website so that our content is easy for our listeners to share.”

Hertz adds, “The chief ministry for most of our social media venues is disciple-making. The best way we can do this online is through knowledge and relationships.

“We want to gather believers from various points on their paths of faith into a virtual room, give them opportunities to interact, and let them sharpen one another as iron sharpens iron. We want to create communities that discuss, encourage, challenge, and inspire their members.”

These online faith communities are growing. On the *Walk the Way* Facebook site, for example, the number of fans has

grown from 517 to more than 10,000 in one year, and interactions among fans has increased from 19 per month in 2009 to more than 1,200 in 2010.

Other BTGMI social media sites have also grown phenomenally, such as the Facebook pages of *Under the Radar* and *Spotlight*—the international English program—each of which has more than 5,000 fans.

“Beyond conversations on Facebook, we’ve also seen direct ways we’re helping people grow their faith,” Koster reports. “On our *Today* Facebook page [for English speakers], Alicia L. has commented several times about the redeeming side of Facebook: ‘I am reading more of the Bible than I ever have. I’m now using Facebook for God’s glory instead of letting it rule my life negatively.’”

Koster summarizes the social media ministry like this: “To share God’s story in people’s lives, we embrace new technologies. And as our projects continue to grow, we know it’s not about us, but all about God using Facebook to bring people closer to him.

“Pray that [we’ll] reach more people through social media. And if you’re on Facebook, will you be part of the conversations? We’re so thankful for all the ways you support our ministry.” ■



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

REACHING OUT TO THE WORLD

Rev. Mark Stephenson is amazed by how people from around the world have contacted the ministry of Disability Concerns via The Network, a social-networking tool launched by the Christian Reformed Church a year ago.

The Network helps people across the CRC connect to share ideas, concerns, and suggestions on how to do ministry.

As director of the CRC’s Office of Disability Concerns, Stephenson writes regular posts on a range of disability-related issues. Recently his site has been visited by people from Indonesia, Fiji, Kenya, Vietnam, and elsewhere.

“The numbers aren’t huge, but they do show that people from all over the world are interested in what we are doing,” said Stephenson.

Stephenson tells of an encounter on the site with a man who wrote about how having a disability made him feel hopeless. Stephenson and another person wrote back with words of encouragement and prayer. This exchange encouraged the man, Stephenson said, and he is now a regular on The Network.

“People from all over the world are interested in what we are doing.”

“Many people are learning from one another by sharing their thoughts and experiences on the various sections of The Network,” said Stephenson. The Network is accessible at www.crcna.org/network.

In addition to The Network, many CRC ministries use social networking.

Christian Reformed World Missions has a program called “Hope Equals,” which links college students across North America to discuss social issues, among them the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Facebook is a critical way of connecting all of these people, says Mariano Avila, coordinator of Hope Equals. “This is not a fun new tool. It’s the way we communicate.” (See www.facebook.com/hopeequals.)

Christian Reformed Home Missions uses Facebook and Twitter to communicate with supporters. Many of CRHM’s funded ministries, particularly church plants and campus ministries, have their own Facebook pages.

Faith Alive, the publishing agency for the CRC and the resource provider for the Reformed Church in America, has connected with more than 11,000 people by using social media to promote its resources.

Among the outlets that Faith Alive uses regularly are Twitter (twitter.com/faithalive), Facebook (facebook.com/faithalive), YouTube (youtube.com/faithaliveresources), and GodTube (godtube.com/faithaliveresources).

The CRC’s Office of Social Justice also relies heavily on social media, using Twitter, Facebook, Ning, and other services, depending on the audience it wants to reach.

“You can’t beat the bang-for-your-buck impact, and it helps us hear from constituents (and even the field) in a way that wouldn’t otherwise be possible,” says Meghan Krale, communications director of OSJ.

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee shares links to its newsroom stories and also publishes some items on Facebook and Twitter. On Facebook, it shares videos, posts events, and features causes such as “Feed the Fish” or the “Embrace AIDS” campaign.

Social media has become an integral part of how the CRC in North America communicates. ■

—Chris Meehan, CRC Communications

The Church at Work in a Digital Era

Do you “tweet” on Twitter or have Facebook friends? Are you blogging and posting? Are you part of the brave new world of social media?

Ten years ago no one would have understood those terms. Facebook didn’t even exist until 2004, yet today it boasts more than 500 million users—more than the population of Canada and the United States combined. In just a few short years, Facebook and other social networks have profoundly changed the way we think and interact.

Not so long ago most folks my age (early 60s) saw the networking phenomenon as something limited to young people. We thought it was a novelty—a toy for children in an electronic age. But now I and a huge number of my contemporaries have created our own Facebook pages.

Since then we’ve discovered a new way to connect. Many of my Facebook friends are cousins with whom I had no contact for years. Others are pastors and church leaders from around the world. My children post recent pictures of my grandchildren. Even my mother can now see the latest pictures of her great-grandchildren.

Technology is advancing so fast that it’s nearly impossible to keep up. Just when we think we have it figured out, someone develops a new and better way to connect and share. This constantly changing reality presents us with both opportunities and challenges.

On the one hand, we’re able to connect in ways we never thought possible. With a simple click of the mouse, we can send messages, photos, and video clips. We no longer have to wait for the annual Christmas card or letter to know what’s

happening in the lives of family and friends. We don’t have to wait for the morning paper or the evening news to find out what’s happening around the world.

On the other hand, such instant communication sometimes seems cold and distant. What were once deep conversations have been reduced to sound bites and snippets. While I love seeing video clips of my grandchildren, they are a poor replacement for real hugs and kisses.

The church is also aware of the challenges and opportunities offered by these new technologies. So how do we engage them? As you will discover on these pages of Church at Work, the Christian Reformed Church is finding new and powerful ways to proclaim the gospel using technology. Churches are connecting with other churches on The Network (check it out at www.crcna.org/network). Pastors are engaging each other with new and creative ideas. Agency websites are

providing easily accessible resources on a multitude of topics for our use.

Visit the CRC’s home page at www.crcna.org, the “front door” to the CRC’s online presence. You’ll find many ways to connect with each of our agencies and offices. You can see and hear the latest news of what’s happening in your denomination. You can find information on individual CRC congregations as well as resources such as the *Agenda for Synod* and *Acts of Synod*. This month you’ll also find a redesigned *Banner* website at www.thebanner.org that offers more interactivity and additional content.

I am pleased with the work that our staff has done in providing the best possible resources for you and your church. I hope you take the time to visit, discover, and join our network of information! ■



“Facebook didn’t even exist until 2004, yet today it boasts more than 500 million users.”



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

Calvin Students Learn Around the World

Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., currently hosts semester programs in Britain, China, France, Ghana, Honduras, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Spain. This year it will add Peru.

With so many semester-long international study opportunities, Calvin has been ranked as a top baccalaureate institution for the total number of students who participate in a short-term study abroad.

This information comes from the 2010 Open Doors report, based on data from 2008-2009, when 421 Calvin students studied abroad in semester programs, interims, and other programs.

The Open Doors report also notes a record number of international students studying in the United States. That trend holds true at Calvin as well. In 2008-2009, 350 international students studied on campus, placing the school sixth in the nation among baccalaureate institutions.

The annual Open Doors report is published by the Institute of International Education, the leading not-for-profit educational and cultural exchange organization in the United States.

Besides the semester programs, each January Calvin offers many off-campus interim courses based in other countries, multiplying the opportunities for students to study abroad. Calvin currently



A Calvin student in Ghana

offers month-long interims in more than 30 countries.

“Calvin has made a strong commitment to global engagement,” said Don DeGraaf, director of off-campus programs at Calvin.

“Students have the opportunity to travel to the far reaches of the globe, but more important, Calvin makes an intentional effort to assure that students travel with a purpose: to see how God is at

work in our world and to ask how God is calling them to join his work in his world.” ■

—Matt Kucinski

Ministry a Family Affair in Montana

When Rev. Mark Hofman was ordained in Churchill, Montana, a few months ago, he began his ministry in the same area where both his paternal grandfather and maternal great-grandfather served.

“In the fall of 1950 my father, Tymen Hofman, was ordained to the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church in Bozeman. I don’t remember that event, having been born in 1954,” said

Mark’s father, Dr. Ron Hofman, a pediatrician in Grand Rapids, Mich.

But Dr. Hofman said he had “a huge lump in my throat reminiscing about what that might have been like as I witnessed the ordination of my son.”

Mark Hofman’s grandmother, Cobi Jorritsma Hofman, and his wife, Heidi, stood by him during the ordination. Calvin Seminary professor Carl Bosma flew out from Grand Rapids to preach “an inspirational call to broaden the kingdom,” said Hofman.

Heidi Hofman’s grandfather, Rev. John Medendorp, had been the first pastor of Bozeman CRC in the 1940s.

Medendorp’s son, grandson, and great-grandson all followed his footsteps into ministry via Calvin Theological Seminary. Heidi Hofman’s mother, Chris Veltkamp, grew up in Churchill, where Mark was ordained.

Ron Hofman said, “Things have changed in 60 years, but the commitment to the kingdom remains fast, and the call to bring God’s Word to a world in need is still paramount. To God be the glory.” ■

—CRC Communications



Newly ordained Rev. Mark Hofman, left, sings with Calvin Seminary professor Carl Bosma.

CRWRC Provides Access to Safe Water

Water is essential for life. But millions of people in the world do not have access to safe drinking water. The problem isn't only that fresh water can be difficult to find in some drought-ridden regions. Poor sanitation and contamination of water sources also limit the fresh water available.

The Odong District in Cambodia is an example. "In the past, the people of Odong collected all of their drinking water from an open swampy area next to the road," explains

Rachel Brink, a CRWRC-Cambodia staff member. "They bathed in this same water and let their animals drink there during the dry season. There were no other water sources nearby, and sometimes even this swamp would dry up."

As a result of drinking contaminated water, 3.5 million people die every year of water-borne diseases. Organizations like CRWRC are responding to this crisis, training local partners to educate community members about the risks of drinking contaminated



The swamp in the foreground is where the people of Odong used to draw their water. The pond in the background is where they get it now.

water. Once a community commits to addressing the problem, CRWRC connects the residents with the resources they need to carry out solutions.

Last year CRWRC funded a project in Odong to block



A sign marks a new pond filled with clean drinking water in the Odong District in Cambodia.

off an area next to the swamp and dig a pond for drinking water. This project also received funding from CRWRC's local partner, Community for Transformation, and from the Norwegian Mission Alliance.

"The community contributed materials and labor to build a fence around the pond to keep the animals out and ensure that they had a clean water source," said Brink. "They were especially blessed to find a spring when they were digging, so the pond filled up quickly."

Today that pond provides clean drinking water to 500 families throughout the dry season.

"The people of Odong are experiencing better health because they are not exposed

Growing Native American Ministries

Historically the Christian Reformed Church's ministry among Native Americans has primarily been with the Zuni and Navajo tribes living in and near Gallup, N. M. But that work is likely to expand to include Native American tribes across the United States now that Rev. Stanley Jim, a Navajo, has been named by Christian Reformed Home Missions to be part of a newly formed Ethnic Ministry Council.

Jim's job will involve training and developing Native American leaders and teams across the country to do ministry among their people, to start churches, and to bring the message of Christ to as many people—Native Americans especially—as possible. Jim also envisions using leadership clusters throughout North America to accomplish his vision of helping to provide a better life for Native Americans in need.

"I want to dream, cast vision, and be a resource to the CRC, and I'm passionate about new Native American Christian ministries becoming self-sustaining and incarnational," says Jim.

With more than 500 Native American tribes represented in the U.S. alone, he has a huge ministry ahead of him. But he is excited to see the church broadening its reach to include more Native Americans.

"We want to bring all tribes to Jesus in obedience to God's word to 'Go ye into all nations,'" says Jim. "We must warmly welcome our Native American brothers and sisters into our church community. It's key to building relationships with them."

To learn more about the Home Missions Ethnic Ministry Council, see www.crcna.org/pages/crhm_ethnicministry.cfm. ■



Rev. Stanley Jim: "We want to bring all tribes to Jesus."

—Laura Posthumus, Home Missions

to diseases from drinking contaminated water,” said Brink.

In a similar way, CRWRC is helping other communities around the world gain access to clean water through wells, water-storage containers, water filters, and sanitary latrines. These projects are often funded by generous members of the Christian Reformed Church.

“Last year Christ Community Church in Nanaimo, British Columbia, held a fund-raiser for new chairs for their auditorium

and decided to do an ‘alternative seat’ sale at the same time to raise money for latrines,” said CRWRC Donor Relations Manager Judy Eising.

“And Trinity CRC in Goderich, Ontario, had an Advent celebration focusing on water that raised over \$30,000 for wells in West Africa. It is exciting to match campaigns like these with community initiatives to improve access to fresh water.”

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

Seattle Church Commits to Neighbors

The members of a Seattle-area church plant called Word of Truth International Ministries are not content to simply enjoy Sunday worship together. They also want to reach out to their community. They believe their faith, based on the Word of Truth, demands it.

Located in Tukwila, one of Seattle’s most diverse and impoverished inner-city communities, Word of Truth focuses on ministering to the whole person. The congregation’s goal is to be a community center that serves the needs of the many hurting people in their area.

For example, the church has launched The Movement, a community development ministry focused on creating a more hopeful future for at-risk youths. The church also conducts financial education classes for local residents.

Inspired by Rev. Clarence Presley’s teaching on discipleship, many in this young congregation have committed themselves to serving as a missional presence in their neighborhoods—bringing the church into homes.

As interest and commitment to neighborhood ministry has caught on, the church recently launched six new “missional communities” in southern King County.

These communities are made up of members of the congregation and their neighbors, who gather together regularly to share meals, fellowship, pray, and study the Bible.

The groups also talk about ways they can work together to serve their neighbors. Among the leaders of the groups are recently-baptized Word of Truth members.

Word of Truth continues to grow. The church recently baptized eight new believers in a celebration event held at a local city pool.

The congregation is supported by Christian Reformed Home Missions.

—Home Missions



Team members pray with a Nicaraguan pastor

A Mission of Prayer

When Nanette Hoogsteen, a member of Meadowvale CRC in Mississauga, Ontario, saw a flyer inviting people to be part of a new kind of missions trip focused on prayer, she knew God was asking her to go.

Although she knew the power of prayer, nothing could have prepared her for the way that she, her teammates, and others experienced God’s presence during a prayer trip to Nicaragua.

In mid-October, Hoogsteen and six other North Americans traveled to Managua, eager to see the ministries of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee and Christian Reformed World Missions and to pray for the people involved in them.

The trip was part of a new partnership between Prayer Missions International and CRWM to send teams out to pray specifically for ministry fields.

The team’s week began with an overview of ministry in Nicaragua and a

prayer walk through the Nehemiah Center—a national organization that brings international and national agencies together to encourage transformation in every sector of Nicaraguan life. The prayer team met with 45-50 members of the Nehemiah Center, splitting into small groups to pray with and for them.

During the next few days they traveled to several communities, meeting and praying for local pastors and their families.

“God showed us that he was doing a new thing. . . . In obedience, all we did was ask. We were ready to walk through any door that opened for us to pray,” Hoogsteen says.

“People were amazed that [the team] came just to pray with and for them,” says Steve Holtrop, a CRWM missionary in Nicaragua. “One pastor said, ‘As pastors, no one prays for us, and we needed that.’”

—Sarah Van Stempvoort,
Christian Reformed World
Missions

Have a Heart

On Valentine's Day, and all year long, we talk about our hearts a lot. We say things like "I love you with all my heart" or "My heart is broken." We say, "That person

has a heart for the poor" or "Thank you from the bottom of my heart." The Bible even talks about loving God with our whole "heart and mind and strength."

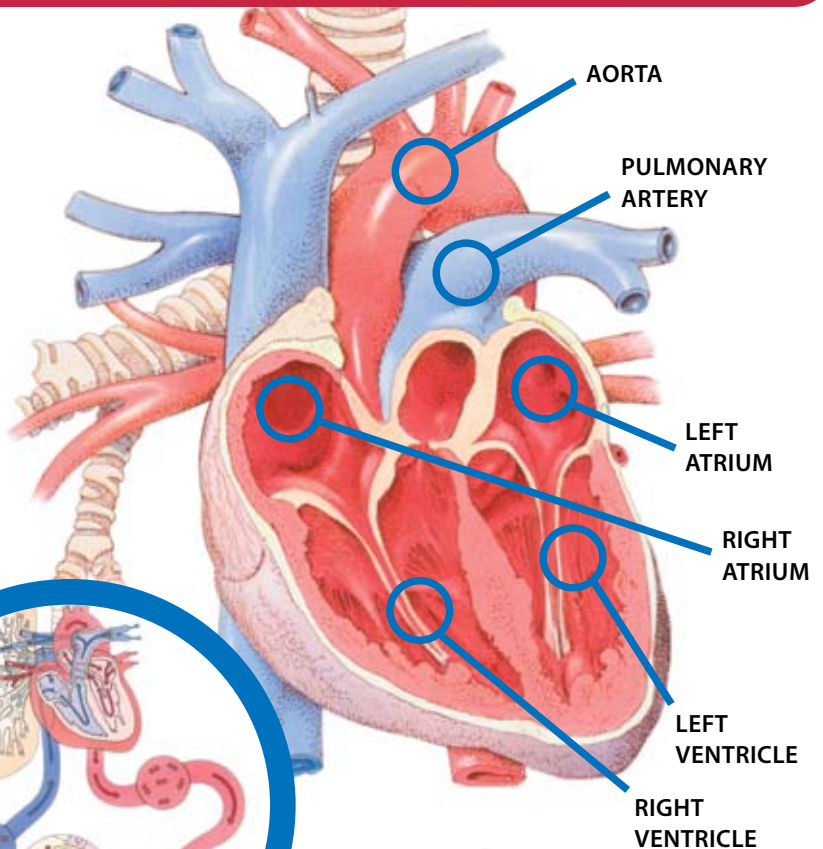
But how much do you really know about the heart God put inside you? Check out these cool facts!

Your Heart's Job

Your heart's main job is to move your blood, which carries oxygen and nutrients to your body. All day, every day your heart pumps and you don't even have to think about it. Your brain automatically tells your heart what to do!

Here's how your blood moves through your body. Take a look at the heart diagram and see if you can follow along.

- Blood from your body pumps into your heart's **right atrium**.
- From there, the blood flows down into your **right ventricle**.
- The right ventricle pumps blood out to your lungs.
- Your lungs fill the blood with oxygen.
- Oxygen-rich blood pumps from your lungs to the **left atrium**.
- From there, blood flows down to the **left ventricle**.
- The left ventricle pumps the blood out to your body.



Strange But True

- Your heart is about the size of your **fist**. But a blue whale's heart is about the size of a **Volkswagen Beetle** car!
- In one day, your blood travels a total of **12,000 miles** (19,000 km)—that's four times the distance from Los Angeles to New York City.
- An octopus has **three** hearts: one main heart and two hearts that pump blood to the gills.
- A hummingbird's heart can beat up to 1,300 times per minute—about **20 times faster** than a human's heart!

Heart Parts

Circle these heart parts in the word search below. Remember to look across, down, diagonally, and backwards! When you're done, look at a picture of a heart online and see if you can identify all these parts.

X V L K W Z R L A T A L
 N C A X J V T T B V A X
 S I S L X R R P A V E H
 X S E I V I J C D Y E T
 O I L V A E A R T E R Y
 G T C Z Y N S A T R O A
 X M I Y E S V I K V F Z
 E O R V D E G S E T I N
 Y H T I H P Q O S R A B
 X M N O S T G W P F Z A
 M D E V V U C I N F Q Q
 T G V T Z M F V N J B L

ATRIA The two upper chambers of your heart that act as holding chambers for the blood.

VENTRICLES The two lower chambers of your heart that pump the blood.

ARTERY A tube that carries blood from your heart to parts of your body.

VEIN A tube that carries blood from parts of your body back to your heart.

VALVES Flaps that open and close to keep blood from flowing backwards.

AORTA The main artery that delivers blood to your body.

VENA CAVA The main vein that carries blood back to your heart after it circulates through your body.

SEPTUM The dividing wall between the upper and lower and left and right parts of your heart.

Homemade Stethoscope

Your heart beats about 100,000 times a day—or about 35 million times a year! Want to hear some of those beats? Just ask a family member or friend to help you with this fun, easy experiment.

First, get a cardboard tube that's left over from a roll of paper towels. Go into a quiet room and put one end of the tube over the other person's heart. Press your ear to the other end. You should be able to hear the person's heartbeat loud and clear. How cool is that?!



Feed Your Heart

There are lots of ways to keep your heart healthy, like exercising and not smoking. But eating good food is also good for your heart. Try some of these heart-healthy recipes!

- Sprinkle a bowl of oatmeal with dried cranberries, walnuts, and a little brown sugar. Oats, berries, and nuts are all heart-healthy foods.
- Whip up a batch of fresh guacamole by mashing avocados and adding some salsa and a little lime juice. Avocados are full of good fats that are great for your heart.
- Need a crunchy snack? Make your own pita chips! Cut a whole-wheat pita into eight equal pieces. Separate the top and bottom layers, and brush each piece with olive oil. Sprinkle the chips with a little bit of salt, and bake at 350 F (175 C) until they're light brown on the edges. Whole grains and olive oil are both good for your heart.



Sandy Swartzentruber works for Faith Alive. Once she saw a video of her own heart beating. She thinks hearts are amazing.

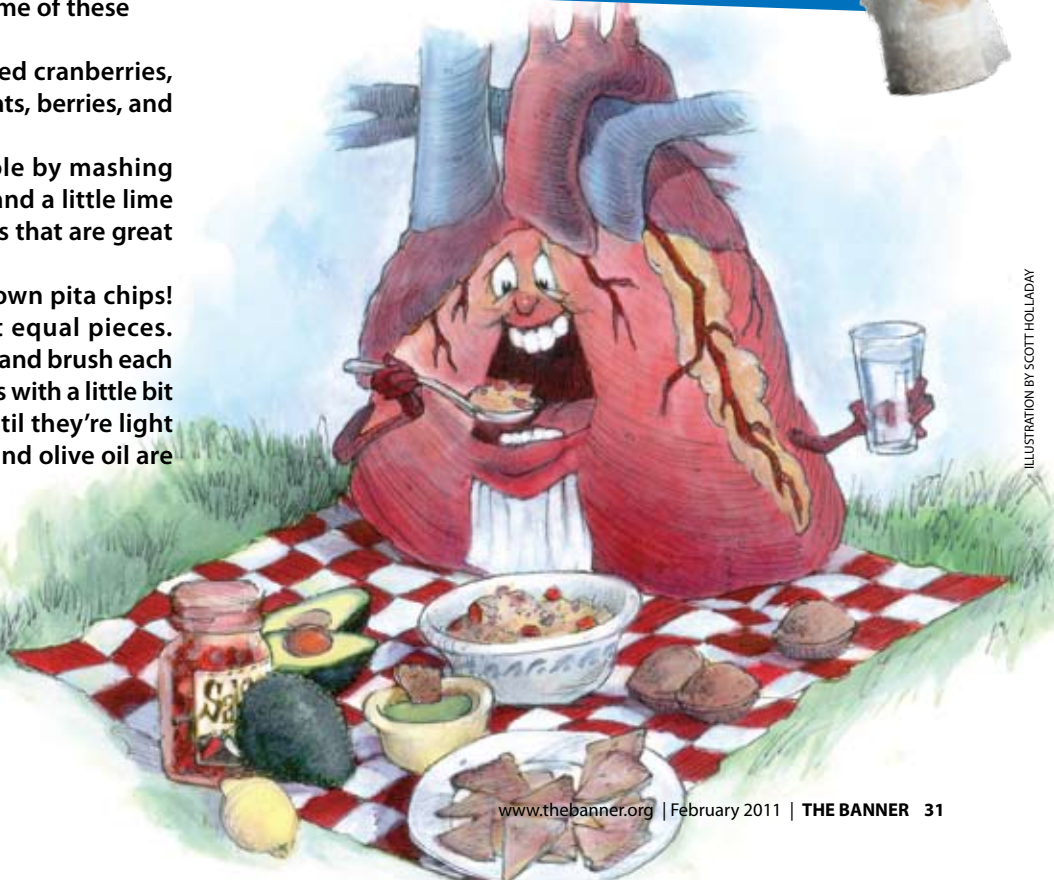


ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

Saying Our Prayers

THE HUMAN HEART, like clay, is soft and pliable; throughout our lives it is conformed and shaped. The question is, into what? How will your life take on the contours of Christ and not be pressed into the mold of the surrounding culture? How might you walk in step with the Spirit, living out of God's story rather than the narratives of cable news or social media?

With those questions lingering, consider the story of Daniel. Exported to Babylon during his formative teen years, Daniel was steeped in the ways of pagan Babylonian culture. He lived and served in Babylon for the remainder of his life. So how did Daniel's distinct calling as a servant of the one true God survive the spiritual bazaar of Babylon, with little to support and nurture his faith?

In the classic lion's den narrative, we see a hint of how Daniel remained true to his identity as a child of God. At 80 years old he'd seen kings come and go, empires rise and fall. And the latest comer to the throne had issued an edict that everyone must pray only to him. In response, Daniel calmly did what he'd been doing routinely for years—an act seemingly insignificant, but so subversive. He went to his room, where “three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to God, just as he had done before” (Dan. 6:10).

What did Daniel do? He prayed, but what's more, he practiced a specific form of prayer that has nourished followers of God for thousands of years—a practice that just might help us not only survive within our own poly-spiritual, multi-faith world but thrive with a distinctive Christian faith and identity. This ancient Christian practice of prayer is called “praying the daily office.”

What Is It?

So what is the daily office? It's an old form of prayer that's new to most people today: a pattern of prayer and worship regularly



offered to God at set times within the course of a single day. It's rooted in the simple reality that just as we need a mug in order to enjoy a sip of coffee, so we need a form for our prayers.

The pattern of the daily office frees us to enjoy prayer as an extended conversation with God: God invites us to be with him; we quietly enjoy his presence, listen to his Word, and respond to him; and God sends us forth with his blessing.

This rhythm of prayer was an established Hebrew practice. In Psalm 119:164, we read, “Seven times a day I praise you. . . .” Whether that means seven actual times or is symbolic of all our time, it likely reflects Paul's call for us to “pray continually” (1 Thess. 5:17). Jesus himself marked his days with regular times of prayer, and the early church observed a similar pattern.

Praying the office is like a mold that conforms us to the life of Christ and

imprints on us the story of God. It typically begins with an invitation to prayer, a call to open up to the reality of God's kingdom. A psalm is always a part of the daily office; praying through the psalms is one of the oldest ways God's people have regularly prayed. A further selection of Scripture is prayed through as well, the aim being to frame our days with the story of God.

The daily office also includes times for silence—quiet spaces in our 24/7 wired lives for listening and responding to God. And you'll find prayers of petition and intercession, either spontaneous or written, often along with the Lord's Prayer. Finally, each time of prayer concludes with a blessing from God.

Does that seem familiar? Where else have you seen that flow and form? The shape of the daily office intentionally parallels what we experience every Sunday morning in worship. Praying the

The form gives us the freedom to enjoy the relationship.

office is an extension of and preparation for Christian worship.

Why Bother?

But why bother with an old—or any—form of prayer?

Here's the truth about you and me: we are space- and time-bound creatures. While God is everywhere and always present, we are not. We easily take a theological truth (say, God's omnipresence) and construct a flawed practice around it (I can pray wherever and whenever I feel like it). Thankfully, spontaneous prayers are a part of our life with God, but such a scattershot approach is not enough for a lasting life of prayer any more than it is for a satisfying relationship with someone you love.

Yet we still wonder, shouldn't genuine prayer be more spontaneous? Many of us have picked up the notion that only extemporaneous, unstructured prayers are real and authentic. We've idolized self-expression and confused *personal* with *unstructured* or *spontaneous*.

Have you ever considered how much personal, intimate interaction with others is schooled and structured? We connect over a scheduled cup of coffee, in the etiquette of dating or formality of a dinner meal, in the "How was your day?" catch-up conversation, even in late-night college dorm bull sessions. So many of our personal, apparently spontaneous, interactions are, in fact, structured and patterned. The form gives us the freedom to enjoy the relationship.

The daily office provides a form in which we can experience intimate fellowship with God himself. I love the wise balance Puritan pastor William Law offers: "It seems right for everyone to begin with

a form of prayer. If, in the midst of his devotions, he finds his heart ready to break forth into new and higher strains of devotions, he should leave his form for a while and follow those fervors of his heart till it again wants the assistance of his usual petitions."

Going by the Book

So how can you practice this way of prayer? First of all, pick out a prayer book that's helpful for you (see box). Then set a place and schedule a time. Drop the often-unspoken demand for something to happen and simply "say your prayers," whether you're in the mood or not.

Give this practice time, because at first it might feel foreign, maybe a little stiff. That's natural, since the process of being shaped involves being pressed into a form. Accept the awkward feelings and allow the form of prayer to shape you.

And then remind yourself of Daniel, a man immersed in Babylonian culture yet radically identified with God. He lived a unique calling and identity, bearing the shape of God's kingdom imprinted deeply on his life through daily, routine prayer.

Author Annie Dillard writes, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." May the daily, routine practice of prayer shape in us a heart of love for God and make all our days a living prayer. ■

Recommended for You

To enjoy this Christian practice you'll first need to find a daily office to pray. Here are a few prayer books to consider:

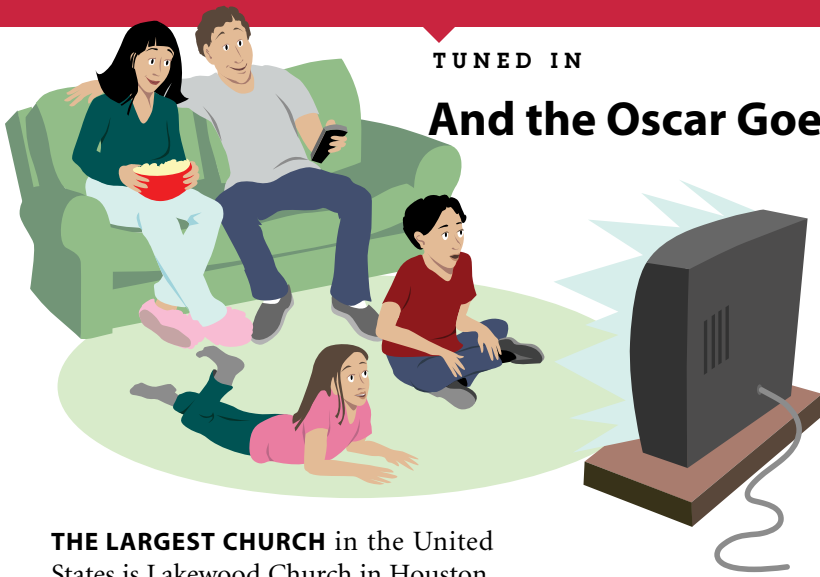
- *The Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle. Each seasonal volume contains four different offices to pray during the day (Doubleday).
- *Pray-as-you-go.org* offers a daily office for download to your MP3 player.
- *The Rhythm of Life*, by David Adams, is a neat, small volume of three offices per day for seven days, which are repeated each week (Morehouse).
- *Seeking God's Face: Praying with the Bible Through the Year*, by Philip Reinders, includes a simple, accessible daily office for every day of the year, following the Christian calendar. It incorporates the Reformed confessions turned into prayer (Faith Alive Christian Resources, www.faithaliveresources.org or 800-333-8300).



Rev. Phil Reinders is pastor of River Park Church in Calgary, Alberta. Check out his blog at <http://squinch.net>.

TUNED IN

And the Oscar Goes to . . .



THE LARGEST CHURCH in the United States is Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. It holds 43,500 people. The largest Christian network in the United States is Trinity Broadcasting Network, which draws about 5 million viewers per week.

Those are impressive numbers.

But then, consider this: Last year, 41.6 million people watched the Academy Awards.

Of course, you might say, it's unfair to compare churches to the movie industry. Movies are a business, and churches are not. Movies pander to the lowest common denominator, and churches do not.

Still. The first Academy Awards ceremony lasted just 15 minutes, and 15 statuettes were handed out.

Over time, the awards show has become almost as important and lucrative as the movies themselves. And the show's continuing popularity seems to defy logic. After all, television audiences are shrinking and fracturing, yet awards shows—and the Oscars in particular—continue to draw millions of viewers every year.

Perhaps it's the fact that the Oscars have something for every kind of viewer. The show attracts serious film buffs as well as fashionistas who rate and rank the celebrities on the red carpet. It attracts white-collar workers who place bets in office pools.

People watch the Oscars for many of the same reasons they attend church.

But I wonder if it is more than that. Maybe the Oscars—and the movie industry generally—fill a growing void in people's lives.

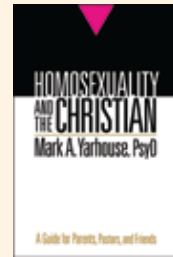
The fact is, despite the growth in evangelical churches (in particular, megachurches like Lakewood) the percentage of people in North America who identify themselves as Christians is declining sharply. Our world no longer goes silent on a Sunday morning as Christians gather to worship—it spins busily and blindly on without us. And the Christian community is no longer a cultural touchstone.

For many, the Oscars (like the Super Bowl or the Olympics) represents one of those rare moments when we're all doing one thing together. In a fractured, busy world, that's what people are missing. We all want to live in community, to celebrate something excellent, to enjoy music, and be immersed in something bigger than ourselves. We want something to lift us out of the routine of our lives.

So perhaps people watch the Oscars for many of the same reasons they attend church—or *used* to. And, perhaps, for that reason alone, they're worth a closer look. Not because church needs to be more like Hollywood, but because the Oscars represent an opportunity to learn something profound about what brings us together, and why. ■



Lloyd Rang works in communications for the government of Ontario. He is a member of Rehoboth CRC in Bowmanville.



Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends

by **Mark A. Yarhouse**
reviewed by **Wayne Brouwer**

Yarhouse is weakest when trying to summarize a definitive "Scriptural" position on homosexuality, quickly drawing conclusions lacking depth or nuance, and skimming centuries of church history to pluck a few ideas that match preconceived notions. He improves when talking about gender identity formation as a complex and evolving process, though he reduces a lot of good research into a false dualism between *the* "Christian script" and *the* "gay script." When he moves to advice for persons, parents, and pastors, Yarhouse shines. He acknowledges most change is gradual and limited, rightly advising sincere listening, faithful loving, and communities that honor and embrace rather than quickly shunning. Skip the first chapter, skim 2-7, and memorize 8-10. (Bethany House)





The Weight of Silence

by **Heather Gudenkauf**
reviewed by **Randall Engle**

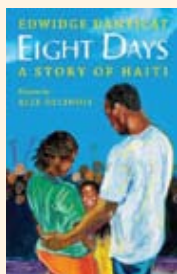
Gudenkauf's first novel narrates child abduction in cold, chiseled strokes. Since the eyewitness to the crime is mute, the adult characters must patch together clues that lead them to the lost girl. Fearing the worst, a search then begins for the girl, and Gudenkauf explores total despair. In the end, the reader discovers a deeply biblical narrative of powerlessness and entrapment, which are defeated by the relentless love of a rescuer. (Mira)



Get Low

reviewed by **Josh Larsen**

Movies love to celebrate forgiveness—that's why so many end in the glow of reconciliation. *Get Low* is different. It reminds us of the cost of not forgiving. Robert Duvall plays Felix Bush, a 1930s hermit who throws a funeral for himself before he dies, largely so he can confess a secret, long-ago sin. Duvall's climactic speech features the stalwart actor at his pinnacle—his Felix is a sinner with a sermon in his heart. (Sony)



Eight Days: A Story of Haiti

by **Edwidge Danticat**
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

In this fictional picture book based on the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Junior is trapped beneath rubble. Eight days later, he is rescued. When asked how he coped, Junior says, "In my mind, I played." Whether imagining flying a kite, playing marbles, or running in the rain, Junior kept his hope alive. Author Edwidge Danticat sensitively and age-appropriately handles a horrific topic, and illustrator Alix Delinois' vibrant artwork accomplishes his goal "to reflect the beauty of Haitian life before the earthquake, and what is possible for the future." Ages 4-8. (Scholastic)

EarthSky.org

reviewed by **Ron VandenBurg**

Want to read about the largest molecule ever found in space? What's up with the decline of the honeybee population? What was the science behind plugging up the oil spill? *EarthSky.org* offers videos, audio, articles, and analysis of innovative science and discoveries. A favorite for kids is the "Science FAQ" section, which offers explanations and online comments between the science authors and their audience. A "Featured Scientist" page and an interview section introduce those who work to learn more about God's creation.



The Suburbs

by **Arcade Fire**
reviewed by **Robert N. Hosack**

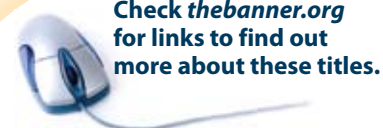
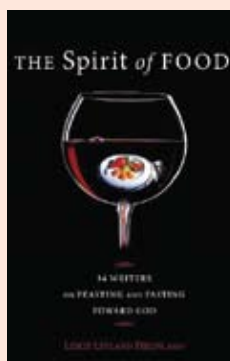
Montreal-based indie rockers Arcade Fire have a growing North American reputation. With *The Suburbs* they brilliantly mine our modern *malaise* through a look at suburbia, searching in the shadows of shopping malls to explore the themes of adolescence, affluence, and anxiety that make up our 21st-century wasteland. By using a tight concept-driven format, each of the album's tracks follows smoothly from the prior one, echoing repeated words and phrases to build an "anthemic" song cycle. *The Suburbs* is a masterpiece. (Merge Records)



The Spirit of Food: 34 Writers on Feasting and Fasting Toward God

edited by **Leslie Leyland Fields**
reviewed by **Jennifer Parker**

While the *Chicken Soup* franchise of books never quite satisfied me, this collection of essays serves up something truly rich—the hearty reflections, reminiscences, and recipes of 34 writers offering earthy wisdom and soulful insights along with wonderful treats for the palate. The authors, including some acclaimed writers of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, have in common the ability to articulate with warmth and power the spiritual importance of a common human experience. Their words constitute a sumptuous feast—and we all have to eat. (Wipf & Stock)



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

loving the broken

Sometimes we isolate those
who need us the most.

BROKEN AND HURTING PEOPLE. We meet them on service projects and at local nonprofits. We work with them at the office. We sit next to them in church. We talk to them across the dinner table. We see them in the mirror.

Sometimes our brokenness draws casseroles from the congregation, cards in the mailbox, hugs in the coffee shop, and prayers in our worship services. But sometimes the brokenness we bear is not seen as something “safe.” For one reason or another people within the community seem unable to address it, and the broken ones find themselves alone.

More than alone. *Isolated* and alone. And then—because how else can one explain exile from the community in a time of need—comes wave after wave of shame.

Entering into the lives of those who bear not only brokenness and hurt but also isolation and shame is difficult. It can challenge even the most giving and loving soul.

Addictions. Mental illness. Suicide attempts. Legal trouble. Unwanted pregnancies. Extramarital affairs. Eviction. Job loss. Business failure. And on and on.

How do we respond? What does God ask us to do?

Lament

Suffering people, wrote Lewis Smedes, are experiencing something that they very much don't want to experience. They desperately want the suffering to go away. But it doesn't. Whether their suffering is public or in isolation, they are in real pain. Their prayers—if they're able to pray at all—sound like groans: “Lord, God, Father and King, take this pain away! I'm wasting away, dear God. I can't go on. Rescue me, please!”

They wake with tear-stained pillows, dreading the day, hearts so heavy that buying groceries seems a monumental chore. And, oh, how they carry the pain. It's the weight in their legs. Their inability to focus. Their lethargy. The rumble in their souls. Sometimes even the bite in their voices.

When we suffer, Nicholas Wolterstorff observes, we have a certain awareness about us. He calls it a “radiance”—a glow that screams, “This is *not* how it's supposed to be!” He believes that when we suffer we understand God's shalom (God's peace, God's work to make everything right again) in the deepest way possible. The louder the voice of suffering roars in our lives, the greater our desire for the fullness of shalom.

Perhaps this understanding of the creational groan (Rom. 8:22-25) can help us in our calling to love the broken. Perhaps we, too, experience what Wolterstorff describes.

If nothing else, we can join the lament of the broken as a community. We can shake our fists at sin and pain even in the midst of our tranquil lives for the sake of our brothers and sisters who can barely stand against the gusts of life. We can stand with our arms around them and scream with empathic fervor, “This is *not* how it’s supposed to be!”

Should we not be angry that a young woman was sexually abused by her father? Or that depression has taken a young man in the prime of his life? Or that someone’s job was eliminated? Or that addiction is killing a friend? Or that a man beats his wife and hides her shoes to drive her crazy?

Should we not cry to God for the sake of those who have experienced injustice, sickness, abuse, neglect, and suffering that goes far beyond our imagination? Should we not pray like David in Psalm 22, “Why are you deaf to our weeping?”

Yes, joining in lament as a community of believers and crying out for shalom is a good first response. But is that all? Cannot our feet and hands and arms get involved too?

Roadblocks

What stops us from walking beside people who are hurting and broken and filled with shame? What obstacles stand in our way?

Are we afraid? Walking beside those with scary hurts is a volatile business. We have no control in this arena. We do quite well if hurting people heal in a given timeframe, but what if they don’t? Can we continue loving for the long haul?

Are we too needful of gratification? When the romance of caring for people has run its course, do we become disappointed, irritated, and impatient for lack of a thankful response?

Are we arrogant? Do we secretly believe that by their actions these folks “asked for” their suffering? Do we love only if our conditions are met? Do we see hurting and broken people as projects to fix and not souls to love?

Or is it that we just don’t know how to love some kinds of brokenness?

Perhaps it’s that we’re all too busy and too blinded—or just incapable of an empathic response to others. It’s inconvenient and messes up our plans.

Or perhaps it’s that we’re hurting too. It’s difficult to reach out to others when we’re doing everything we can to crawl out of our own despair.

There is only one way, it seems, for us to break through the obstacles and faithfully respond to our Lord’s call to love hurting and damaged people. And that’s to do what the psalmist chides himself to do in Psalm 42: “Put your hope in God.”

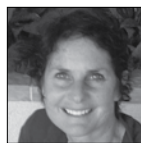
Look at those hurting and broken people in your life—especially those isolated by their pain. Be encouraged to step forward and draw them back into community by doing the following:

- Share in their lament.
- Cast your eyes on the Lord. Put your hope in God, not in your ability to love well.
- View broken and hurting people with “transcendent curiosity” (Larry Crabb), with awe at what God is doing in their lives and with awe that you’ve been called there too, at such a suffering time as this.
- Ask what your role is in this unfolding story. What have you been prepared for? How should you respond as the person God created you to be?
- Love and accept each person where she is at. Let her know you value her for who she is, not for who you think she should be.
- Have meaningful conversations. Listen well. Be available. Develop a healthy relationship.
- Let him know he’s impacted your life—and that he’s tremendously loved by God.
- Use empathic responses: “That must hurt so much.” “You must be so frustrated.” Try to understand, *really* understand, where the person has been.
- Try hard not to judge or condemn. Don’t impose your values or make assumptions about what the person should know.
- Be very, very patient. Judge your “success” by your faithfulness to God’s call to love, not by gains or change in the other.

We have many opportunities to love the broken and hurting. I’ve seen firsthand how beautiful the love of the church can be.

Loving the broken is pleasing to God. He meets the needs of his children through us. If we ignore them or turn them away, if we cast them off or judge and condemn them, we preach a powerful sermon that has nothing to do with Christ our Savior.

With our eyes on God, we can love the broken well. “Put your hope in God” as you enter the lives of the hurting. And be encouraged. As Psalm 42 testifies, you will not despair in your efforts. »



Sandi Altena is executive director of The Bridge, a nonprofit faith-based transitional housing program for women and children in northwest Iowa.

Books for People Who Care

The Compassionate Congregation: A Handbook for People Who Care by Karen Mulder and Ginger Jurries offers firsthand stories, practical advice, and resources to help churches care for people in a wide range of difficult situations.

A Compassionate Journey by John G. Cook guides congregations in caring for people living with chronic illness, disability, and other long-term needs.

Both books are available from Faith Alive Christian Resources: 1-800-333-8300; faithaliveresources.org.

Being a Friend to the Hurting

He was only 24 years old, and suffering from severe paranoid schizophrenia. For years his loving parents relentlessly pursued help for him—to no avail. Then the phone call came: John had committed suicide. He could no longer live with the inner torment. I can't imagine how devastated and alone his parents felt.

What do you say to them? Somehow "I'll pray for you," while sincere, sounds trivial after such tragedy.

I often think of a certain church secretary before asking, "How are you doing?" She lost her son to a terrible accident. How often did she reply with the socially acceptable, "I'm OK," when inside she hurt deeply?

Often our nervousness leads to making inappropriate statements that get in the way. We want to offer a caring presence to the hurting but have no idea how. The following are suggestions for getting beyond our awkwardness. Many of them apply to multiple situations.

Chronic Illness

- Try not to let your first words be about the person's health. Let her decide when and with whom to discuss her situation. Instead, cheerful greetings such as "Thanks for letting us come by," "I am so glad to see you," or "We miss you at Bible study" show she is more than her disease or condition.
- Understand that new treatment information or stories of others' treatment can cause anxiety—as do questions of whether the person has received the correct care. Be mindful that everyone responds differently to treatment. Responses such as "Jane got really sick from it" or "Are you losing your hair yet?" are not helpful.
- Bring prepared foods. Cooking may be tiresome, or perhaps nothing sounds good. If a person is bedridden, picnic with him in the bedroom if that sounds good to him.
- Give a gift certificate for a manicure or massage. Life's little pleasures help soothe the body and mind.
- Bring over DVDs, magazines, or library books. Your loved one would still like to enjoy life as much as possible. Skiing may be out, but sitting by the fire and reading is good.
- Know your loved one's sense of humor. Laughter hides in strange places. When my sister went through chemo and radiation for breast cancer, a friend filled her mailbox with humorous get-well cards that became the highlight of her days.

When Death Is Imminent

The greatest gift we can give the dying is our presence. Always call before visiting to ask if it's a good day to stop by. Be prepared for a physical change.

- Feel free to hold a hand or stroke an arm.
- Talk about something other than the illness, unless the person brings it up. Assure him by saying, "It's hard to make sense of this."

- Remember that even your tears express love.
- Pray together if you're comfortable with that.
- Again, appropriate humor may be appreciated. Follow your loved one's lead.

Funerals and Afterward

Your presence alone will comfort the bereaved. A familiar face, a hug, or a hand squeeze affirms the message "I want to be with you at this time."

- Share memories. It's healing. Mourners want to hear stories about their loved ones.
- Avoid: "You are holding up so well"—the person may be falling apart inside. "Time heals all wounds"—not true. I still ache from the tragic deaths of four immediate family members. "I know how you feel"—no one can know what another person feels.
- Never tell a couple who has experienced a miscarriage that it was God's will or that adoption is an option.
- Avoid "Think of all you still have to be thankful for."
- Avoid "He's in a better place now"—this is not always comforting in the midst of loss.
- Avoid nervous "fix-it" words such as "Things will get better."
- Don't ask, "What are you going to do now?" This is a confusing time.

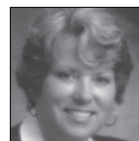
Any Situation

Being specific in your offers of help gives people an opportunity to say no and define other needs. For example, instead of "Call me if you need me," say, "I have time on Monday that is yours. May I mow your lawn, get groceries, or take care of your kids?"

- Food doesn't have to be homemade. Give gift certificates to restaurants that deliver, or pick up a favorite pizza, fast food, or latte.
- Offer to make calls and answer the phone (keep a record of who calls so you can share it with your loved one).
- Assist with daily tasks, children, appointments, and errands.
- Manage pickup and lodging for out-of-town relatives.
- Be a friend, not a hero. Avoid authoritative phrases such as "You should" or "You are" or "You will."
- It's OK to say, "I don't know how you feel or what to say, but I care about what is happening to you."

"I am so sorry this is happening to you" were the most compassionate words anyone ever said to me. This followed our adopted son's biological mother locating him and the turmoil that followed. Imogene recognized my devastation. Because of her words I began the healing process.

As we walk alongside those in pain—and, yes, pray for them—we, too, can act as anchors during illness, loss, and self-doubt.



Sandy Rensvold is a retired nurse and a freelance writer. She lives part-time in Seattle, Wash., and Carmel, Calif., and attends Carmel Presbyterian Church.

The Purpose of Marriage

A CULTURE WAR IS RAGING over the primary purpose of marriage. Battle lines have been drawn by those who contend that sinister forces are redefining marriage to be solely about the mutual enrichment of the couple.

They claim this emphasis has led to immaturity and selfishness and that we need to get back to marriage as being first of all about procreation. Otherwise, they say, the divine purpose for marriage is dangerously distorted.

I wondered, how has our Reformed tradition weighed in? Have we in the Christian Reformed Church remained faithful to God's purpose for marriage?

It took only a little digging to find that our red 1934 *Psalter Hymnal* and blue *Psalters* of 1959 and 1973 list the primary purpose of marriage as “the propagation of the human race.”

But Synod 1977 nudged producing offspring out of first place, approving a new marriage form that listed mutual help as the primary purpose. And that became the form for the gray *Psalter Hymnal* of 1987.

That same advisory committee encouraged synod to mandate the study committee to consult with marriage forms of “other churches in our country.” After this, the propagation phrase appeared and the switch in priorities for marriage occurred.

Volbeda had high-church leanings, and “the propagation of the human race” is vintage Roman Catholic theology. The *Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on Christian Marriage* and the *Catholic Encyclopedia* contain the phrase verbatim as the primary purpose of marriage. That, in large part, explains Rome's absolute ban on birth control and the no-exception clause in its pro-life stance that extends even to situations threatening the life of the mother. Marriage is primarily for the purpose of producing offspring, no matter what.

But not so in Reformed theology.

In our tradition, except for the one aforementioned generation (1934-1977), the enrichment of the couple has *always* been marriage's primary purpose. So too in Presbyterianism,

The **enrichment of the couple** has *always* been marriage's primary purpose.

At first glance it appears that we capitulated to the “slippery slope” of the new views on marriage. Digging deeper, however, I uncovered something quite different.

Prior to the 1934 revision, back to the first *Psalter* of 1566, there is no mention of “the propagation of the human race.” The enrichment of the couple came first, and raising children followed. This was even in a draft for the red *Psalter* presented to Synod 1930.

Then, after almost 400 years, something unexpected happened.

The propagation phrase suddenly appeared as the primary purpose of marriage in a draft of the 1932 *Acts of Synod*. The enrichment idea lost ground. And the propagation phrase became part of the marriage form for the red *Psalter*.

This historic change bears the fingerprints of a man who was added to the study committee by Synod 1930: Rev. Samuel Volbeda. This highly regarded seminary professor had been quite vocal that year on synod's advisory committee regarding the marriage form.

as evidenced by the Westminster Confession's description of marriage: “Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife.”

This clarification, of course, does not resolve the culture war. We must fight courageously for biblical ideals. But the battle ought not be waged on a false premise.

And in the meantime, these insights should come as a blessing to couples who cannot, or prayerfully choose not to, have many or any children. They, and those who remain single, should not feel at odds with God's design for marriage and life in his world. Rather, their unique gifts may contribute something extraordinary for the fulfillment of God's cultural mandate to “be fruitful and multiply” and the Great Commission to tell the world of God's love. ■ **WEB Q'S**



Rev. H. David Schuringa, a Christian Reformed minister, is president of Crossroad Bible Institute, Grand Rapids, Mich., a discipleship ministry that reaches more than 40,000 inmates on six continents.

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Denominational and Classical Announcements

AGENDA FOR SYNOD 2011 Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the executive director of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda: a. Reports of standing committees and affiliated youth and educational agencies are due on February 15. b. Reports of agency boards are due ten days after the conclusion of the board meetings, but no later than March 1. c. Overtures and appeals are due no later than March 15. d. Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the Credentials for Synod, as well as the completed information sheet on each delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes as soon as possible but no later than March 15. Materials will not be included in the printed Agenda if received after the synodically established deadlines.

Gerard L. Dykstra Executive Director

ANNUAL DAY OF PRAYER Synod has designated Wednesday, March 9, 2011, as the Annual Day of Prayer. All CRC congregations are requested to assemble to ask for God's blessing upon the world, our nations, for crops and industry, and for the church worldwide. Councils are reminded that if it is judged that the observance of the Annual Day of Prayer can be more meaningfully observed in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer (U. S.) they have the right to change the date of service accordingly (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 578). The National Day of Prayer (U. S.) is May 5, 2011.

Gerard L. Dykstra Executive Director

NEW! The Synodical Faith Formation Committee encourages churches to check out its website (www.crcna.org/faithformation) for ongoing updates intended to help engage congregations in study and conversation. The latest addition—podcast interviews with committee members about sacramental practices and faith formation issues—provides a great way to initiate small group discussion.

Announcement of Candidacy

WE ARE PLEASED to announce that Jenifer S. Holmes and George W. Lubbers have now completed their academic requirements and are eligible for call as candidates for the ministry of the Word.

Rev. Gerard L. Dykstra, executive director

Financial Aid

Classis Kalamazoo, MI 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 aid for the academic year 2011-2012 to apply no later than February 28, 2011 by contacting Paul Vander Kamp, 2221 Ridgefield Rd., Portage, MI 49024, phone 269-321-0709, or e-mail vdrkmp@juno.com. Undergraduate students must be at least in their junior year during 2011-2012. Students presently receiving aid must reapply.

Congregational Announcements

Church's 125th Anniversary

FIRST CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH of Prinsburg, Minnesota, is celebrating "125 Years of God's Amazing Love and may all who follow find us faithful" this year. The church was established on April 29, 1886. Celebration and special events are planned for May 1, July 3, and August 3. We would like to extend an invitation to all former members to join us for these events. An anniversary booklet and a coffee mug are available as souvenirs of the 125th Anniversary. Information on activities and order information are posted on our website: www.firstcrocprinsburg.org or contact the church office for more information. Tel. (320) 978-4323, E-mail: office@firstcrocprinsburg.org

Church's 50th Anniversary

SOUTHERN HEIGHTS - 50 YEARS! Southern Heights CRC in Kalamazoo, MI will celebrate 50 years of ministry with a special dinner on March 19 - the anniversary date of the first worship service. It will be held at the Christian Middle School - the place of the first worship service. Go to www.s-heights.org for details. Or call 269-349-4954

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 Maranatha CRC Dec. 6 through April 11, 10:00 A. M. at 6159 E. University Dr., Mesa, AZ. Rev. Gary Hutt, Pastor. Info: 480-668-0478

Birthdays

90th Birthday

ANNE L. BUIKEMA, wife of the late Robert C. Buikema Sr. at Victorian Inn 12600 W. Renaissance Cir. #214 Homer Glen, IL 60491, will celebrate her 90th birthday on Feb. 9th. Her children Robert Jr.(Linda), Kathleen (Gary) Ritsema, David (Ruth), Howard (Sharon), 12 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren give praise and thanks to God for the blessing she is to our family.

SOPHIE LEFFRING celebrates her 90th birthday on Feb. 5, 2011. Send well wishes to 4656 West 87th St., Apt. 3B, Chicago, IL 60652.

MARIE NYKAMP (ROON) 7212 Thornapple River Ct., Alto MI 49302 celebrated her 90th birthday Jan. 20. Her children: Sylvia Maat, Del, Esther DeVries, Rich, Den, & Char Dozeman. Her words: "God is so good!"

ROSE PELS of Smith Crossing 10511 Emilie Lane G13 Orland Park, IL 60467 celebrated her 90th birthday on January 11. Her family is thankful for God's faithfulness and blessings.

Roger Van Dellen, 1600 NW Crista Shores Ln, #B-17, Silverdale, Washington 98383, 360-204-5518, will celebrate his 90th birthday on 2/24/11. His wife, Nell, and children, Joyce, Roger Jr. (celebrating in Glory), Carolyn Cartwright, and Dr. Al Van Dellen and their families are thankful for his faithful witness to God's blessings in his life and his love for his family, ministry, and friends. "Great is Thy Faithfulness"

Anniversaries

60th Anniversary

BOUMA - Rev. Gerard and Margaret Bouma celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on Feb 1, and Dad's 60th year in the ministry of the Word. Your children, 10 grand and 10 great grandchildren rejoice and praise God for His faithfulness to you. Celebrate with us at an open house at Breton Woods, 2500 Breton Woods Dr #3068, Grand Rapids, MI on Sat. Jan. 29 from 2-4pm.

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NIEWENHUIS Eugene and Evelyn (VanderTuin) PO Box 34, New Holland SD 57364, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on Dec. 28, 2010. Their family: Wilmer & Joan Niewenhuis, Marica & Dave Kuipers, Randy & Diane Niewenhuis, Dan & Jody Niewenhuis, Wendell & Maureen Niewenhuis, JoEllen & Doug Dykstra, 29 grandchildren and 29 great-grandchildren thank God for His faithfulness to them and for the blessing they have been to us all. We love you!

PETERS, Herbert and Theresa (Venema), 3211 Log Ave. Sheldon IA 51201, rejoice in 60 years of marriage on Dec. 28. Thanking God with them are: Cori & Jerry, Jacki & Tom, Bart & Deb, Mart & Deb, 15 grandchildren & 9 great-grandchildren. Ps. 34:3 "Glorify the Lord-let us exalt his name together!"

REINDERS Alice and Hank, of 5-81 Wood St., Drayton, Ont., NOG 1P0 will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on Feb. 18, 2011. Praise God for his faithfulness. Congratulations from your children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

50th Anniversary

SPORN Donald & Marilyn (Kloet), 1928 Empress Court, Naples, FL celebrated their 50th anniversary on January 21. We thank God for our wonderful parents and grandparents! Donna & Steve, Gary & Dawn; grandchildren Reagan, Austin, Carson, & Preston.

Obituaries

CORSTANGE Bea, nee Bosker, 101. Died 12/28/10. Kalamazoo, MI. Widow of Jake. Children: Ron & Cathie Corstange, Ken & Marilyn Corstange. 5 grandchildren-1 deceased. 10 great-grandchildren.



DRENTH Mrs. Alice, aged 93, of Grand Rapids, went to glory on December 31, 2010 to celebrate her birthday with her Savior. She was preceded in death by her husband Harvey. Surviving are her daughters, Beth & Steve Kushman of Traverse City, and Francine & Larry Bronec of

Manhattan, MT; grandchildren, Christopher (Elizabeth) Kushman, Ryan Kushman, Alicia Bronec, Brandon (Brittney) Bronec; great grandchildren, Matthew Kushman, Hurlee and Hunter Bronec; sister, Grace (Benjamin) Rietema of Grand Rapids; and several nieces and nephews. Funeral Services were on Tuesday, Jan. 4, 2011 at Holland Home Raybrook Manor Chapel, 2121 Raybrook, SE; with Rev. Kenneth VanWyk officiating. Interment in Ellsworth Cemetery. Memorial contributions may be made to Faith Hospice or the Holland Home Patient Assistance Fund. Arrangements by: STROO FUNERAL HOME 1095 68th Street, SE www.stroofuneralhome.com

FOLKERTSMA Mrs. Jeanette, age 88; November 28, 2010. She is survived by her children: Kathy Slager, Marvin J. and Andrea Folkertsma; 7 grandchildren; 10 great grandchildren; 2 great-great-grandchildren; brother and sisters: Dr. John A. (Dottie) Voss, Christine (Henry) VandeKerk, Agnes (Robert) Steegstra; sister-in-law: Helen (Harold) Boersma.

HOLTVLUWER, Kenneth, went to be with his Lord on Christmas Eve, 2010. He is missed by his wife of 64 years, June Holtvluger, 4 children, 8 grand children and 11 great-grandchildren. 616-974-1091

HUISJEN, Martin, age 91; Dec. 10, 2010; 16300 Louis Ave. #631, South Holland, IL 60473. Survived by wife, Pat (Vree) Huisjen; children: Marty and Janet Huisjen, Cindy and Lee Kleidon, Henry and Janine Huisjen, Mike Huisjen; 6 grandchildren; 6 great-grandchildren.

JELGERHUIS Della, age 81 of Orange City, IA. Peacefully passed into God's presence on 12/14/2010. She was preceded in death by her husband, Alvin and is lovingly remembered by her children (Elmer and Shar, Leanne and Sid Gillson, Lynell and Jim Dykstra, and Drew and Jane) eight grandchildren and many Christian brothers and sisters.

SCHIPMA George E., 94, went to be with Our Lord on December 22, 2010. 5228 S Ernst Ct, Western Springs, IL 60558. Husband of the late Charlotte, nee Lanenga. Father of Patricia (Kenneth) Wiltjer, Anita (John) Tevelde, George E., Jr. (Patricia) Schipma, Charis (Jim) Engel and Lois (Russ) Van Dyke. Grandfather of 14, great-grandfather of 10. Brother of Eleanor Roon, the late Peter (the late Emma) and the late Charles (Marcie) Schipma.

SPOELHOF Mr. Charles Peter; aged 80; December 18, 2010; 2105 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546, formerly of Rochester, NY; He was preceded in death by his sister, Carolyn (Harold) Veldkamp. He is survived by his wife, Cornelia "Kay" Spoelhof; children: Beth (Stephen) DeVries, Philip (Patricia) Spoelhof, Gordon (Colleen Lynch) Spoelhof, Ronald (Renee) Spoelhof; brother: John (Jo Mae) Spoelhof; sister: Roberta (Benjamin, deceased) Bruinooge; sisters-in-law and brother-in-law: Pearl Bloemendaal, Jeanette Miedema, Trudy (Ken) Split, Gary (Delores) Maliepaard; nine grandchildren, two great grandchildren.

VANDERLAAN George "Lefty", age 89, went to be with his Lord on Nov. 8, 2010. He was preceded in death by his wife Gerbina (Beenes). His family Bea (Butch) Schaaf, Renee Vanderlaan, five grandsons, Ron (Dee), Randy (Dawn), Clar, Jeff (Laura) the Late Tim and thirteen great-grandchildren will miss him.

Employment

CAMPUS MINISTER Ottawa CRC Campus Ministry Committee seeks to hire a full time campus pastor to establish a new bilingual campus ministry at the University of Ottawa. The successful candidate is com-

mitted to the Reformed faith, self motivated, relates well with young adults and is able to be an incarnational presence in both the academic and wider communities Please contact Larry Vandergrift at lvdgrift@uottawa.ca for a job description and further information. Deadline: February 28, 2011

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR Calvin College Business Department is seeking a full-time, tenure-track faculty member to teach accounting and/or finance beginning August 2011. For more information, please visit <http://www.calvin.edu/go/facultyopenings>.

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Church Positions Announcements

BRIDGEWOOD CHURCH of Savage, MN is seeking a full time pastor. We are looking to grow through outreach and community missions. Our new pastor will have a commitment to sound Biblical teaching and passionate preaching that is relevant to both established believers and 'seekers'. Bridgewood Church - People changed by the love of Christ creating a ripple effect in our community. - Check us out at www.Bridgewood.org!

PASTOR: Immanuel CRC of Cornwall, Ont., is seeking a full time Pastor who will enable & encourage spiritual growth, provide effective Bible-based messages & help us share the love of God. For more info & to obtain our Church Profile, send inquiries to Immanuel CRC, Att: Dianne Kuipers, Sec. of the Search Committee, 2264 Pitt Street, Cornwall, ON, K6K 1A3 or icrc@cogeco.net

LEAD PASTOR-GRAND RAPIDS, MI Oakdale Park CRC is seeking candidates for the position of Lead Pastor. OPC is a progressive community of believers located in a multi-ethnic urban neighborhood in the heart of Grand Rapids Southeast side. Our congregation shares a deep desire to be a light for Christ in the Oakdale neighborhood, our city and our world. Qualified candidates will demonstrate excellence in teaching, an ability to identify and develop leaders within the congregation, and an ability to champion our vision of being a multi-cultural congregation. To view a complete job description and church profile, please visit www.oakdalepark.org, or email pastoralsearch@oakdalepark.org.

SENIOR PASTOR. River Terrace Church (Christian Reformed), located on the edge of the Michigan State University campus, seeks a pastor who will lead the church as it seeks to cultivate hearts and minds to flourish in Christ. (Dr. Clayton Libolt, our current senior pastor, will be retiring later in 2011.) Responsibilities include preaching, worship, and leadership as pastor of the congregation and head of staff. Send resume and letter of interest by March 1 to: Search Committee, River Terrace Church, 1509 River Terrace Drive, East Lansing, MI 48823 or search@riverterrace.org. More info at www.riverterrace.org

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRIES ~ Faith CRC in Elmhurst, IL is seeking someone passionate about working with youth and helping them experience God's word, express God's love, and be equipped for Christian service. Fulltime, with benefits. Mail detailed resume to Youth Director Search Team, 1070 S. Prospect, Elmhurst, IL 60126 or email to FaithYouthDirector@gmail.com.

PASTOR OF PASTORAL CARE Prairie Edge CRC seeking part-time Pastor of Visitation (40 hours/month). Full job description at pecrc.org. Interested men may contact Tom VandenBerg at 269-207-4024 or tvandenber@gmail.com

BRIDGE OF HOPE MINISTRIES Bridge of Hope Ministries CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa is seeking an effective preacher/teacher who is culturally relevant and deeply in love with the Lord. Ideal candidate should be able to work well on a team, can encourage people to use their gifts and relate their faith into their daily lives. For more information or to submit a resume please e-mail Mark Borger at mborger@mtcnet.net. Please mark "Confidential" in the subject line.

OUTREACH DIRECTOR Inglewood CRC in Edmonton, AB is seeking a part-time Outreach Director. Interested candidates should visit www.inglewoodcrc.org for details.

FAITH PRESB. CRC OF GUAM is seeking a senior pastor for our multi-ethnic congregation. Desire a candidate with strong Bible-teaching skills and a heart for evangelism. Web: www.faithchurchguam.com. Applicants can email ktvolsteadt@email.com or call 671-734-7778.

ZION CRC IN OSHAWA is currently seeking a Worship Coordinator to work up to 29 hrs/week overseeing our worship and volunteer ministry. The successful applicant should be proficient on piano and will actively assist Pastor with the coordination and flow of worship services while using volunteer participation. Please forward statements of faith and resume to the Personnel Committee at office@zioncra.ca and visit www.zioncra.ca for more info.

YOUTH DIRECTOR Covenant CRC in Woodstock, ON is seeking a half-time Youth Director to join our Spirit-led Youth Ministry Team. For more information including a job description contact Craig Renkema @ 519-537-3523 or email cc.renkema@hotmail.com.

FIRST CRC in Hamilton, Ontario, is seeking a full-time pastor. We are a diverse, multi-generational church of about 250 members, located in the downtown of a major urban centre that we long to see transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are committed to excellent, Gospel-centred preaching and Spirit-led worship that moves us into mission and compels us to extend God's loving care to one another and to our community. We are searching for a pastor who will lead us as we continue on our journey, will provide spiritual leadership to our church, and will seek to cultivate relationships with our risen Saviour and each other. For more information please contact Aaron Schat, chair of the calling committee at schata@mcmaster.ca, or visit www.firsthamilton.ca.

LAKEVIEW CRC by Valentine, NE seeks a senior pastor to lead our congregation. Contact Don at 605-429-3374; Vern at 605-429-3315 or mlogterman@esu17.org



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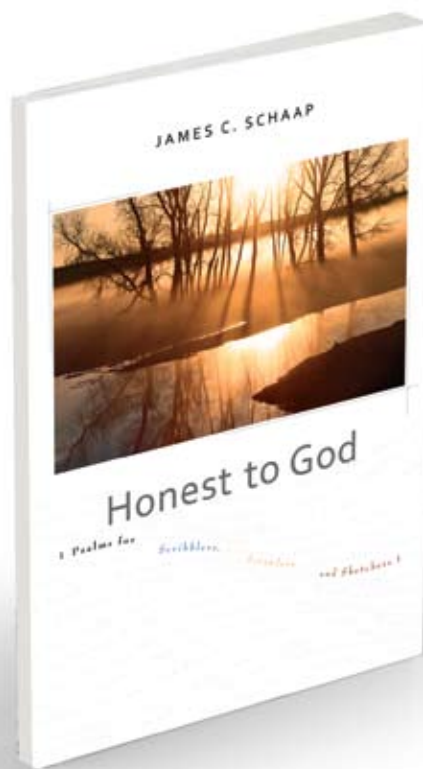
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Miscellaneous

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA SCHOLARSHIP Geneva Campus Ministry is taking applications for the \$1,000 Jason Chen Faith & Learning Scholarship. For 2011-2012 undergraduate students. See www.geneva-ui.org or contact GCM: geneva@uiowa.edu or 319-594-2621. Deadline: April 1.

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Next proposal deadline is May 1.

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Punch Lines

Share in the fun and send us your funny story or joke. Got a photo of something humorous related to the Reformed Christian life? We'll take that too! Please send your contributions to *The Banner* at 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560; or email them to editorial@thebanner.org.

During a unit on the solar system in December, the kindergartners learned about the planets, sun, and moon. In February, as part of a Mother Goose unit, the teacher was reading, "Hey, diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle. . . ." As she read the poem, she remembered a news story about the lunar eclipse that was to happen that night. She paused in her reading and said, "Oh, class, tonight something very special is going to happen in the sky!" A student raised his hand and asked, "Is the cow going to jump over the moon?"

—Peggy Bierma

Being a Canadian living in the U.S., I am still a big hockey fan. My 3-year-old boy knows that I'm especially a fan of the Calgary Flames. Once at suppertime he announced, "Dad, I want to move to Calgary." Thinking he wanted to be closer to "our team," I asked him why. He responded, "Because that's where Jesus died."

—Ralph Krikke

Our daughter is 2 years old. My husband and I have taught her two prayers, one for

dinnertime and one for bedtime. During one recent dinner, we decided to let her lead the prayer. She began abruptly, "Dear Lord, thank you for this day and my food. . . ." My husband interrupted, "Honey, please close your eyes and then pray." Compliant, she closed her eyes and began again, "Now I lay me down to sleep. . . ."

—Becky Folk

A Sunday school teacher began her lesson with a question: "Boys and girls, what do we know about God?" A hand shot up in the air. "He's an artist!" exclaimed a kindergartner.

"Really? How do you know?" the teacher asked.

"You know," the girl said, "our Father, who does art in heaven"

—Gene Potoka

Shortly before Christmas several years ago, we began teaching our 2-year-old son about Jesus' birth. He was particularly interested in the angels announcing Jesus' birth to the shepherds. Our teaching coincided with the beginning of potty training, and one afternoon he asked, "Do angels wear underwear?" I responded, "I don't know—you will have to ask God someday." He walked a few steps away, closed his eyes, and said, "God, do angels wear underwear?" Then he opened his eyes and triumphantly exclaimed, "God said yes!"

—Nicole Roloff

Remembrance Day, Nov. 11, 2010: A 3-year-old and his mother were standing quietly before the monument. Gazing up to look at the statue of a soldier holding a gun, the boy asked his mom, "Did he use that to shoot dinosaurs?"

A veteran sitting in his wheelchair nearby replied, "Son, we're not that old!"

—Lucille VanderVies

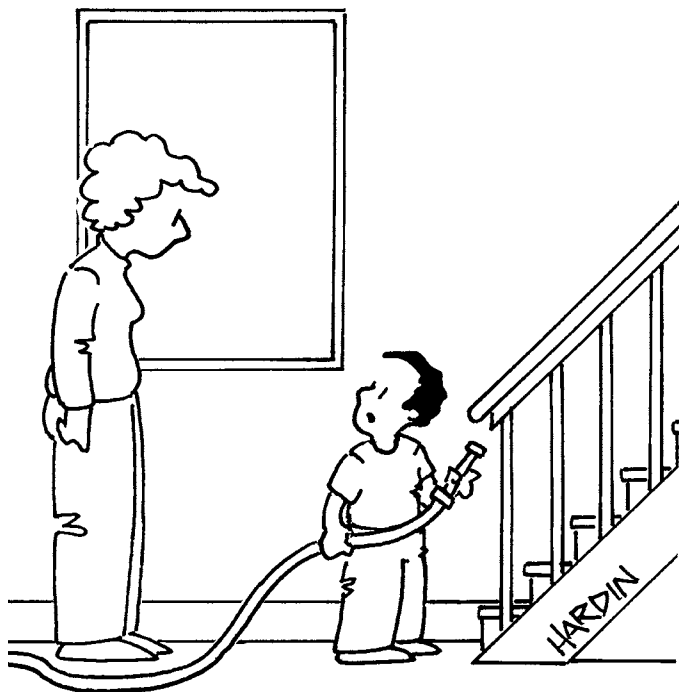
My dear spouse and I have been married for 60 years. We've gotten along very well. Yes, sometimes we have words—I seldom get to use mine.

—Name withheld
for obvious reasons

A second-grade teacher asked her class to draw a picture of an event associated with the birth of Jesus. A little boy drew a picture of the holy family's flight to Egypt—Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus riding in an airplane with a man sitting at the controls. The teacher studied it for a while, then said, "I think I understand your picture, but who is flying the plane?"

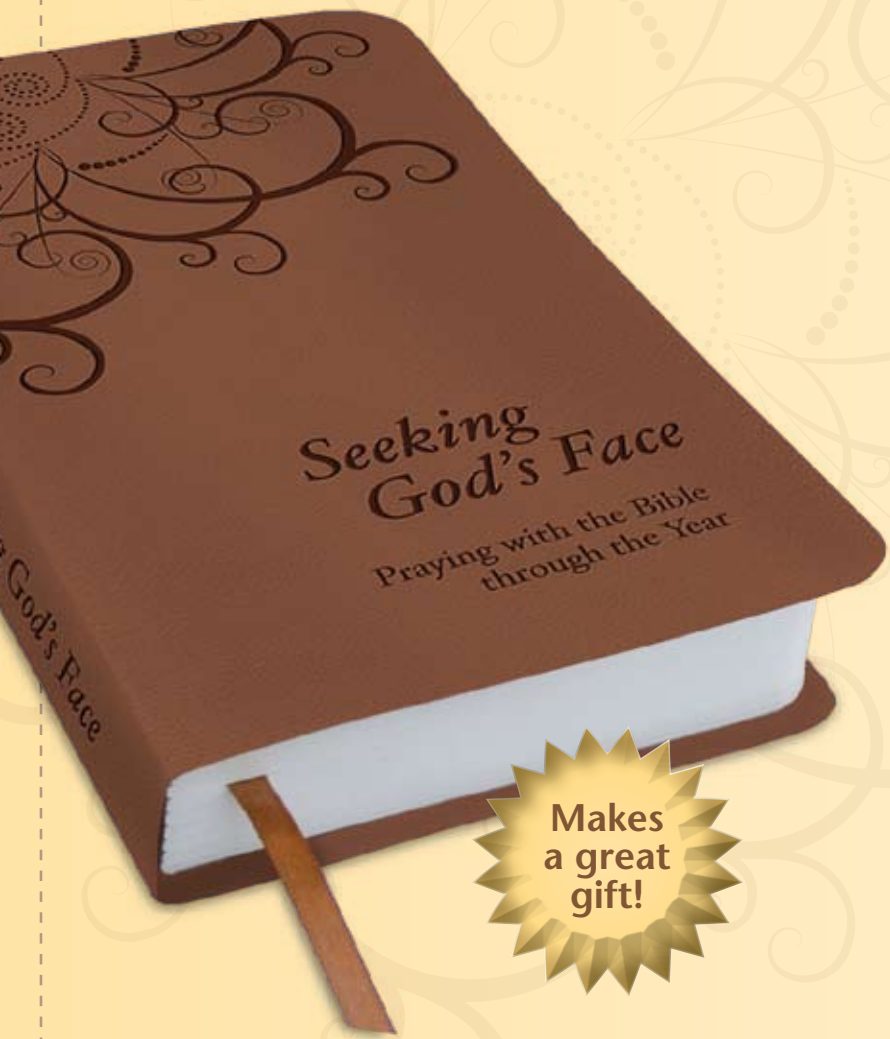
The little boy replied, "That's Pontius the Pilot."

—Robert Lubbers



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