

BANNER

January 2012 | www.thebanner.org

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⁴⁰ The Beauty of Belonging

²⁴ Healthy Pastors, Healthy Churches



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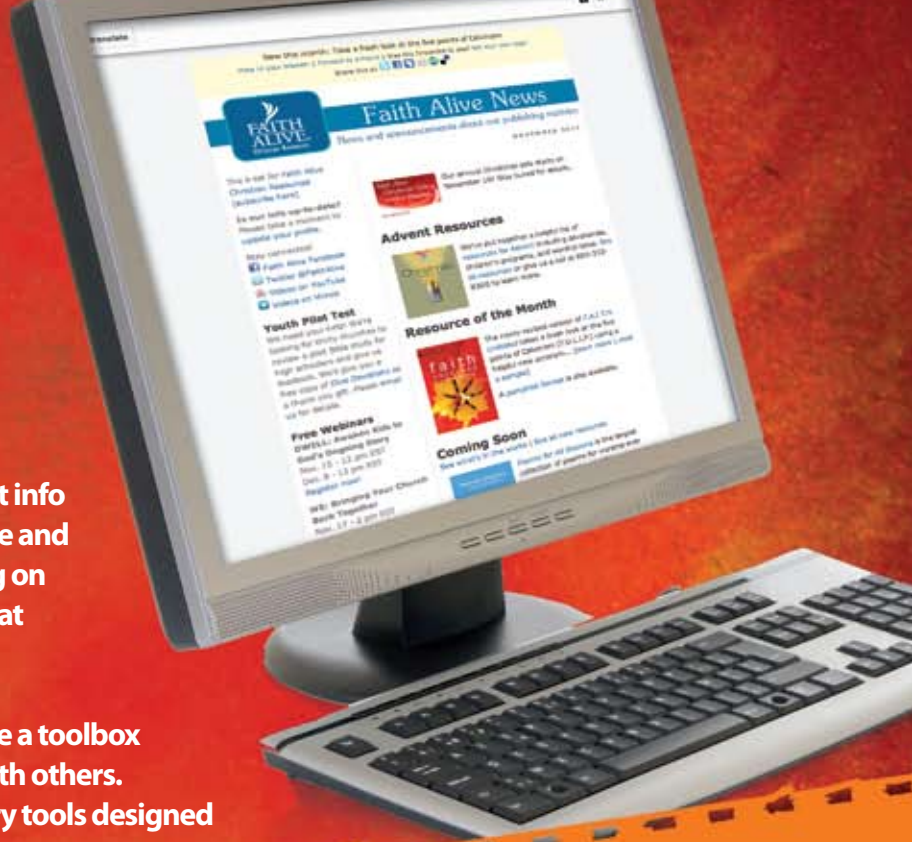
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Too Much Information?

THE WAY WE MARK THE CHANGE FROM ONE YEAR INTO ANOTHER is entirely arbitrary. There is not a single good astronomical reason to make it January 1. On that date our orbit around the sun is neither at its apogee nor its perigee. We're well past the winter solstice and months away from the equinox. It's strictly a cultural convention.

And yet stepping into a "new year" always makes me muse on the purpose of life, especially when I'm shoveling snow off the sidewalk. A bit of repetitive upper-body exercise frees the mind to roam in esoteric places.

Now, back inside from shoveling, not having found an answer to life's meaning, I try Googling it. Fingers are still frozen, so touch typing must temporarily make way for the biblical "seek and thou shalt find" method of keyboarding:

"W-h-a-t-i-s-t-h-e-m-e-a-n-i-n-g-o-f-l-i-f-e-?"

The marvels of technology! Within 0.13 second (Google actually boasts how quickly it responds) I receive an answer.

But wait . . . a problem. It's not what I feared: an error message along the lines of "System error" or "Entry not understood," or "Shouldn't you be shoveling the driveway?"

The *opposite* happens. In that split second I receive 48,900,000 entries to my question. Aye, there's the rub.

The right answer might be there, but how do I find it? Suppose I blow through one answer per second: it still might take me 4,500 working days to ferret out the right one. Another dilemma: if I do stumble across the right answer, how will I *recognize* it?

Maybe breaking the question down into byte-sized chunks will help. No dice:

- Q. What happens when I die? (458,000,000 results in 0.18 second)
- Q. Which religion is the right one? (355,000,000 results in 0.16 second)
- Q. How can I be happy? (2,320,000,000 in 0.15 second)
- Q. Who am I? (393,000,000 in 0.12 second)
- Q. How do I know right from wrong? (164,000,000 in 0.18 second)

For finding answers to some important questions, science and technology aren't much use. I wish Google would have come back with a single, honest response that works on at least 48,900,000 levels: "God knows."

That answer might point me, say, to Ecclesiastes 12, which honestly tells me that my past year didn't amount to much—including the snow shoveling—and the next year won't either. That immediately winnows down the many false entries the database between my ears keeps generating. And it directs me to the only *real* answer to my question: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of a person" (Eccl. 12:13—from the Hebrew).

Our relationship to our Abba and living out God's love is what we're all about. It lends substance to our being. It's because we mean so much to God that we matter at all and matter forever—including all the stuff we step over and into in 2012.

For the rest of 2012 I resolve to spend less time searching Google and more looking for answers in the Word.

You too? ■

For finding answers to some important questions, science and technology aren't much use.



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

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'Amy Made That!'

WHEN MY DAUGHTER Amy was a preschooler, she loved to delight us with her homemade creations. One such creation was a piece of construction paper onto which she glued many pieces of yarn. She further adorned the paper with squiggles of glorious colors from her enormous collection of markers. This masterpiece was made for the purpose of expressing her love to us, her parents.

There were many other creations over the years, in various media, all expressive of her inner artist and her love for Mommy and Daddy. Amy's creations were quite beautiful. Many have been packed away as treasured heirlooms. I have little doubt that when we unpack them in years to come, they will not have lost their beauty.

It was not, however, the beauty of Amy's creations or the fact that her precious little fingers made them that brought us so much joy. It was, instead, the presentation of her gifts that elicited our

delight. As we admired her works of art, she would loudly and joyfully announce, "Amy made that!"

"Amy made that!" became an everyday expression in our home. Nine years later, we still lovingly say, "Amy made that!" when she shows us a more sophisticated drawing of a dog or a horse.

Recently, while leading Children in Worship at our church, I was again reminded of the joy we feel when we create something. I noticed a bracelet made of simple plastic beads on the wrist of one young boy. It caught my eye because Amy and I had made more than 50 such bracelets several months earlier for a school fund-raiser. I knew immediately that this boy's bracelet was one I had made. I remembered the beads. I remembered thoughtfully placing the silver-colored spacers between the orange and blue beads. I remembered how much I wanted it to be special. I felt proud and joyful about this little plastic bracelet. At 50 years old, I felt an overwhelming desire to say, "Diane made that!"

Suddenly, God spoke.

Right there, as I sat on the floor with 15 children ages 3-8, God spoke to me. I heard no still, quiet voice; God spoke right out loud to my heart. He said, "I love you because I made you. I take such joy in what I have created. I know every detail of you."

What an awesome God we serve. He weaves transforming experiences into days and moments of our lives—experiences that deepen our knowledge, our love, and our trust in him. God selects these teachable moments for his children through wrinkles in time, turning years into mere seconds. He is a God of surprise, a God of wonder, a God of mystery. A God who knows every detail of his creation. A God who takes joy in us because he made us. ■



Diane Van Ryn lives in Florida with her husband and her daughter, Amy. She is actively involved in the children's worship and GEMS ministries of Bradenton (Fla.) Christian Reformed Church.



*Everything has being
through the love of God.*

— JULIAN OF NORWICH

Theology in the Light of Science

This may seem a long way from denying the historicity of Christ's resurrection.



In his Easter editorial (“Christ Has Risen Indeed!” April 2011), Bob DeMoor asserts that we “can and may question and debate points of doctrine, biblical interpretation, morality, and mission. . . . But we may never deny the actually-happened, literally historical reality of Christ’s bodily resurrection from the dead. It is the heart of the gospel and of our faith.”

Although this viewpoint is not controversial in the CRC, it is in Protestantism generally. Many mainline Protestant theologians see Jesus as no more than a great teacher or a revolutionary who died a martyr’s death. He “rose again” only in the sense that his Spirit lives on in the lives of his followers.

Others reject this. They want to retain the heart of the historic Christian faith, yet have difficulty accepting the historical trustworthiness of the Bible. They believe that certain events in the Bible, such as the creation of Adam and Eve, the virgin birth, or the resurrection of Christ, may not have actually happened in real history; what matters is the spiritual truth these events are intended to convey.


In his article “How Should We Read the Bible?” (November 2011), Clarence

Vos addresses the controversy surrounding the historical creation and fall of Adam and Eve. Vos adapts Abraham Kuyper’s helpful distinction that “the historiography of the Bible was not that of a camera but more like that of an artist’s brush.” Taking it far beyond what I respectfully suggest Kuyper intended, he argues that an event may be “historical” without being “literal,” just as “Harriet Beecher Stowe’s ‘Topsy’ was more historical than any living African American girl.”

The article ends with the expectation that as theology learns from the findings of science “however tentative they may be . . . in the end our Christian faith will be more vital than ever.” Perhaps, but surely this is not intended to mean that we should adjust our understanding of Scripture to the most tentative of scientific findings.

Responding to the current findings of the Human Genome Project, “which indicate strongly that the human race, as now constituted, did not descend from one human pair,” Vos finds a rethinking of the historicity of Adam and Eve to be a biblically faithful way of interpreting the early chapters of Genesis.

This may seem a long way from denying the historicity of Christ’s resurrection. But given the theological significance of the New Testament parallel between the first and second Adam (Christ) on which our entire salvation hangs, is it not an entirely possible (if distant) development? ■

 Visit thebanner.org for a longer version of this article.



Rev. J. Cameron Fraser is pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, Lethbridge, Alberta.



World Sorrow

I too am sometimes overwhelmed with sadness at the thought of all the suffering in our world (“World Sorrow,” December 2011). From now on when I get discouraged and think my impact is too small to matter, I will remember that every choice I make for Christ is just one of “thousands of small acts of love illuminating the world.” This is part of what it means to be a member of the body of Christ: we belong to something bigger than ourselves!

—Jillian Burden
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Women in Office

Nothing [in the article] was mentioned about women who become elders and/or deacons, which makes it seem like it’s more about money than ministry. In some smaller gospel churches a pastor—male or female—may have to do like the apostle Paul and become a “tentmaker” to support themselves *and* pastor a congregation. Perhaps the Holy Spirit may call them to minister regardless of whether or not a salary is attached to the position.

—Bob Wierdsma
Peterborough, Ontario

TTERS

More Global Warnings

I have some questions in response to Brian Martin's article ("Global Warning(s)," November 2012). If the goal of *manmade* climate change believers is to direct our climate in a positive way, who decides when the ideal climate is achieved? What is the correct temperature for a given region? Was it the temperature of 100, 500, or 1,000 years ago? I agree that we need to be the best possible stewards of God's creation. I'm just glad I don't have to be the one to decide. . . . I have enough trouble with my thermostat.

—Terry Tinklenberg
Edgerton, Minn.

As a Christian economist who cares for this world, I do not believe that the case for aggressive anti-global-warming policies is sufficiently strong to warrant their implementation. It would be much better to use the resources these policies would absorb to address the world problems of starvation, disease, and poverty.

—Joseph Schaafsma, Professor Emeritus
University of Victoria, British Columbia

The question of why [we have a] rapid increase in consumption of fossil fuels should be included in the discussion [of global warming]. This increase correlates closely with world population growth. More people mean more houses, more roads, more cars, more energy, more food, more deforestation, more pollution, and the like. Every human life is precious to God, but will overpopulation make the world unlivable?

—John G. Pousma
Denver, Colo.

Article 2 of the Belgic Confession reminds us that we know God *first* "by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe" (general revelation) and second through Scripture (special revelation). Thus, we are called to know him better both through the study of Scripture and creation. Recent surveys show that more than 95% of researchers around the world actively involved in studying the earth's climate system—a remarkable component of that creation that allows life on earth—agree with the conclusions put forth by Dr. Martin. Let's stop the denial and move forward in fulfilling our mandate of caring for the earth and all that is in it.

—Henry Hengeveld
Willowdale, Ontario

How to Read the Bible

Rev. Vos's article ("How Should We Read the Bible?" November 2011) is a welcome challenge to fundamentalism, and his apparent acceptance of scientific inquiry strengthens his position. But his argument is diminished by equating spirituality, an unscientific proposition, with rational scientific enquiry.

—Ray Stellingwerff
Surrey, British Columbia

How should we read the Bible? Is it OK to dismiss its veracity, denying both its inerrancy and perspicuity, as Clarence Vos does with his metaphorical "artist's brush"? How about some childlike "trust on little legs"? It's almost as if children's minds were designed to understand creation truth, which is perhaps why Jesus made room for them on his lap.

—Mel Mulder
Banning, Calif.

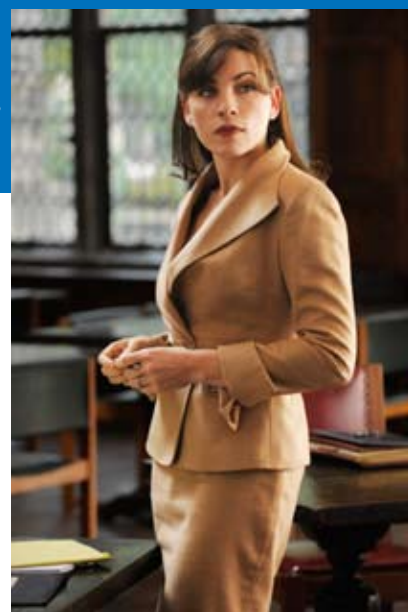
Over the past 24 hours I've read Vos's brilliant article three times. I can't get Kuyper's idea of camera versus artist's brush out of my head. "Do we have the right to tell the Spirit how to write the Bible?" What a profoundly humbling question!

—John Van Sloten
Calgary, Ontario

Corrections

- We reported that Rev. Gary Hutt retired from New Hope CRC in Spokane, WA ("Snowbirds of a Feather Worship Together," December 2012). Truth is that he retired from Ebenezer CRC in Leota, MN.
- *The Banner* incorrectly reported that Rev. Naji Umran was released from the ministry (December 2011). In fact, his eligibility for call was extended for one year.
- Rev. Jimmy Lin has been named interim director of Back to God Ministries International, not "interim administrative director" as we incorrectly reported ("Back to God Director Passes Away," November 2011).

Julianna Margulies plays Alicia Florrick in *The Good Wife*.



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'The Good Wife' and the CRC

Viewers of the CRC persuasion were highly surprised when a character in a December episode of "The Good Wife" identified herself as a member of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

One of the most popular dramas on network television today, "The Good Wife" is broadcast on CBS in the U.S. and on Global in Canada.

In the episode called "Parenting Made Easy," the CRC character was fired from her job as a professor because of her religious views about homosexuality. She was being defended by the show's

main character, lawyer Alicia Florrick (played by Julianna Margulies).

The show's executive producer and co-creator, Robert King, said the CRC connection was that he met some CRC students years ago when he attended Westmont College, a Christian liberal arts school in Santa Barbara, Calif.

"We wanted the character to be a little more hard-line. She had a strong argument for her beliefs [but also believed] that Jesus tempered the need for punishment. It felt like the CRC fit our interests," he said, acknowledging that members of the CRC hold a range of views.

Rev. Joel Boot, executive director of the denomination, wrote a

letter to the Kings and CBS, objecting to what he termed the caricaturing of the CRC's position on homosexuality. He asked CBS not to re-air the episode without either editing it or providing an apology for misrepresenting the CRC's position "on this important and sensitive topic."

LuAnn Westerhuis, 56, of Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, British Columbia, said, "The portrayal of the character could very well fit a CRC church member, but, certainly, not all CRC members have the same political or social views."

Andrea Kloet DeVries, 42, said she wished the denomination were not associated with the controversial topic of homosexuality. "Christianity is much more than one topic," she said. DeVries attends Meadowlands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster, Ontario.

Rev. Pieter Pereboom, pastor of First CRC in London, Ontario, thought the portrayal of the church was largely negative, but he did appreciate that the character insisted on reading the Old Testament command in the light of the grace and mercy won for us in Christ. 🙏

—Gayla R. Postma

For more, including the letter written to CBS, please visit www.thebanner.org.

West Michigan Youths Mentored for Leadership

Amy Westra and Christy Carlin Knetch have, for the past six years, been working to develop leadership in their young people from Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church and Madison Square Church.

One of the ways they do that is through technology-free retreats designed to create space to practice theological thinking and reflection.

Knetch identifies the participants as "future elders and pastors—leaders of cities and communities."

Now the high school participants in the program are passing on what they have learned to middle school youths in their congregations. 🙏

—Noah J.K. Kruis



Participants in the Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders gather at their graduation ceremonies at Oakdale Park CRC.

CRC in Canada Lowers Afghanistan Priority

The Christian Reformed Church in Canada is giving less priority to the peace-building effort in Afghanistan.

The CRC in Canada speaks to the government via the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue (formerly known as Committee for Contact with the Government). For the past five years, since 2006, the Afghanistan file has been one of the group's two core issues.


But now, according to Centre director Mike Hogeterp, they will

give it less focus. Hogeterp said, "If and when opportunities arise to address the issue, we will do so. So while we are not dropping this file, it is no longer a core priority."

The presence of Canada in Afghanistan has been costly—both in lives and dollars. The change from combat to training has been welcomed by many Canadians.

Hogeterp noted, "As far back as late 2009, I began hearing a consistent message that the Cana-

dian public was not interested in the complexities of peace building in Afghanistan—this impression was common among, but not exclusive to, government MPs."

Hogeterp noted that setting aside the Afghanistan file is very disquieting. "Suspending this work now feels premature, like we are letting down people in Afghanistan. There are no solutions for this kind of disquiet." 

—Gayla R. Postma

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Albert Helder

1942-2011


Rev. Albert Helder, 69, whose challenging ministry made people think, and whose example helped people integrate their faith into everyday life, passed away suddenly from heart complications following surgery.

Helder graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary and was a doctoral candidate at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif.

Helder was concerned not only about the spiritual but also the mental and emotional aspects of the ministry. Thus he began his ministry in the Christian Reformed Church in the chaplaincy of Pine Rest Christian Hospital in Michigan.

Helder's parish ministry included churches in Iowa, Colorado, Hawaii, British Columbia, and California.

Helder was deeply loved by the congregations he served and was equally devoted to the CRC denomination. In his preaching he made the Scriptures become alive and relevant to today's world. Under his guidance churches became more inclusive communities of unconditional love.

He is survived by his wife, Sandy, two children and their spouses, and three grandchildren. 

—Louis M. Tamminga

Further information on recently deceased ministers is available at www.thebanner.org and in the front pages of the *Christian Reformed Church's annual Yearbook*.

Ontario Church Gets Surprise Visit from Robin Mark

Members of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario, were treated to an unexpected surprise Nov. 20 when Robin Mark, a well-known Christian recording artist from Belfast, Ireland, dropped in to help lead worship that morning.

Mark, who wrote "Days of Elijah" and "Jesus, All for Jesus," was in southern Ontario for a Promise Keepers convention, and Rick Verkerk, a member of Immanuel, arranged for Mark to join them.

Rev. Henry Kranenburg kept the plan under wraps together with Rev. Mark Knetsch for several months to avoid unmanageable crowds of people showing up to hear the singer. "An important element for us was to keep it 'our' worship and not have it become a Robin Mark event," Kranenburg explained. "We planned the liturgy that way, both in its opening and in its structure. Worship is about God, and that is who we are there for."


"I didn't believe it," said Audrey Benjamins, a member of the praise



Robin Mark (right) joins Immanuel's worship team, from left: Klaas Hoekstra, Ann teGrotenhuisse (on piano), Rev. Mark Knetsch, and Audrey Benjamins.

and worship team, who found out about the special visitor at the pre-service practice. "At first I felt nervous, but when we started I realized my purpose in being there hadn't changed. It was about worship, and Robin Mark accented that."

Mark, who started his musical career by leading worship in his own church, said he welcomed the unique chance to play with local musicians and to encourage the congregation through shared worship.

"I am a big fan of being committed to the local church," he said. "If you start by serving there, and you are faithful where [God] has placed you, he can and will open the doors for more opportunities to serve him in other ways." 

—Monica deRegt

Churches Learn the Parable of the Blanket

Blankets covered the church floor at New Hope Christian Reformed Church in Calgary, Alberta. They represented land in a blanket exercise that walks participants through the history of relationships between First Nations people and those who arrived in Canada as explorers and settlers.

Rev. John Van Sloten, pastor at New Hope, used the blanket exercise as his sermon during a Sunday morning service.




Participants at First CRC in Edmonton, Alberta, engaged in the blanket exercise.

"I entered into the process hoping to discern and understand what God might be saying through this 500-year-long text," he said. "The blanket exercise enabled our community to relive a parable of judgment, of greed and injustice,

of mixed motives and unintended consequences. I was asked to play the role of the 'European' in the reenactment, taking land, handing out smallpox-laden blankets, and ushering children to residential

schools. I made eye contact with those who were representing First Nations peoples. Feelings of culpability continue to haunt me."

The CRC's Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee, the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, and the Edmonton Native Healing Centre, a ministry of the Christian Reformed Church, all helped to bring the exercise to Alberta in recent weeks.

Since its creation in 1996, the blanket exercise has been conducted hundreds of times with thousands of people of all ages and from all backgrounds. 

—Rachel deKoning Kraay

Write for *The Banner*!

The Banner is seeking a writer in western Michigan (Grandville-Hudsonville-Jenison area) and a writer in Arizona/New Mexico. If you like to write and have a passion for telling stories of how God is at work in churches in your area, we'd like to hear from you. We'd especially welcome writers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. All expressions of interest should be addressed via email to Gayla Postma, News Editor, at gpostma@crcna.org. Please include a resume or letter outlining your news-writing experience and some recent samples of your work

Minnesota Congregation Celebrates 125 Years

First Christian Reformed Church of Prinsburg, Minn., celebrated its 125th anniversary with the theme "125 Years of God's Amazing Love . . . And May All Who Follow Find Us Faithful!"

Established in 1886 by settlers from the Netherlands, the charter members included nine families and a number of individuals, some of whose grandchildren and great-grandchildren are still members.

First CRC celebrated throughout 2011, reenacting practices from years past, such as men and women sitting on opposite sides of the sanctuary, and members even dressing in period clothing.

Marilyn DeGroot, a longtime member, said, "Throughout these 125 years, God has led and will continue to lead us. May we and those who come behind us also be faithful."

—Rachel deKoning Kraay

Congregation Boosts Organ Donor Registrations



Lucknow Community Christian Reformed Church, Ontario, hosted an organ donor registry blitz recently as a way of supporting Coffee Break Bible study member Ruth Pritchard and remembering her great-granddaughter Alyssa.

Born with half a heart, Alyssa underwent seven open-heart surgeries before dying at age 7 earlier this year.

The Coffee Break group had prayed often for Alyssa over the

Kelsey Burgsma (left) assists Gerry teRaa

years. "When she died, we felt at a loss," said Rev. Rita Klein-Geltink, the church's pastor. "[This] was one small thing we could do to offer support and encouragement to Ruth and her family."

The church was pleased not only to surpass the goal of 50 new registrations (by two), but to discover that many members had already registered.

—Anita Brinkman



Iowa Church Celebrates 100th Birthday

In May 1911, 11 families gathered for what would later become Sanborn (Iowa) Christian Reformed Church.

Sanborn CRC has a history of deep roots. Of the current members, five families have attended for six generations, and eight families have attended for five generations.

The church celebrated its 100th anniversary with a dinner, a program of memories, and a display of pictures showing everything from the first church building, parsonage, pulpit, and chair, to financial reports dating back to the 1930s and written in Dutch.

—Kate Padilla



Korean Coffee Break at Meadowlands Fellowship CRC

Ontario Church Offers ESL Coffee Break

Coffee Break Bible study leaders from Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ontario, wanted to reach out to the Korean moms of exchange students attending the nearby Christian school.

When it became apparent that a language barrier prevented the Korean women from fully participating in Coffee Break, Carla Wikkerink, an ESL teacher and Coffee Break group leader, agreed to lead a separate Bible study for them.

Min Jin said she feels this is a very important time, spiritually, in her life. “God has brought me here to strengthen my faith more and more,” she said.

—Monica de Regt

The float the church created for Railroad Days—in celebration of their 100th anniversary

Check thebanner.org for the expanded story.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Robert Heerspink

1953-2011

Rev. Robert Heerspink, head of the Christian Reformed Church’s media ministry, Back to God Ministries International, a careful and visionary administrator, and gospel communicator at heart, died at age 57 of pancreatic cancer.

Heerspink received his M.Div. and Master of Theology degrees from Calvin Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Divinity degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill.

Heerspink served four Christian Reformed congregations in Michigan. In 2006, Heerspink was appointed director of Back to God Ministries International and filled that position till his death.

Heerspink was a “church man” at heart. He possessed considerable leadership gifts. His work for the CRC was marked by a deep sense of theological integrity.

Prominent in Heerspink’s ministry was his emphasis on stewardship. He wrote a book on that fundamental calling: *Becoming a Firstfruits Congregation*, published by Faith Alive. He also wrote numerous *Today* daily devotionals.

Heerspink is survived by his wife, Edith, three children, and one daughter-in-law.

—Louis M. Tamminga

The Ten Commandments for Kids

The Ten Commandments isn’t exactly uncharted territory for pastors.

But when Rev. Ben Van Arragon began searching for a way to reach youngsters in First Christian Reformed Church, Detroit, with a meaningful explanation of the commandments, he ended up constructing his own version.

The children’s version ranges from the most basic, such as “We will not take what doesn’t belong to us” (no. 8), and “We will listen to our moms and dads and obey them” (no. 5), to commandments that took a bit more thought: “We will respect our bodies and the bodies of other people” (no. 7).

The creative process wasn’t as simple as one would imagine. “Trying to translate [the commandments] into more childlike language also had to do with applying more to a kid’s perspective or a kid’s life,” Van Arragon said.

While most of the commandments have a direct behavioral tie kids can relate to, the commandment regarding adultery became the biggest challenge. Van Arragon estimates he wrote 10 versions of the seventh commandment before settling on a final one.

For the whole set, and more, please visit www.thebanner.org. —Jeff Arnold

NEWS



EMILY WILSON

New Jersey Bowlers Strike Out Hunger

Eighty-five people enjoyed bowling, fellowship, food, and fun on a recent Saturday while raising money for the food pantry of New Hope Community Ministries.

New Hope is a diaconal outreach in Prospect Park, N.J., supported by several area Christian Reformed churches.

Sponsors rented 15 lanes at a local bowling alley for \$120 per lane. In return they received 2.5 hours of bowling, shoe rentals, pizza, and soda for everyone bowling their lane. Many families and people of all ages attended.

The lane rentals, a silent auction, and additional donations raised \$1,250 for the food pantry.

Barbara Adams, a New Hope volunteer, said, "I liked this event. We could bring our grandchildren and give back while having fun as a family."

—Calvin Hulstein

Tim Steen bowls at the Strike Out Hunger event for New Hope Ministries.



Delegates of Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan view Cree art.

reForming Relationships with Aboriginal Communities through Art

For Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan (a regional group of churches), a field trip was on the agenda of the fall meeting.

Delegates viewed an exhibit of "Kisemanito Pakitinasuwin" ("The Creator's Sacrifice"), a series of paintings by self-taught Cree artist Ovide Bighetty.

"These paintings depict the Easter story in Woodland Cree artistic style," said Steve van de Hoef, Justice and Reconciliation Mobilizer for Canadian Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church.

The paintings are being shown across the country as part of the reForming Relationships tour organized by the CRC's Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee. One of the stops will be at Synod 2012 in Ancaster, Ontario, in June.

"The tour is about forging and deepening relationships between Christian Reformed and Aboriginal communities," explained van de Hoef. "These paintings have served as a point of contact and a bridge between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people."

—Rachel deKoning Kraay

Diaconal Ministries Canada Celebrates 10 Years

Diaconal Ministries Canada (DMC), a ministry of the Christian Reformed Church that equips deacons, celebrated 10 years since formally organizing in 2001. DMC serves deacons in the approximately 250 congregations of the CRC in Canada.

Deacons of Woodynook Christian Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta, organized a celebration to acknowledge the anniversary but also to recognize just how

many people have been involved in diaconal work throughout the years.

DMC's roots date back to 1960 and the formation of the All-Ontario Diaconal Conference (AODC). Western Canada diaconates also organized diaconal conferences. Eventually leaders of all the conferences sought greater levels of cooperation, which ultimately led to the formation of the national organization.

Joe Doef, chair of the DMC board for 2011-2012 and representative of Classis Alberta North, a regional group of churches, said, "For all deacons, but especially for first-time deacons, DMC has been a great source of help, information, and encouragement, and it's my prayer that it will continue to do that till Christ returns."

—Rachel deKoning Kraay



Deacons of Woodynook CRC in Lacombe, Alberta, hosted Diaconal Ministries Canada's 10th anniversary celebration.

RACHEL DEKONING KRAAY



National Bible Bee qualifier Kaitlyn Vredevoogd

Michigan Girl Competes in National Bible Bee

Kaitlyn Vredevoogd, 14, from Lake City (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church, recently competed in the National Bible Bee, put on in Nashville, Tenn., by the Shelby Kennedy Foundation.

To qualify, Kaitlyn had to memorize over 500 verses and study the book of 1 Peter this past summer, and then compete in a local bee at the end of August. The local competition included both a written part testing her knowledge of the book of 1 Peter and an oral part requiring her to recite verses from memory. To compete at nationals, Kaitlyn had to memorize another 200 verses and study 2 Peter.

"I get goose bumps when I think of what God can do with those 700 verses that Kaitlyn knows," said Amy Vredevoogd, Kaitlyn's mother.

Although Kaitlyn did not make it to the top 15 for semifinals, she enjoyed the family discipleship celebration surrounding the competition.

"For me the highlight was meeting people who had been studying the same books of the Bible and memorizing the same verses as me," said Kaitlyn. 🙏

—Daina Kraai

Black Eyed Peas Inspire Students in Philadelphia

You might not expect an alternative hip-hop group, the Black Eyed Peas, to inspire Christian banners, but art students at the Ayuda Community Center rewrote the lewd lyrics of the Black Eyed Peas song "Imma Be," which is slang for "I'm going to be."

The center is a diaconal outreach of Spirit & Truth Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in North Philadelphia, Pa.

Michaelanne Harriman, the center's arts director, said students rewrote the song to include lyrics like:

"Imma be praising God with my whole crew.

"Imma be living up there even though I'm living down here.



MICHAELANNE HARRIMAN

One of the banners created by Ayuda Center art students.

The students picked 10 words to represent their vision for their future and the future of their neighborhood.

Aryione, 13, chose the word *Godly* because she "wants to tell everyone else about God." Eliannys, 11, chose *Loved* because she wants to be surrounded by people who love her.

Students then spent the summer designing and sewing a banner for each word. The banners were hung in Hunting Park for a reduced installation fee and displayed for six weeks last fall.

—Calvin Hulstein

Indiana Pastors' Partnership an Answer to Prayer

Rev. Jim Halstead, pastor of Community Christian Reformed Church in Fort Wayne, Ind., and Reginald Blackmon, bishop of Latter Rain Ministries, met while watching their sons play basketball.

When they discovered they were both pastors who share a love of John Piper and a similar way of thinking when it comes to Reformed theology, their conversations shifted quickly from basketball to a shared passion for reaching their community.

The two pastors now pray with one another each Monday and have started planning how to share the gospel with people living in two apartment complexes within a mile of Halstead's church.

"I had been asking God who I should partner with," said Halstead. "That's when I met Reginald and found someone who has the same philosophy of ministry I do.

"We're two peas in a pod." 🙏



Reginald Blackmon (left) and Jim Halstead

—Jeff Arnold

NEWS

Looking Back and Looking Ahead on CRWRC's Birthday

As the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee prepares to celebrate its 50th birthday in 2012, *The Banner's* news editor sat down with co-directors Andrew Ryskamp and Ida Mutoigo. Ryskamp has been with CRWRC since 1974 and has served as director of CRWRC-US since 1998. Mutoigo has been with CRWRC since 1985 and has served as director of CRWRC-Canada since 2006.

Q: As you look back over your history with CRWRC, what words come to mind?

AR: For me, it's an ongoing journey of spiritual growth. For the organization, it has been ministry growth.

IM: God's grace, especially as I reflect on the deep generosity of people in our churches and how that has grown—the generous heart for people in poverty and disaster.

Q: What has CRWRC excelled at, and what do you wish could have been done better?

IM: The partnership model is our strength. Partnering with local organizations is a strong achievement.

Another key achievement is the whole Disaster Response (DRS) programming, the quality of that in North America and internationally. It's been a real highlight to see the expansion of money we have managed and leveraged in terms of grants and partnerships.

From the field level, I would have liked to have done more integration of worldview and values transformation at an earlier stage. We could have had so much more impact.

AR: Community strengthening with involvement of the church has been central.

What I wish we would have been able to accomplish more strongly is the involvement of the church in North America in that, and the understanding they have of the principles involved in good development. We want our denomination, our churches, and our donors to be so involved in our work that they not only support the work internationally but incorporate the same principles at home for transformation of their own communities.



Bringing running water to desperate communities

Q: What do you see as milestones?

AR: For me, two things make the most impact. One is watching a child die from malnutrition. Once you've seen that, you never want to see it again. The other one is when you sit in a community that is Muslim, and you [know that] you can save hundreds of lives in terms of the physical sense—but when you know it's having a spiritual impact, that's huge.

The tsunami was huge, but what's memorable is sitting with community leaders whose homes are rebuilt, but they don't know what to do with their grief. We're able to talk about that from our own faith perspective. That doesn't require a tsunami to happen. Poverty is the tsunami of everyday life.

IM: In terms of disasters, Katrina and the tsunami were key. Katrina in the U.S. opened up volunteerism, and we've connected with thousands of volunteers. In terms of poverty, the whole Bangladesh program: how [the people] have connected from local organizations to institutions that address whole regions through strong local ownership, affecting large numbers. In terms of justice, [it is] West

Africa, where an irrigation scheme was going to shift people off their land with no compensation, and they were able to negotiate through advocacy a more reasonable settlement.

Q: As you look at CRWRC right now, what are the bright spots you see?

IM: Some of the bright spots I see are an expanded audience of interested donors in North America beyond the CRC, and a lot more openness of other churches and other alliances to joining us. These give a huge opportunity for greater impact, and then there are the global alliances. Another bright spot is the stronger justice orientation of youth and young adults. There is a huge opportunity for us to tap into that. Volunteerism—groups coming into DRS—is another bright spot.

AR: It's sort of humbling that we've become an agency of choice to partner with. The other is that people want to partner with us because

they appreciate [our] philosophy of ministry, our approach to the countries, community empowerment.

Q: As you look ahead, what are the challenges you see?

IM: Like all charities, we face greater scrutiny and skepticism. When people find us, it takes a lot of work [to overcome skepticism] because people start with a distrust level, rather than assume [we are] worthy of investment. The other trend is more interest in designated giving, so money that can support the core of what we do is harder now to raise. People are drawn more into a disaster mode, yet longer term it is so important to mitigate against the disasters.

AR: For me it is addressing injustice. Justice has been politicized in North America, so raising issues that are systemic in nature to the causes of what we face on the field are more difficult to address. When we start talking about a justice issue, people may interpret it as a left-leaning political stance as opposed to seeing it as biblical justice called for in Isaiah 58.

Q: You told the Board of Trustees of the denomination about the choices the CRC has to make about the role of CRWRC looking ahead. Can you say a bit more about that?

AR: We've become a player in the field of global NGOs, but there are people who would still like us to be more of an in-house diaconal

global church through ACT Alliance and other [organizations]. Those are partnerships that we have connected with that have even bigger possibilities for reaching even more people than just [in-house] collaboration.

IM: Through Canadian Foodgrains Bank, in one year we might generate around \$1 million in support from the CRC. But because we are a lead organization to implement those programs on the field where food security programs are needed, we manage \$10 million. It multiplies the impact that CRWRC is able to have and leverages the resources we receive to do much more.

That's where the CRC, then, is at a crossroads. Structurally, managing an organization with over 100 employees and a budget of \$40 million (about half the denomination's budget, excluding Calvin College) demands a different system or structure to make it flourish and grow rather than one that keeps it under an umbrella. An umbrella closes in. We see it upside down—connected and rooted in the CRC but open to continue to grow and flourish. Can systems of the denomination flex enough to allow an agency to have growth potential to flourish without tying it down to the restrictions that fit for the others and without losing the connection to our constituents?

We don't want [the CRC] to feel like we're World Vision or a lesser priority. [The CRC is] the source through which we can then leverage all these other partnerships. That's a very important relationship to us.

Q: What do you want the church to focus on during this anniversary year?

AR: Celebrate what a relatively small denomination is able to accomplish in ministry worldwide, not only through CRWRC but through all of its ministries. For a small denomination to be recognized internationally at government levels and at other alliance levels, the impact is disproportionate to the size of the denomination.

IM: I hope we really celebrate the heroes in the communities, the ones that are really on the frontlines. We don't often hear about them or see the lives that are being changed, the faithful mothers who volunteer to train other mothers; partner staff, some who have died in service because of risks encountered; to celebrate and appreciate God's work through

these strong Christian leaders who had a heart for their community.

—Gayla R. Postma



Homes being built after the earthquake in Haiti

ministry, an extension of deacons' work. They would like us to just work with Christian Reformed World Missions and Christian Reformed Home Missions and limit us to what we can only do together.

What we're saying is, if we unleash the potential that exists in CRWRC and other agencies, we can unleash a whole movement of ministry involvement in the denomination. It would be less contained; it would be a ministry explosion. CRWRC is not concerned about just the CRC. We connect with the



GAYLA R. POSTMA

Texas CRC Brings New Life to Old Neighborhood



Members of the Old Town Spring Heights Task Force at work together

A few local churches in Spring, Texas, have banded together to help a small impoverished neighborhood in the city.

New Life Christian Reformed Church has partnered with four other churches to form the Old Town Spring Heights Task Force, and together they are making a difference in a community once

reputed for being a center for drug trade and high levels of crime.

Members from the supporting churches gather donations of household supplies and meet once a month to sort and distribute the items to residents who can use them. The group also takes time to visit and pray with these neighbors.

The task force meets regularly with residents to ask for their help in identifying the needs of the community. "They feel like they're being listened to," said Rev. Andy Sytsma, pastor of New Life.

The task force has also helped with a number of other projects, including home repairs and working with the county and the local electricity provider to supply the neighborhood with street lights.



—Sarah Boonstra

In the News Again, 32 Years Later

Folks on the west coast of British Columbia who hear the words "Traffic is moving well" may be listening to the voice of Ann Luu, the newly appointed traffic specialist for CTV B.C.'s "Morning Live."

Luu traces her Canadian roots to Living Hope Christian Reformed Church in Abbotsford, British Columbia, where she and her family were welcomed 32 years ago.

The church sponsored Kieu and Mui Luu and their six children, one of whom was Ann. Church member Tina Kruk was instrumental in helping the Luus settle into their new community.



The Luu family (back row, l-r): Lynn, Helen, Tim, Ann, Nicole; (front row, l-r): parents Kieu and Mui, Laura

The family made a treacherous boat trip to Malaysia, fleeing war-torn Vietnam. Prior to that, Luu's parents had fled communist China. Their arrival in Canada was an answer to hopes and prayers.

Don't Invite Them to Church in Salt Lake City

Don't invite them to church. That's the new evangelism strategy of a church in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Mountain Springs Community Christian Reformed Church is using Karen Wilk's book *Don't Invite Them to Church* as a guide for small-group discussions.

Wilk's book, published by Faith Alive Christian Resources, is described as a tool to help congregations move from being a "come and see" church to being a "go and be" one.

"Of the 15 people in the class, every one of them has a story of what God is doing with them in their community," said Rev. Peter DeVries, senior pastor of Mountain Springs.

Jim Gutzwiller, a member of the church's council, sees the book as a way of taking church to his neighbors instead of bringing them to church. Recently he and his wife invited their neighbors over for dinner.

"We weren't doing it to evangelize them. We [did] it to establish a relationship with them," he said. "It's a start, and we'll see where we go from there."

Another member of the group, Pat VanHeyst, said it takes the pressure off of having to always think of something new. "[It's about] walking alongside people," she said.

—Sarah Boonstra



A *Don't Invite Them to Church* discussion at Mountain Springs Community CRC in Utah.

their six children, who all have university degrees.

Dreams have come true for this family—and still do. "Traffic reporting is a dream assignment for me," said Luu. She lives in nearby White Rock with her husband. "We do our best to stay in touch with the CRC families that helped us settle down in Canada."

The Luu family was one of a number of families sponsored by Living Hope CRC in the late 70s. More recently the church has sponsored people from Iraq, Sudan, and Syria. The church community is presently awaiting permission to sponsor two more families who have fled from Turkey and are waiting in Cyprus.

—Jenny deGroot

FAQs

Relationships

Q Our 23-year-old son has left home and moved in with his girlfriend of two years. What is our role and responsibility as Christian parents?

A The first, sometimes difficult, truth to remember is that basically your parenting is over. In the same way that you relinquished responsibility for your son's physical and material welfare once he became an adult, you must also relinquish responsibility for the choices he makes with respect to lifestyle. For instance, you can no longer "make" him go to church and neither can you insist that he get married before cohabiting. To try to force adult children to follow your rules, even if what you want for them is good and godly, is manipulation, with the result that your relationship is conditional on your being in charge. Lording it over your children is, of course, neither good nor godly.

The transition from being responsible *for* your son to being responsible *to* him is not an easy one. Being responsible to someone includes letting him know what you believe is the right thing to do (for example, waiting until marriage before living together with his girlfriend), as well as inviting him to talk about his faith in God and what that might mean for his lifestyle. But it also includes listening to his viewpoint and respecting his right to choose differently without changing your acceptance of him and his girlfriend. Your role as parents has changed from taking care of your son and keeping him safe (physically, but also morally and spiritually), to the role of friendship and of having influence rather than control.

Your Christian responsibility can certainly include praying for your son and his girlfriend,

Lording it over your children is neither good nor godly.

continuing to extend hospitality to them, and being gracious, loving, and accepting of them, even while disagreeing.

—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.

Editor's note: Watch for a feature article on this topic in our February issue.

Faith Formation

Q Our small (but committed!) congregation will never be able to afford a paid youth pastor, and some of us fear that our ministry to children and teens will always struggle because of this. Is there hope for us smaller congregations?

A Some of the strongest ministry to children and teens occurs in congregations your size. Almost every time this strength comes from the same source, which can best be described by paraphrasing the opening verses of 1 Cor. 13:

Our congregation may have the most qualified youth pastor imaginable, but if we do not have love, we are only resounding gongs or clanging cymbals. We can have the latest curricula and bring in top-notch consultants to train our volunteers, but without love, we are nothing. We can cover all the costs to send our teens to the splashiest conventions and mission trips, but without love, we gain nothing.

Here are two true stories from small congregations. A university student said to me, "In our final year of high school, it suddenly struck my friends and me one night how much our congregation had loved us from day one. We decided to put on a thank-you dinner for them before we left for university." A middle-aged woman from a tiny rural congregation said, "At the age of 12 I was asked to play piano because our organist suddenly passed away. I don't know how they were able to sing those first months as I stumbled through the hymns. But every Sunday without fail they thanked me, and I knew they loved me."

Walking with children and teens (and adults) so that they *know* they are loved is the central discipleship calling of every congregation. Ask your 18-year-olds how they received God's love through the body, and then prayerfully make adjustments as you seek to live out Paul's beautiful prayer for the church in Ephesians 3:14-21.

—Syd Hielema

Syd Hielema is a professor of religion and theology at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, and a member of the CRC's Synodical Faith Formation Study Committee. ■

ARE **YOU**
GROWING IN



FAITH?
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HOW DO YOU
KNOW?



WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, the doorframe of our kitchen was covered with pencil marks. Every once in a while my mom would stand me next to it and make a new mark. I would carefully measure from the floor to the mark and announce how tall I was. I was one of those kids who had a late growth spurt, so I measured my height a lot.

Measuring your height is easy. Measuring your faith, on the other hand, is not so easy. We have a clear idea of what “taller” means, but we really don’t have a clear definition of what a richer or deeper faith looks like.

So what do we mean when we talk about “growing in faith”? What are we looking for? How do I know if my faith is growing? How do I know if the faith of others is growing? Are the things we’re doing to encourage faith in our children and teens working? Do our church programs help people to have a deeper and richer faith? Is there a way to know whether our efforts to instill faith are effective?

Perhaps faith is one of those things that’s hard to define but we know it when we see it.

Think of someone you know who has a particularly deep faith. I’m not talking about someone famous like the late Mother Teresa. I mean someone you *really* know. It might be a parent or a grandparent. A pastor or an elder. A child or a teen. Have you got someone in mind? Now, why did you choose that person?

You probably chose that person because of what you have observed about the way she lives her life. Maybe you chose him because of the way he welcomes people into his home or because of the great advice she gives. Those are good things, but they are difficult to measure.

One possible measure of deep faith might be active involvement in a local congregation. For example, does this person

attend worship regularly? It makes good sense that someone who is growing in faith will worship with God’s people often. But we can’t just count the number of worship services attended. Does someone who worships eight times a month have a deeper faith than someone who worships four times a month? Maybe worshipping eight times a month vs. four times a month doesn’t tell us much, but eight times vs. one time might tell us something.

Active involvement in church isn’t just worship attendance, though. It means participating in the life of the congregation. I’m on our church’s education committee, for example, so that counts for something, right? But faith is not the same thing as attending committee meetings. (If it were, the Christian Reformed Church would be in fantastic shape!) So while participation is part of what we’re looking for, being involved in committees or even attending church potlucks doesn’t really indicate a growing faith either.

We can also look more broadly at the way people live their lives. Some people in my church, for example, have the skills to build houses and, in their retirement, have volunteered to do that in our community on a weekly basis. This is a great ministry, and many people have benefited from their selfless service. Do these volunteers have a deep faith? Maybe. But maybe not. Their service is noteworthy and an example to others, but we’re looking for more than just that, right? After all, organizations like the Peace Corps or Habitat for Humanity are filled with people who give of themselves, but some of them have no faith commitment at all.

So just looking at what people do is problematic for measuring how deep someone’s faith is. That’s because the ways I use my gifts in Christ’s service might look different from the way you use your gifts. The same thing is true about involvement in our local congregation. For example, those who lead in music or in speaking do not necessarily have a deeper faith than those who listen. They simply have different gifts.



Theological Accents

As we think about this, we end up with an amalgam of things that mix together both to inform our faith life and indicate how we are doing. In her book *Almost Christian*, Kenda Creasy Dean notes that teens who have a vibrant faith have four “theological accents.” They have “a creed to believe in, a community to belong to, a call to live out and a hope to hold on to” (p. 42). I found her list helpful as I thought about my own faith life. Let’s look at this list a little more closely.

1. Creed

Knowing what we believe is an important facet of a deep faith. This means the work of education is important in our churches and in our homes. By spending time in God’s Word and studying what others have written and said about God, we get to know God better and we grow in our understanding of our faith.

2. Community

We were made to live in community with each other. Our modern emphasis on individualism runs counter to God’s call for us to be a community of faith together. We need others to hold us accountable, to teach us, to worship with us, to help us, and to be helped by us. If we are not part of a community of believers, we are missing an important element in our growth as Christians.

3. Call

We are each called to live out our faith in ways that are uniquely “us.” We sometimes think of “call” in terms of vocation, but it is bigger than that. My call is different from your call, but we have each been called to bring our gifts, our abilities, and even our weaknesses in service to God and to other people. Our lives have meaning because we have a God-given purpose.

4. Hope

Faith is not just an academic exercise; it is a way of life that has a trajectory. We are working not just for a heavenly reward, but for the coming of Christ’s kingdom. We look forward to the day when wrongs will be righted and injustice will be no more. We have a hope that all things will work together for good (Rom. 8:28). We have confidence that God wins.

In studies of teenagers and religion, teens who exhibit the four accents above also exhibit a lot of the behaviors we mentioned earlier (church attendance, congregational involvement, lives of service) plus many more. These things

are not just important for teens, but for all of us to continue to grow in faith. We need to have a place in our church community with God’s people. We need to know our brothers and sisters in Christ, and they need to know us. That means making involvement in our local church a

high priority. And we need to make sure we and our children are involved in good church education programs. We can be serious about our call and what it means to do the tasks God has given us as people of faith. We also need to keep talking to each other. A life of faith thrives on conversation with other Christians. Our talk must be authentic and reflect our ups and downs, our dreams and disappointments, but it also should be laced with our thoughts about God’s place in our lives.

Channels of Grace

Faith is a gift from God, but there are things that Christians have done for centuries, *faith practices*, that play a powerful role in shaping our faith. These practices are not only indicators of our faith but they also help us to grow in faith—things like prayer, worship, reading God’s Word, and practicing hospitality.

We do not look at these practices as chores or as something we do out of obligation. Rather, faith practices are gifts from God. By engaging in them we open ourselves up to more fully experience God’s work in our lives; they are channels of grace that help our faith grow. So while it isn’t possible to measure faith as easily as we measure our height, we can have a pretty good idea of which direction we’re heading. ■

WE NEED TO KNOW OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, AND THEY NEED TO KNOW US.



Robert J. Keeley is a professor of education at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich.

What Do You Really Believe?

In your 20s or 30s? We want to hear what's on your mind as it relates to living out your faith in today's world. Please send manuscripts (600 words) to editorial@thebanner.org. (And, no, you don't have to be ordained!)

MY COUNSELOR read the following statements to me, waiting for me to say “I agree” or “I disagree” after each:

- *I may want to please people I care about, but I don't have to please them all the time.*
- *If I refuse to do a favor for people, that doesn't mean I don't like them.*
- *If I say no to people and they get angry, that does not mean I should have said yes.*

Each time he read a statement, I immediately knew the correct answer—the one he was looking for. Of *course* I don't have to please everybody all the time. Of *course* I don't have to say yes to someone if he or she gets angry with me.

I knew enough to agree with the statements, but everything inside me shouted, “No! I disagree!” As a pastor I have said those very things to others in my office, and even from the pulpit. But at that moment I realized that though I could give lip service to the right answers, I did not really believe them.

In the Reformed tradition of the Christian faith, we emphasize accurate theology. We want to possess the right answers about God, humanity, and life. I appreciate this about the Reformed tradition. The way Christians express their faith has changed much over the centuries and varies greatly in different cultures around the world. Doctrines, however, do not change. Jesus Christ and his identity are the same yesterday, today, and forever. The Reformed tradition does an excellent job of handing down the faith that was once for all given in Jesus Christ.

Yet in my own spiritual walk with the Lord, I am seeing that I can know all the right answers regarding doctrines and not really believe them in my heart. The problem is not that I disagree with anything in our creeds or confessions. I agree with everything. But my actual *belief* in many of them

is weak. This must be why Jesus so often said, “You of little faith!” to the apostles.

The apostles had no problem thinking Jesus was correct in everything he said. But when it came time for Peter to walk on water to Jesus, he began to sink. In the same way, we can bear witness that our salvation is by grace alone, then feel terrible guilt over mistakes we made years ago. In saying the Apostles' Creed we can affirm “the resurrection of the body” while deeply fearing our own death.

If asked, I would affirm with the Heidelberg Catechism that I have had my sins forgiven and have been made forever right with God as if I had never been a sinner. Yet I will get defensive instead of apologize when someone approaches me about something hurtful I've said. I will attempt to fight for my own righteousness instead of accepting the righteousness given to me by faith in Jesus Christ. My true belief is exposed: I actually believe my righteousness comes from my image as a good person.

I would never disagree that God loves me unconditionally and that God's love is all I need. Yet my day can be ruined if someone is upset with me. I feel guilty that I cannot be at every meeting. I feel inferior when a sermon isn't a knockout. My true belief seems to be that God's love is not good enough and that my importance is based on my performance.

God is showing me the difference between knowing the truth and actually believing it. Now I scrutinize my behavior to see what my true beliefs are: What might I really believe if I enjoy seeing people I dislike “get what they deserve”? What do I believe about the holy catholic church if I make snide comments about classis or synod or fellow believers in other denominations?

I have been thankful that God has placed concern for right doctrine on my heart. Now I am thankful God is showing me what it means to truly believe. ■

Rev. Aaron Vriesman is pastor of North Blendon Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Mich.

NEXT



I realized that though I could give lip service to the right answers, I did not really believe them.



Healthy Pastors, Healthy Churches

By Chris Meehan

A group of young men joked and laughed as they rolled balls down the lane at a crowded bowling alley in Grand Rapids, Mich.

A few pumped their arms, and a loud cheer went up when one of them rolled a strike.

They were a little rowdy, but it was clear they were having fun—thanks to a grant from a Christian Reformed Church program called Sustaining Congregational Excellence (SCE).

These young men from the neighborhood around Coit Community Church

Rev. Jeff Brower, pastor of Bethel CRC in Waupun, Wisc., paddles down a river as part of the Go Green Group

in Grand Rapids don't have jobs and rarely have enough money to splurge on a night out. So Rev. Jerome Burton, pastor of Coit, applied for a grant to encourage them.

Burton says the ministry provides “an opportunity to witness to our neighbors and show that we care, and that we are committed to being a part of the solution to improving the quality of life in our community.

“We are focused on reaching out to the hard-core, streetwise young men in our neighborhood with the underlying purpose of building strong, trusting relationships with one another.”

Often the group met around tables at the church for Bible studies tailored to their needs. Some went to Coit as children, but none now attend church.

A week or so after the group meetings concluded, one of the young men did come to church with his young child. Coit members greeted him warmly.

Besides SCE, the Christian Reformed Church also supports the Sustaining

You add.
God multiplies.

MINISTRY SHARES
TOGETHER
DOING MORE

Pastoral Excellence (SPE) program for encouraging and supporting pastors and pastors' spouses.

SPE and SCE have been active for several years, touching many lives and boosting the health of many churches, including Coit Community Church.

Lis Van Harten, who directs both the SPE and SCE programs, says, "Today's congregations need strong servant leaders who can adapt to, change, and grow with their congregations. For this, pastors must develop character, knowledge, and skills."

SCE, she said, emphasizes prayer and thanksgiving to God. It helps churches to develop a sense of purpose and encourages congregations to look outward to meet needs in their communities so that they can thrive into the future.

Reaching into the Community

SPE and SCE work in many ways. For example, funds from an SCE grant help CrossWay Church, a Christian Reformed congregation in Vancouver, Wash., run the Barnyard, a children's play and activities area at a farmers' market in Salmon Creek, Wash.

CrossWay Pastor Brad Vos says the Barnyard gives church members the chance to live their faith outside the walls of the church and to return to church with a deeper sense of mission and purpose.

And there are other benefits. People often ask Vos why he works in the Barnyard. He tells them simply that CrossWay, out of love for Christ, is reaching out to the community. A few Barnyard visitors have since ended up attending CrossWay.

"I also know that my personal involvement in the market has blown away the stereotypes that people have about pastors," says Vos.

Ann Foster, coordinator of the market, says the Barnyard has been quite a draw, bringing in hundreds of children to play and do activities as their parents shop for produce. Without being overtly evangelistic, she says, church members reflect qualities that attract people to them.

"The farmers' market is really the only high-profile thing that happens in Salmon Creek, and the church has helped to make it happen," says Foster.

Going Green

SPE grants nourish the hearts and spirits of pastors, helping them stretch and grow, become healthier, and experience a deeper connection to God.

The "Go Green" group in Wisconsin, for example, met to talk about their ministries and how they could improve, especially so their churches could glimpse what healthy Christian outreach looks like.



Kids work on a craft in the Barnyard while their parents shop at the farmers' market.

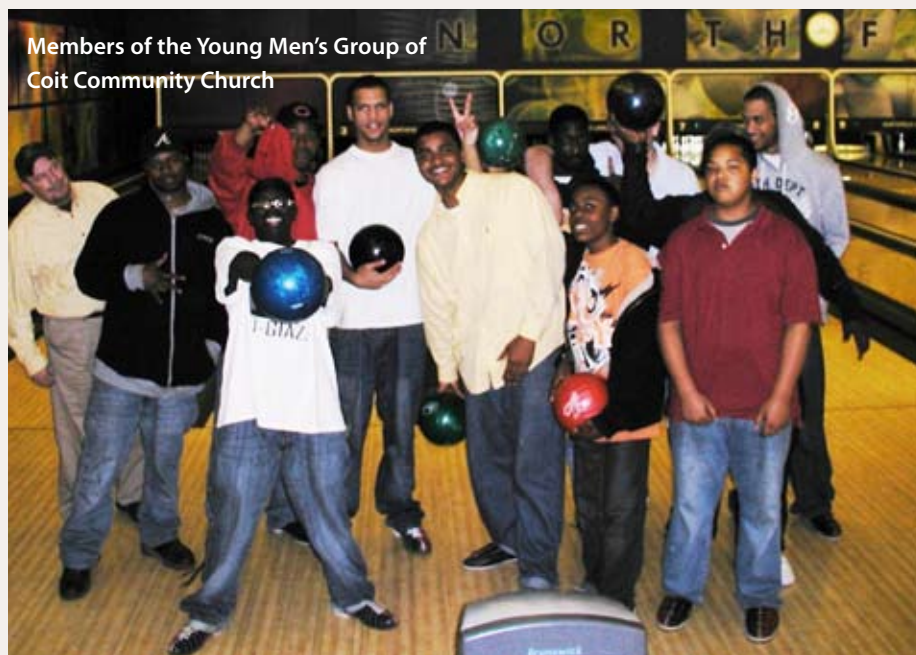
Rev. Verlan Van Ee, pastor of Living Hope Community (CRC) in Fox Lake, Wis., says the pastors also bolstered their health by hiking through the woods, canoeing, and rock climbing.

One of the purposes of the group has been to get outdoors, to revel in God's good creation, says Van Ee.

Another SPE group included more than a dozen pastors from scattered communities in eastern Canada. An SPE grant helped the isolated pastors, who traveled many miles to meet, feel less alone and enjoy more collegiality.

The pastors meet monthly for lunch, fellowship, prayer, and reflection on experiences of the past month.

Seeking the grace and work and presence of God, the group strives to "reflect upon the sometimes very ordinary and sometimes very strange little moments that make up the life of parish ministry," says Rev. Ken Gehrels, pastor of Calvin CRC near Ottawa. ■



Members of the Young Men's Group of Coit Community Church



Chris Meehan is news and media relations manager for CRC Communications and a member of Coit Community Church.

Evaluations that Help Pastors Flourish

By Norm Thomasma and Jeanne Kallemeyn



Cecil VanNiejenhuis, Norm Thomasma, and Jeanne Kallemeyn from the CRC's Office of Pastor-Church Relations work on the *Evaluation Essentials* training tool.

Seven years into his ministry, “Pastor James” realized he no longer felt the fire and passion for ministry that he once had. He wondered if he had lost himself, his direction, and his connection to God.

Instead of ignoring his thoughts and soldiering on, or simply leaving the church, he sought an in-depth evaluation of his ministry.

“Was it a classic case of burnout? Or was it something else? I decided to face the challenge and get it fixed,” he said.

He read up on the topic, joined a Sustaining Pastoral Excellence peer group, and—most important—asked his elders to honestly assess him and his ministry

and tell him if had gone off track and, if so, how and where.

The evaluation process is proving to be a successful way for pastors and church leaders to undergo a checkup, like going to the dentist or physician for routine care—and to see whether something more serious needs attention.

“What was unique about the pastor performance process is that it was pastoral. I set up and led the process,” Pastor James says.

“I identified two areas in which I felt particularly vulnerable: leadership and preaching. I asked for input from the church family. With the assistance of a five-person team, we invited a random group of members to a meeting. I asked

them to critique my preaching and leadership skills.”

The ground rules were simple: If the pastor judged a comment to be more hurtful than helpful, he would ask the person to reframe the comment or leave the room. Similarly, he reserved the right to leave the room.

“After explaining that I was sincere in asking for input, they offered numerous suggestions for ways I could more effectively lead our ministries and more effectively communicate in preaching,” he said.

“The team then assisted me in processing what we heard, and together we developed an action plan, a plan that has guided me and, I believe, has blessed the church.”

You add.
God multiplies.

MINISTRY SHARES
TOGETHER
DOING MORE

“ Evaluations need to fit the congregation, the pastor, and the situation. ”

The evaluation process may not be for all pastors, but it can help some pastors to flourish.

In place for more than a year, the evaluation process from the CRC's Office of Pastor-Church Relations is called *Evaluation Essentials for Congregational Leaders, Setting the Table for Healthy Conversations*. The CRC's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program helped to put it together.

Pastors aren't the only ones asking for evaluation. Phone calls and emails from churches to the Office of Pastor-Church Relations often sound something like this:

“Hi, do you have some evaluation materials we can use with our pastor?”

“Good question; what did you use the last time you evaluated your pastor?”

“Oh, we have not evaluated our pastor for a long time.”

“Oh, so why are you thinking of an evaluation now?”

“Well, things have not been going so well lately.”

Rev. Norm Thomasma, director of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations, says his office concluded that councils and congregations do not generally think about evaluations until there is conflict.

“It is understandable why pastors and congregants passively conspire to avoid regular evaluations,” he said. “They take time and effort, and they need to be done

well. In fact, poorly conducted or poorly conceived evaluations can do more harm than good. And what will work in one congregation may not be appropriate for another.”

That's why the Office of Pastor-Church Relations wrote the training tool *Evaluation Essentials*, rather than a simple how-to booklet. Evaluations need to fit the congregation, the pastor, and the situation. Working through the training tool increases the likelihood that that will happen.

One pastor of a church in Ontario obtained *Evaluation Essentials* for each member of his executive council as they reviewed the church's ongoing staff evaluation process. He said they found affirmation for many things the pastor had been doing.

Another pastor of a church in Colorado downloaded the booklet from the CRCNA website. “Reading through *Evaluation Essentials* is challenging our elders to rethink the evaluation process for all our staff,” the pastor said. ■



Rev. Norm Thomasma is director of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations.



Jeanne Kallemeyn is staff ministry specialist for Pastor-Church Relations.

Pastor-Church Relations Fast Facts

- The mandate for the CRC's Office of Pastor-Church Relations is to provide programs of “healing and prevention” for ministers, staff, councils, and congregations.
- Ministry Shares funding enables the office to offer these services to congregations.
- Throughout the years the methods of delivering these programs have been adjusted to the needs of congregations as well as to the staffing of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations.
- In June 2010, two copies of the *Evaluation Essentials* training tool were sent to every Christian Reformed church. As of October 2011, 50 congregations had requested almost 300 additional copies.
- Calvin Theological Seminary uses *Evaluation Essentials* as a class resource.
- To obtain a copy of *Evaluation Essentials*, contact Jeanne Kallemeyn for hard copies (see contact information below), or download a pdf from the Resources section at crcna.org/pcr.
- The Office of Pastor-Church Relations works with and through pastoral mentors, regional pastors, and church visitors to provide support, encouragement, and counsel to congregations and staff, and to access resources.

For more information, see crcna.org/pcr.

—Jeanne Kallemeyn

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Evaluation Essentials for Congregational Leaders

Setting the Table for Healthy Conversations



Sustaining Pastoral Excellence
in the Christian Reformed Church in N.A.
2000 Kalamazoo Avenue SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49508

The Prognosis Is Good

The Christian Reformed Church is a diverse family of healthy congregations, assemblies, and ministries expressing the good news of God’s kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide.”

Did you know that the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church reaffirmed the above in 2010 as our denomination’s vision statement?

The Board also agreed that “The ministry priority of the Christian Reformed Church is to create and sustain healthy congregations for the purpose of transforming lives and communities worldwide.”

So, you might ask, just what is it that makes for a healthy congregation?

Some might say that meeting the budget is a good indication of a congregation’s health. Others might look at a church’s programs. Still others might consider such things as the church facility, parking spaces, or community involvement.

While any and all of those have something to do with congregational health, none by itself—and not all of them together—make a church healthy.

If I could show you a church that grew phenomenally—by as much as 2,500 percent—after one spectacular worship service, would you be inclined to consider it a healthy congregation?

The Bible describes it this way: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . . And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42, 47).

Here was a church in which God’s Word was central—not only on a pulpit or podium in the front of the sanctuary, but in the hearts and minds of the members. They placed it first in their lives. They consulted it first in their decisions. They listened to it before making plans. They put it before their families. They gave it first place, without exception.



Here was a church in which hospitality was important. Church members listened to each other before they spoke. They cared for one another’s needs before making their own known. They sought out people they did not know. They shared meals together and laughter and tears. They shared themselves.

Here was a church in which the sound of splashing water or the scent of pressed grapes brought warmth to hearts and tears to eyes and filled the air with the electricity of faith. Bread

fed souls hungry for closeness to God. Worship services never seemed too long, never seemed long enough.

Here was a church in which, even when people disagreed—especially when they disagreed—they shared the same position: kneeling. They spoke not only to each other, but to God on behalf of each other. “Amen” meant not only that a prayer was finished but that the pray-ers believed that the God

to whom they prayed had lovingly heard. Prayer was not their last resort but their first impulse, not the end of things but the very beginning.

This was a *healthy* congregation. And there are many *healthy* congregations in the Christian Reformed Church today. We are made continually healthier in these important ways: teaching, fellowship, sacraments, and prayer.

These essentials receive additional power through such programs as Sustaining Pastoral Excellence and Sustaining Congregational Excellence. They are encouraged and enhanced by the dedicated work of Pastor-Church Relations. And by God’s amazing grace they are available to us all.

The One who came not to declare us healthy but to diagnose and treat the sick provides this prescription for good health. Wherever such “treatment” is not only offered but received, the prognosis is truly good. ■

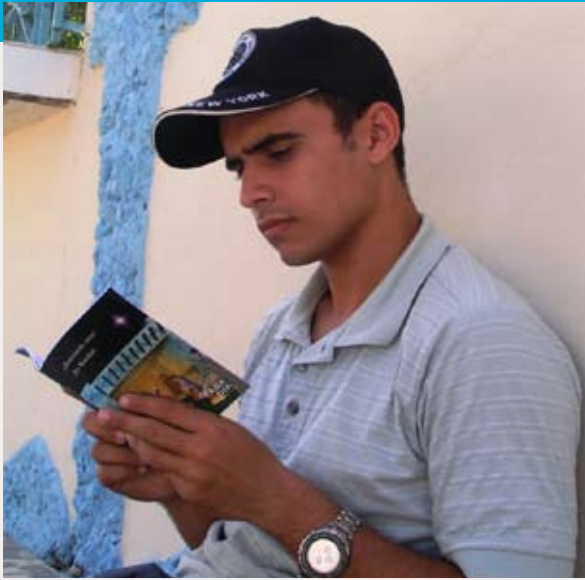
“ Just what is it that makes for a healthy congregation? ”



Rev. Joel Boot is executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

You add.
God multiplies.

HERE AND THERE



A young man reads through his copy of *Cada Dia*, a BTGMI publication.

A Different Kind of Christmas Card

Sidnéa, who lives in Campos dos Goytacazes, Brazil, received a surprise Christmas “card” from a colleague at work.

The envelope contained a Christmas devotional booklet called *Cada Dia Natal*. Sidnéa was so moved by the devotions, she signed up for an annual subscription, noting that it was a blessing in her life.

Every year LPC (Luz Para o Caminho), Back to God Ministries International’s Portuguese media outreach in Brazil, creates and distributes a special Christmas version of their monthly devotional booklet, *Cada Dia*.

Each month LPC prints and distributes more than 20,000 *Cada Dia* booklets. But at Christmastime it prints many more (900,000 in 2011), as some people who receive these monthly devotionals—as well as members of local congregations and businesses—order *Cada Dia Natal* to distribute as Christmas cards to friends, neighbors, and acquaintances.

One woman, who received a copy from her doctor, wrote, “I read the messages about Jesus and was moved to trust in him.”

José works as a traveling salesman in the town of Ilha Solteira. One afternoon while working he received a copy of *Cada Dia Natal*. Later, at home, he began to read it, shared the devotions with his family, then called to subscribe to the monthly *Cada Dia*. “Thank you so much for the great tool that I could share with my family,” he told the LPC staff. ■

—Nancy VanderMeer,
Back to God Ministries International

Calvin Professor Writes Text on Christianity in China

Calvin history professor Daniel Bays recently released *A New History of Christianity in China*, the first comprehensive history of Christianity in China to come out in years.

Bays’s book explores the period before Western countries first established missions in China. He also writes about the first-known Christians in China, the Nestorians—adherents of the Church of the East—who entered the country in the seventh century.

In his book, Bays corrects many misconceptions that Western Christianity has about Chinese Christian culture and about the political climate Chinese Christians live in today.

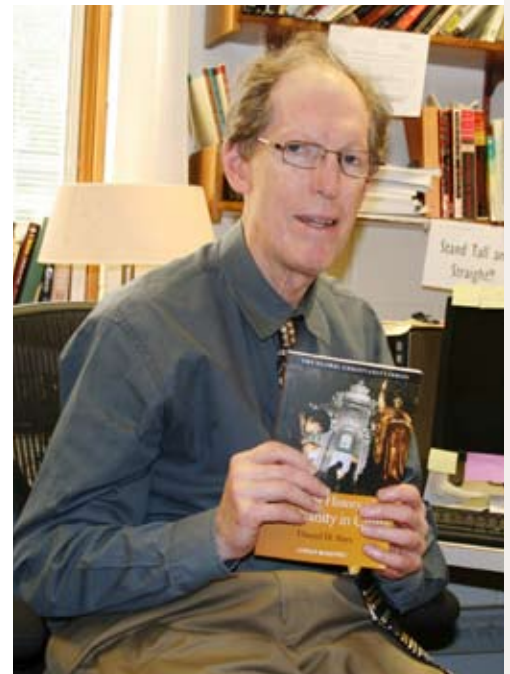
While a history professor at the University of Kansas in the 1970s, Bays earned a grant to conduct research on China. In 1996, he collected 20 scholarly essays on the history of Christianity in China in a book titled *Christianity in China from the 18th Century to the Present*. In 2000, Bays came to Calvin and began building the college’s Asian Studies Program.

“Dan Bays is one of the world’s leading scholars on the history of Christianity in

China,” said Larry Herzberg, professor of Chinese and Japanese languages for Calvin. “His latest book on the subject is not only an important contribution but is extremely interesting and readable.”

Bays hopes the book will fuel an interest in China. “For Christians, it should be of interest because it’s one of the places Christianity is booming in numbers, in self-confidence,” he said. “China has a lot to offer the world.” ■

—Myrna Anderson,
Calvin College



Daniel Bays has written a book on the history of Christianity in China.

Two Voices from San Salvador

In April, I was returning to Managua, Nicaragua, from a visit to Seeds of a New Creation, the partner with which Christian Reformed World Missions does ministry in El Salvador.

Riding to the airport in the capital city of San Salvador, I spoke with the taxi driver, who told me he had been assaulted numerous times, often with a pistol to his head. He cursed his country and said he should have left 40 years ago when his brother fled.



Eliberto Juárez with his wife, Ethel, and children, Luis Enrique and Sofia

Statistically, it's true that in the wake of the 1980-1992 civil war, El Salvador has been one of the 10 most violent countries in the world.

Yet I wished the taxi driver could have listened to another voice, the voice of Timothy Wadkins.

Wadkins, a professor at Canisius College in Buffalo, N.Y., has spent several years researching the influence of Christianity on El Salvadoran society. He has found that many evangelical churches have had an unexpected impact.

Among the evangelical leaders Wadkins interviewed was Mario Vega, the pastor of Elim, a megachurch with 120,000 members.

While Elim remains firm about the need for personal regeneration through Christ, Pastor Vega and his staff have begun to discuss engaging structural evil in society.

Vega told Wadkins, "It is not enough just to preach the gospel or give aid to the poor. We must speak out against and attempt to change those conditions that cause poverty."

Wadkins also interviewed Pastor Pedro Landaverde, a pastor for Elim who works with youths and gangs in the

notorious San Salvadoran community of Iberia.

Instead of just holding evangelistic crusades, he has gotten to know the young people and listened carefully to their needs.

Today gang violence has diminished, and several gang members have become active Christians. Pastor Landaverde insisted to Wadkins that "making Jesus the Lord of our lives must mean more than just personal morality—it must extend outward into all aspects of life."

Wadkins discovered a common thread in his conversations with evangelical pastors like Vega and Landaverde. All participated in the two-year training program of Seeds of a New Creation.

Eliberto Juárez, the program coordinator, told me there was a time he had pretty much given up on the church making a difference in El Salvador. But now he can see a better country for his children because of the hopeful signs he sees in the church.

Seeds of New Creation training emphasizes God's redemptive purposes and encourages students to apply the gospel to the mission of the church, to the family, to vocational life, and to transformation of the community.

I wish my cabbie friend could see that El Salvador. ■

—Joel Huyser, Christian Reformed World Missions field leader for Central America

Rev. Richard Sytsma 'Called to Serve'

Rev. Richard Sytsma, dean of students and international student adviser for Calvin Theological Seminary, plans to retire this year after serving the seminary for more than a decade. "As a faculty member, he has exemplified 'Called to Serve,' the theme and focus of CTS," said Rev. Jul Medenblik, president of the seminary.



Richard Sytsma will be retiring from Calvin Theological Seminary.

Having come to CTS after 32 years in Japan with Christian Reformed World Missions, Sytsma used his international experience to serve students, helping them determine where God is calling them to ministry.

He has earned many titles of respect among the students: "pastor," "doctor," "father," "brother," and "friend."

Sytsma has visited students in the hospital, been a family counselor, and stood at the gravesite of a student's child. He has picked up students from the airport to welcome them to Grand Rapids, Mich., and he has shed tears

with them as they are prayed over and blessed to take up new ministry opportunities.

A search process is underway for a replacement, though CTS is clear that the spirit of service Rev. Sytsma and his wife, Sandra, have so freely shared will be very hard to replace. ■

—Calvin Theological Seminary

You add.
Community.

Coaching Inspires Indiana Pastor

When Rev. Arturo Olguin arrived in DeMotte, Ind., in 2008 to start Comunidad Agua Viva, he was both enthusiastic and amazed by the support from local churches and businesses.

“Everything was perfect,” he recalls. “I couldn’t have been more grateful to the Lord.”

However, leadership challenges became apparent, eventually causing Olguin to become frustrated, tired, and discour-

aged. He considered resigning from the church.

But Viviana Cornejo, a coach who works with Christian Reformed Home Missions’ Hispanic Ministries, came to his assistance. She discussed with Olguin what the church’s leadership could look like, and shared plans for helping the church to get back on its feet and to grow.

“I was like any person addicted to positivism and illusions, and I didn’t want to pay attention to any recommendation in solving the



Rev. Arturo Olguin and his family

leadership situation,” says Olguin.

“I’m grateful to the Lord for Viviana’s words, which didn’t just encourage me, but

reminded me who I was and motivated [me] to get the strength, the courage, and the solutions I needed.” ■

—Laura Posthumus,
Christian Reformed
Home Missions

Transformation, One Kiosk at a Time

Another riot was beginning when Abdul, a 19-year-old man in Anglo-Jos, Nigeria, shouted a plea: “Friends, friends, please don’t touch this kiosk!”

Youths from one religion were about to burn down the business of a family from a different religious background. Unlike previous times, however, Abdul was determined to stop it.

Abdul shouted, “This man has worked hard to rebuild this kiosk after it was burnt in the last crisis. We all enjoy buying things from his shop.”

“Move away or we will drag you away!” his friends replied.

Violence between Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria has been an all-too-frequent occurrence. That’s why the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC)



The aftermath of inter-religious violence in Nigeria.

has incorporated peace and reconciliation work into its community development program there.

The hope is to help people recognize the humanity of all their neighbors and the good that can occur when people work together. Abdul is one of the participants in CRWRC’s program.

In the past, Abdul was one of the ringleaders of violence in the neighborhood.

During one of the CRWRC youth meetings, Abdul and his colleagues, however, discussed how vandalizing, destroying, and burning buildings limited the ability of the community to grow and how innocent people suffered the most.

Abdul reflected on the many shops and kiosks that

had been destroyed, some by his own hands. He also recalled how many people had struggled and borrowed money to open the businesses again.

He promised himself to never again let his religious differences lead him to destroy someone’s livelihood.

“Guys, do this for me, please; it’s the right thing to do,” Abdul begged.

“Have you gone soft? Are you an *arna* [infidel] friend now?” they asked.

“He has done nothing wrong. Let the man be. He has a wife and family to care for,” Abdul said.

Eventually, his friends relented and left the kiosk alone. ■

—Talitha Pam, CRWRC
Constituency Bridger/
Programme Assistant

Your Marvelous Machine

Your body is a marvelous machine.

Put the right stuff into your mouth, and your body changes it, mixes it, and uses it to make just what you need to live well.

Do you know exactly what is inside you? Where it is and what it does? Do you know how to make it work? Of course not! You would not be able to survive if you had to order

your liver to work, your heart to beat, and your stomach to digest your food—all at once!

Yet your whole body works without a thought from you. It greases your joints, washes your “windows,” mends itself, plus a whole lot more. It’s a marvelous machine, and it’s yours. It’s designed just for you by God.



Automatic Window Washers

Nobody likes dirty windows. You can't see through them. So you wash them.

It's the same with your eyes. If you have dirt in your eyes, you won't be able to see where you're going. But you don't have to wash your eyes, do you? They wash themselves!

You blink without even knowing it every two to 10 seconds. Each time you blink, tears bathe your eyes to keep them clean and moist.

When you get a speck of dirt in your eye, your tears work overtime. Your eye waters like crazy until the dirt washes out. Then you wipe the tears away with a tissue and get on with life.

Like almost everything else in your body, tears have a little something extra. In this case it's called *lysozyme*, and it's a germ killer. Lysozyme automatically deactivates most germs and viruses within five minutes of the time they hit your eyeballs. Without lysozyme in your tears, you could go blind from an eye infection.

Did you ever think about that? Probably not. But don't worry. You don't have to. Your automatic window washers and their super cleaning fluid are all part of your marvelous machine.

Your turn: Try to keep your eyes open without blinking for one full minute. Can you do it? Do tears form anyway?





Perfect Thermostat

What temperature should your body be? What temperature is it now? Should you cool it? Heat it? Do you know how?

Your hypothalamus does. That's the part of your brain that controls your body temperature (among other things). It's your body's thermostat. If you're too cold, it turns up the heat by making you shiver. If you're too hot, it makes you sweat. It's more complicated than that, but you get the idea.

You're alive and comfortable, right? Then your thermostat is working perfectly.

Joint Juice

Got a door that squeaks or is hard to open? What do you do about it?

Most adults will tell you, "Spray the hinges with WD-40"—that's a type of grease. Presto! The "frozen" parts move again. Parts that rub together need to be greased to keep them working smoothly.

Think about *this* for a minute: Got a knee that won't bend? A finger that won't curl? A shoulder that's frozen in place? Probably not. That's because your body greases its joints. It actually makes its own "WD-40."

It's called *synovial fluid*. It's thick and stringy like a raw egg white, and it greases many of your joints. Automatically. Before they freeze up or refuse to work.

Synovial fluid is one of the most important fluids found in your body. Imagine for a minute that none of your joints were greased. You couldn't walk, use your hands, talk, or even eat. Thank God for your joint juice!

Try this: Tape all your fingers on one hand together at the joints. You shouldn't be able to bend them. Try to live that way for one full day.

Then do this: Bend your knees and kneel on the floor. Let your arms hang straight down, then bend your elbows to bring your hands up. Now bring your hands together and thank God for your well-greased joints. Thank God for your marvelous machine!

Your Skin Knitter

What do you do when you have a rip in your clothes? You ask someone to mend it or you sew it together yourself, right?

How about a cut or a scratch that makes you bleed? Nine times out of 10 you don't have to sew it or go in for repair. Wash the area and cover it to keep it clean. Then wait.

First, white cells in your blood will rush to the cut. They fight germs that try to get in. Then platelets in your blood clump together to close the leak. Then a scab forms to cover and protect the torn skin.

Beneath the scab, a miracle happens. Your skin mends itself! It grows together; it "knits" itself back together, and stops knitting when the tear is repaired.

Scientists can tell you in more detail what happens. Each thing happens in order and at just the right time. It's really complicated and very finely tuned.

The gist of it is this: you have a perfect skin knitter, created by God, who knit you together before you were born (see Psalm 139).



Joanne De Jonge is a freelance writer and a former U.S. National Park Ranger. She attends West Valley Christian Fellowship in Phoenix, Ariz.

Growing Old Graciously

IF YOU ARE IN THE LATTER HALF of your life and you chronically belittle yourself or quietly claim to be of little value to the human race, it is time to stop such utterances.

They are not true. You may feel that way at times, but your feelings lie. Here are some important things to remember.

You have something every living human being needs. As you grow older and other pressures and responsibilities change or drop away, a new opportunity is open for you. It is that of being an encourager—a support to the younger generation and to your peers as well. What a great new title to own: “I am an encourager.” Inscribe that on your heart. It is the number-one step for gracious living at any age.

Inside you are many unspoken words of appreciation, admiration, and encouragement. Inside you are compliments that have never been expressed, kind words aching to be given away. You have smiles to spread everywhere you go. And you need never run out.

There is no human being who cannot use what you are carrying around.

That is why you must abandon any tendency to think of yourself as of little value in this world. Everyone you meet needs what you have!

Some time ago I was visiting a retirement home, and a woman came up to me and identified herself. After we chatted a bit, I said to her, “You are beautiful!” She glowed like she had been plugged into an electric socket. Anyone can offer such a gift.

Retirement years free us for a more deliberate and intentional career in brightening our environment.

Bert is 84 years old and intent on following Jesus’ instruction to let his light shine. He understands how he can brighten other’s lives. Here is just one example.

While shopping at a gigantic arts-and-crafts show, Bert made a point of stopping at as many of the 200 booths as he could. At each booth he thanked the owner, who was usually the artist who had created the objects for sale. He said, “Thank you for making the world a more beautiful and interesting place by crafting your art

share in God’s image. God distributes lovingkindness indiscriminately, without regard for who deserves it.

The younger generation, especially, needs the affirmation of their elders. Grandchildren, nieces and nephews, neighbor kids, other people’s children—they all need to hear compliments and kind words



You must abandon any tendency to think of yourself as of little value in this world.

so nicely.” The artists were usually caught off guard but then beamed with appreciation for the kind words.

Bert had changed his spectacles. Instead of seeing merchants wanting to take his money, he saw creators of beauty making their inspired pieces available. He realized they deserved appreciation and needed encouragement. He found that his praise and support were like cups of cool water to thirsting souls.

Growing old graciously means recognizing in everyone around you a need for appreciation, admiration, and encouragement. In doing so we

from older folks. Send a note or email or text. Better yet, say it in person.

Gracious living is giving support and spirit-lifting words at the car wash, the grocery store, the bank, and every place else. Graciousness is forgetting yourself and giving to others. And you have plenty to give until your final breath. ■



Jim Kok is director of care ministry at the Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, Calif. He is also a clinical pastoral education

supervisor and author of several books, including *90% of Helping Is Just Showing Up*.

Waking Up



FOR SOME PEOPLE, waking up is simply something they do every morning. I want to share with you what “waking up” means to me.

I grew up in the San Francisco Bay area without the help of a mother and father—just my sister and brother. We were very poor, and we struggled to survive. With no spiritual guidance, we ran wild and got into the wrong crowd, which led to making many wrong decisions. I became a thief, a drug dealer, and a drug user.

I now realize that God had his hand on me. As I look back on those traumatic years, I see signs that God was with me and that his arms were open wide.

For example, I once noticed a guy passing out gospel tracts on the street. Another time I saw people entering a church on Sunday. Though I had no clue what they would be doing in the church (my spiritual eyes were closed), I knew there was a God.

I continued living the only life I knew until I was placed in detention, then in foster homes, and finally in a state prison. Under the “three-strikes law” I am serving a 36-year-to-life sentence. I am 34 years old and without hope of living life outside prison walls.

Life in prison is hard, with much fighting for territory and status. Life-threatening dangers lurk everywhere. One day my cellmate, who has a praying family, said to me, “A.K., God is watching over us. Just think about the times we have not been hurt when there was no way we could get out of a terrible situation.” I could not get his comment out of my mind.

About this time I received a letter from Alice Koolstra, a 92-year-old member of San Jose (Calif.) Christian Reformed Church, inviting me to enroll in Cross-



road Ministry, a Bible study program. I leaped at the opportunity.

I will forever be grateful to Alice for reaching out to me. The study and her letters have brought me to a wonderful relationship with God and with her.

One day, while reading a lesson, I experienced a feeling of warmth from my head to the tips of my toes. It brought me to my knees, and I had tears running down my face. I felt at peace with the Lord and those around me. I now realize that God was showing his approval of me, giving me assurance that I belong to him.

Later, in another lesson, I learned the need to confess my sins and ask for God’s forgiveness. I did this and now know that I am a member of God’s family. I believe this is what woke me up! I now see all the blessings God provides me despite my past.

Prison life continues to be grim. When I became a Christian and began attending the church service and reading and studying my Bible, I experienced some bad remarks, but I figured out that God will take care of me.

It’s not always easy following Jesus because of all the spiritual warfare we go through when we walk with Christ, but I now have an inner peace and a purpose for living. I have a deep desire to share the message of salvation with other prisoners and have been making progress with getting others to enroll in the Crossroad Bible study.

Every morning I start my day off right. I read the Word so I can build on my personal relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I know that when we choose to live as Christ’s disciples, we find life as God meant it to be. When we stop trying to seek *our* way and instead seek God’s way, he gives us what we wanted all along—he wakes us up!

Again, my thanks to Alice and the CRC for sponsoring the Crossroad ministry. It has been a lifesaver for me! ■



Anthony Kozlowski is an inmate at Susanville (Calif.) State Prison.

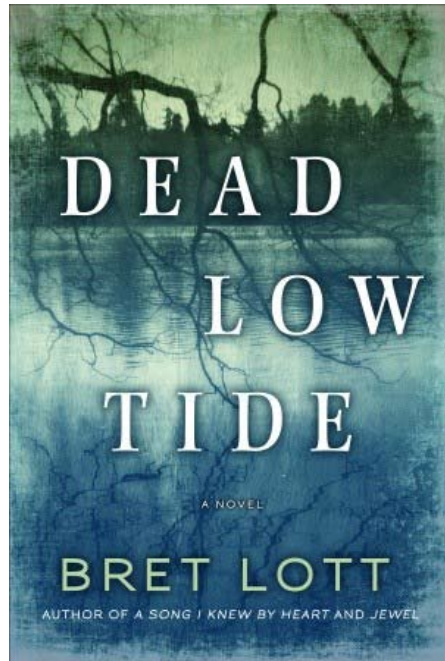
On Being a Christian and a Writer

BRET LOTT IS AN AUTHOR and a Christian, and his new novel, *Dead Low Tide* (Random House), comes out this month. His other books include *Jewel*, *A Song I Knew by Heart*, and *Ancient Highway*. You can read much more of Kristy Quist's interview with him at www.thebanner.org.

Q. Your new novel, *Dead Low Tide*, is the sequel to *The Hunt Club*. In that novel, the protagonist is Huger Dillard, a 15-year-old boy mired in the lies, sins, and mysteries of his community. What made you decide to return to his story?

A. I was haunted by these two people, Unc and Huger, over the years between then and now. They were interesting people who had been ushered to a new place in their relationship to each other, and I just wondered what had happened between them all these years later. The strange thing about writing a novel is that you meet these people, find out all about them, watch them act under duress, solve or not solve problems—and then you walk away and never hear from them again. This was an opportunity to go back and find out what they'd been up to. Oh, and to write another murder mystery—which was a lot of fun.

Q. Many Christians find it difficult to read books with profanity or vulgar language, sex, or violence, believing that those things cannot fall into the category of “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is



admirable” (Phil. 4:8). How would you respond to those concerns?

A. All I can say—and I mean this in love, and without any sense of irony at all—is don't read books that have those elements to them. I won't defend to them what I do when it comes to using foul language or sex or violence. I simply see the world as being a fallen place, and my job as a writer is to portray that fallen state, and to portray as well the fact of redemption being available within that fallen state. We need to focus on those things Paul exhorts us to, but I think Paul may be speaking of these things because the opposite of those are always around us, always present—our job is to focus on the good, true, and beautiful, but we only know these because they stand in relief to the opposite. A book that is solely filled with the good denies the reality of conflict and sorrow and sin that is everywhere present. When Christ came to live among us, he didn't have his apostles scour every room he entered of its offensiveness; instead, he walked boldly into the sin of the world and pointed to it every day he was alive.

Q. My book club read *A Song I Knew by Heart*, your contemporary Southern story based on Ruth and Naomi. We wondered why you made Ruth infertile. The glory of Ruth's story is that she becomes part of the lineage of Christ, so why take that away from the Ruth in your story?

A. I wrestled with this for a long time. Here's why: I knew that I was writing a retelling of the book of Ruth from the Bible, and I knew that . . . I better not trounce on what is truly and deeply most important about that story: the fact this woman, Ruth, is in the direct lineage of our Savior. My understanding of Christ is that he lived and died once and once only for all of humanity—and if I wrote a book that even intimated that there could ever be another Christ born, then I would be in deep trouble with the Author of this sacred text. I didn't want anyone to think out to the end of what could be, were the Ruth in my story to have had a child, and find there at the end of that tendril of thought the notion that another savior could ever be born to us again. That's why. ■

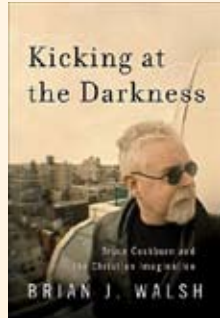


Bret Lott is the author of numerous novels. He teaches at the College of Charleston in Charleston, S.C.

Christ walked
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and pointed to it
every day.

Kicking at the Darkness: Bruce Cockburn and the Christian Imagination

by **Brian J. Walsh**
reviewed by **Robert J. Keeley**



Singer/songwriter Bruce Cockburn has been called a contemporary psalmist because he helps listeners see the

world in new ways. Brian Walsh agrees. In *Kicking at the Darkness* he points out many of the spiritual themes in Cockburn's music. Walsh's writing is clear and his analysis is thoughtful and helpful. Sometimes academic, sometimes personal, his reflections show us that he has done his homework, but also that he has a deep emotional connection to the music. This book will be much appreciated by both casual and serious fans of Cockburn. (Brazos)

Invisible Empires

by **Sara Groves**
reviewed by **Allison Backous**

In Sara Groves's album *Invisible Empires*, we hear a familiar contrast: the "frenetic" work of human hands, which sends us into anxiety and disconnection, and the work of God, which is slow, deep, and loving. For Groves, God's attention to us in the midst of all things—technological advancements, inner conflicts, and spiritual struggles—is both mystery and miracle. The album's melodies, both gospel soul and pop harmony, offer a tight weave of the tensions that mark this contrast for us, and the longing to see "mystery rise up to meet [us]." (Fair Trade)



Pray as You Go

reviewed by **Robert J. Keeley**



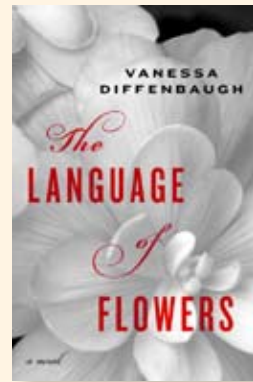
Pray as You Go is an audio podcast produced by Jesuit Media Associates in England. It is not a sermon, a "thought for the day," or a Bible study. Rather it is a 10- to 13-minute daily podcast that combines Scripture, music, and a few questions for reflection. I used it for a number of months as the first thing I listened to on my daily commute, and it was a wonderful way to start that part of my day. Get it free from iTunes or at www.pray-as-you-go.org.

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The Language of Flowers

by **Vanessa Diffenbaugh**
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

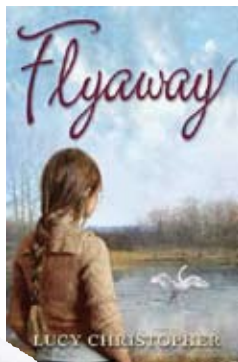
Victoria, an abused and hate-filled foster child who has lived in 32 homes by the time she is 10 years old, is given one more chance. Elizabeth offers her unconditional love and teaches her the language of flowers, established in the Victorian era. However, Elizabeth's past and Victoria's rage converge in a tragic event that forever changes their lives. Diffenbaugh, herself a foster mother, masterfully weaves the themes of emotional pain, forgiveness, and family with the language of flowers. (Ballantine)



Flyaway

by **Lucy Christopher**
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

Thirteen-year-old Isla and her father share a passion for the swans that winter on a lake nearby. When her father becomes ill, Isla's world is turned upside down. While visiting him in the hospital, Isla meets a softhearted, gravely ill boy named Harry. He shares her excitement about a young swan that lives, separate from the flock, on the lake behind the hospital. This juvenile novel celebrates both a family that struggles to survive calamity and to heal relationships, and the awkward, tender, and unlikely love between two teenagers. Ages 10 and up. (Scholastic)



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



Over the Line: Why We Need to Say No to the Belhar

THE BELHAR CONFESSION was written by South African Reformed Christians in the 1980s. It declares the church's opposition to apartheid (the forced separation of people based on race) and to the theology that supported it.

As a denomination, we are discussing whether we should adopt the Belhar Confession to stand alongside the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. Synod, the Christian Reformed Church's annual bi-national assembly, will vote on this in June 2012.

We might agree with the themes of the Belhar: unity, reconciliation, and justice. We might like what it would say to other Christians and to the world if we adopted it. But before we adopt it, we must consider what that would mean in practice.

When we examine how we use our confessions in the CRC, I find that it would be a mistake to adopt the Belhar as a confessional standard. We use our confessions to mark the line between freedom and constraint in the teaching and practice of the church, and adopting the Belhar Confession is likely to cause us to step over that line on both sides.

What's a Confession For?

In the CRC we use our confessions for many purposes: for professing our common faith in worship, for teaching the Christian faith to our children, for declaring to the world what we believe. But one use sets us apart from many other denominations: we use our confessions to clearly mark the line dividing where there may be variation within the church from where we must be uniform in our teaching and practice.

We allow freedom within the Christian Reformed Church even on significant issues like the ordination of women and the structure of the worship service. In fact, our Lord Jesus requires his church to protect freedom of conviction and practice in certain areas (see Romans 14).

But the church can't allow freedom and variation in everything. Our Lord also requires his church to make sure that some teachings and practices are consistent in all congregations (see Titus 1). This cannot be done if every church leader has the freedom to define the message of Scripture for himself or herself.

Somehow we need to find and illuminate the line between areas of freedom and areas of constraint. To do this, we adopt

Before we adopt it,
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confessional documents and require ministers, elders, deacons, and some others to sign a Form of Subscription agreeing to them. By signing this form, they promise to teach and defend the doctrines taught in those confessions, without exception, and to disagree only by means of a formal discussion with the assemblies of the church. This "full confessional subscription" is our way of being faithful to Scripture and pursuing a church unity that includes both freedom and constraint—freedom in those things that are non-essential and constraint in the things that are.

Our practice of full confessional subscription has been at the heart of some major controversies that have shaped our faith tradition. Our theological ancestors have repeatedly defended full confessional subscription: at the Synod of Dort in 1618-19, during the Secession of the 1830s, in the *Acts of Synod 1976*, and even as recently as last summer. According to the instructions of Synod 2011, the new Form of Subscription that will be proposed to Synod 2012 must include "positive, declarative commitments to teach, defend, and actively promote the confessions and Reformed doctrine of the CRCNA," and must take a strong stance on the "scope and binding nature of the commitment" (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 871).

We keep returning to full confessional subscription because we believe that it is the best way to maintain the unity and purity of the church, clearly marking the line between areas of freedom and constraint. The practice is something we should celebrate as our history, as our way of striving to be faithful to Scripture, as a piece of our definition of church unity, and as part of who we are as the CRC.

Stepping Over the Line

Should we begin using the Belhar Confession in the same manner? It might seem so.

The Belhar is structured in such a way that it specifically describes things that must be taught and others that may not. It also describes some of the marvelous truths of God's Word regarding the unity of the church, reconciliation among people groups, and care for the disadvantaged.

But despite those strengths, we should not require full confessional subscription to the Belhar Confession. Using the Belhar to guide us between freedom and constraint would cause us to step over the line on both sides: exercising constraint where we should allow freedom, and giving freedom where we should exercise constraint.

Immediately upon adopting the Belhar, we would step over the line on one side—constraining teaching in areas where there should be freedom. We might agree on the major themes of the confession, but many in the CRC have found points that they cannot agree with. For example, I and many others object to the teaching that God “is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged” (Article 4). God, I believe, is God in the same way to all of those who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Are the disputed points of such importance and so clearly taught in Scripture that we may not permit any officebearer to disagree with them? This is a serious question. The church must protect legitimate freedom. Since the Belhar teaches some legitimately debatable things, it would be a mistake to adopt it as a confession in the CRC and force an end to those debates. We would be constraining teaching in areas where freedom must be protected.

The Belhar is likely to push us over the line on the other side as well, so that we allow freedom in areas where there should be constraint. In the first article of the Belhar Confession, which describes the unity of the church, we read that this unity “can be established only in freedom and not under constraint.” And according to the next sentence, “in freedom and not under constraint” means that the variety of convictions that arise within the church, among other things, must be seen as an opportunity for mutual enrichment. Different convictions within the church *must* be tolerated and even celebrated, the

Belhar teaches; unity *cannot* be established through constraint, but *only* through freedom.

Throughout our history as a church, and as recently as a few months ago, we have affirmed the opposite. The Belhar seems to conflict directly with our understanding of church unity as a mixture of freedom and constraint, and with our consistent practice of requiring full confessional subscription. Down the road, when a minister is accused of teaching something that is in conflict with the Christian faith, all he or she would have to do is point to this article in the Belhar, which would be part of our confessional standards to which we all submit. The article says that freedom of conviction must be respected. How, then, could we tell a pastor that he or she may not teach, for example, that Jesus Christ was not fully divine? How could we even continue to use our Form of Subscription? The Belhar Confession would push us over the line, allowing freedom in areas where teaching should be constrained.

Other denominations might not face these problems in adopting the Belhar because they use their confessions differently. But we face them because we use confessions to mark a clear line between areas of freedom and constraint in the teaching and practice of the church. The Belhar Confession is not fit for this purpose. If we try to use it in this way, we will likely be unfaithful to Scripture by stepping over the line on both sides—constraining in areas of freedom, and giving freedom in areas where there should be constraint.

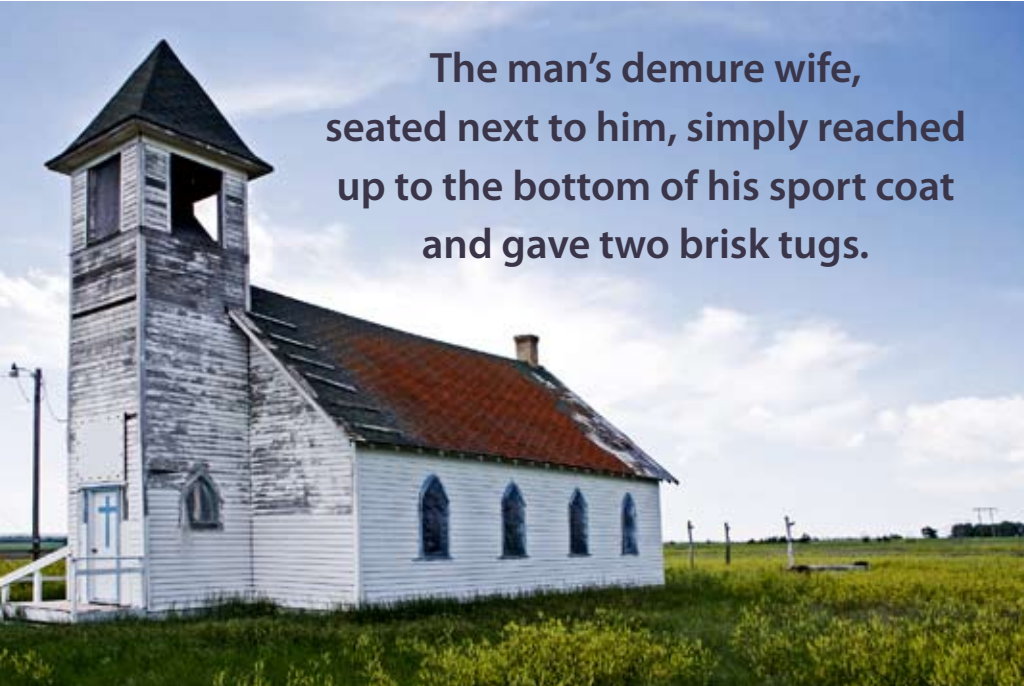
We can and should affirm much of what the Belhar teaches, but we should not adopt it as a fourth confession for our church. ■ **WEB Q'S**



Rev. Nick Monsma is pastor of East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church, New York.

The Beauty of Belonging

The man's demure wife, seated next to him, simply reached up to the bottom of his sport coat and gave two brisk tugs.



After lengthy discussion featuring the gamut of opinions and emotions, the time came for a vote by secret ballot. The final tally told the future of a congregation eager to move forward and build a new house of worship: more than 85 percent were in favor of the project. On that convincing note the meeting adjourned with prayer. But it was hardly the end of the story.

The next morning the elderly man vehemently opposed to the project took a walk. In the course of his walk he stopped at the house of the church treasurer, where he dropped off a sizeable check made out to the New Church Building Fund.

Had someone convinced him to change his mind? Had a divine epiphany brought this about? Neither of the above. But he was a churchman. This was his church, and the members were his brothers and sisters in Christ. He was one of them, and they had spoken. He had an obligation to support their decision. He had been blessed, and he would do his part.

Few lessons in the history of my ministry were impressed on me quite as indelibly as what I learned from this old man about the blessing of belonging. To be a member of the body of Christ is to realize the joy of belonging, with all its rights and privileges. In a world of warring opinions and ideologies, of clashing agendas and passionate disagreement, the truth and beauty of belonging is a priceless comfort to savor. ■



Rev. Harold Hiemstra is a retired minister in the Christian Reformed Church who is in the process of writing his memoirs. He works part-time as a chaplain for Bethany Home in Ripon, Calif., and is a member of Almond Valley CRC.

I**N NORTHWEST IOWA** in the 1970s few things provoked as much passion as hog prices, high school basketball . . . or congregational meetings.

Excitement and anticipation thickened the air as parishioners entered the church. This particular congregational meeting was sure to be one of the most important in the history of the church—its significance heightened by the fact that, for the first time, women were granted the right to vote.

The issue at stake was whether or not to build a new house of worship. The building was old and the church kept growing. Perhaps now was the time. I called the meeting to order, read appropriate Scripture, and led in a prayer asking for wisdom and unity without politicking.

Then the floor opened for discussion. An elderly man rose to speak. One of

the newer members of the church, he had recently retired from the farm and moved to a new home in this town, bringing with him a reputation as a staunch churchman. He spoke with passion, his defiant opposition to the proposal obvious to all. He enumerated multiple reasons for his stance: a weak economy, low prices, a perfectly good, serviceable old church building.

Listening to what seemed like an unceasing rant, I was wondering how to graciously bring it to a close, when help came from an unexpected source. The man's demure wife, seated next to him, simply reached up to the bottom of his sport coat and gave two brisk tugs. Immediately the tirade ended, and he meekly sat down. I was perhaps the only witness to this "power" display, and thus for the rest of the evening my most difficult task was not controlling the meeting but rather stopping myself from laughing out loud.

Advertising Information

Deadlines: February 2012 issue is 1/2/2012; March issue is 1/30/2012. Visit www.thebanner.org for complete details.

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Denominational and Classical Announcements

Calls Accepted

CANDIDATE TERENCE VISSER to the Willard Christian Reformed Church in Willard, Ohio.

Eligible for Call

We are pleased to announce that **STEVEN ECKERSLEY** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word.

Rev. Joel R. Boot, Executive Director

Financial Aid

STUDENTS CLASSIS ZEELAND preparing for ordained/nonordained ministry in the CRC are invited to apply for financial aid to the Classis Ministry Leadership Team for the 2012-2013 school year. For information, contact Judi Steenwyk, (616) 772-1772. All requests need to be received by April 1, 2012.

CLASSIS HEARTLAND STUDENTS preparing for ministry in the CRC may apply for aid to assist them in their studies by contacting Rev. Kevin Muyskens, P. O. Box 114; Sheldon, IA 51201. 712-324-4523. Deadline for applications is February 1.

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS ILLIANA will meet on Tuesday, March 6 at 9:00 a.m. at Bethel CRC in DeMotte, IN. Please email all items for the agenda to firstcrrc@netnitco.net by January 24. Laryn Zoerhof, Stated Clerk

Retirement

REV. JOHN L. WITVLIET pastor of Blythefield CRC, is retiring after 44 years of ministry. Blythefield CRC will be having a farewell service of praise and thanksgiving on January 15 at 10:00 am. Thank you Pastor Witvliet and Betty for your many years of faithful service.

REV. KEITH BULTHUIS pastor of the Bethany CRC in Gallup, New Mexico, is retiring after 40 years in ministry. Friends and former members are invited to a weekend of thanks and praise, with a Community Open House on Saturday, January 21, and two worship services (10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.) on Sunday January 22, 2012. We give thanks to God for Pastor Keith's 27 years of ministry at Bethany, and we thank Keith and Pat for all their years of faithful service. For more information, contact bethanychurch@qwestoffice.net.

REV. TOM NIEHOF pastor at Trinity CRC in Ames, IA is retiring after 30+ years of ministry. Friends and members of Pastor Tom's previous churches are invited to join our congregation for a farewell service on Jan. 15, 2012 at 9:30. A luncheon will be served at 11:00.

Congregational Announcements

Change in Time of Worship

The morning service of the **PINE GROVE COMMUNITY** Chr. Ref. Church of Pinellas Park FL, has been changed to 9:15 AM.

Church's 125th Anniversary

LAGRAVE AVENUE CRC of Grand Rapids MI will observe 125 years of God's grace on Sundays, Feb. 19 and 26. Former members and friends are invited to attend. See our website, www.lagracecrrc.org, or call the office, 616.454.7204, for more information.

Church's 100th Anniversary

FIRST CHRISTIAN REF CHURCH of Hanford, CA will celebrate 100 years of God's faithfulness on June 3, 2012. We invite all friends, former staff, and past members to attend. Please contact the church office 559-582-4423 or hanfordcrrc@comcast.net

Church's 50th Anniversary

ORANGWOOD CRC Phoenix, Az will celebrate 50 years of God's faithfulness March 17-18, 2012. We invite all friends and former members to fellowship with us March 17 @ 7pm and worship service March 18 @ 10am.

Worship Services

SUNLIGHT COMMUNITY CRC Invites those in the area to attend our Sunday evening service 6pm January - March "Exploring Jesus' Parables 772-879-6326

LK. ALFRED MINISTRY-CRC/RCA winter ministry-join us in worship! Every Sunday, 10:30 AM, 5:50 PM thru April 22. Located on Rt. 17/92 in Lk. Alfred, Fl., close to Winter Haven & Route 27. Phone 863-422-2187, 863-422-6442. cf, www.lakealfredministry.org.

WINTER CHURCH SERVICES in Mesa, AZ. Please join us for our Sunday Worship Service at Maranatha Comm. CRC in Mesa, AZ. We are a winter church and our services start the 1st Sunday in December through the 2nd Sunday in April. For more information contact, Rev. Gary Hutt @ 509-499-4561.

Birthdays

100th Birthday

LUCILLE ROETERS of Redlands, CA will be 100 on Dec. 29, 2011. A Family birthday party is being held for her at her residence in Plymouth Village, which will include 2 Sons, 3 Grandchildren, 4 Great-Grandchildren, and 2 Great-Great Grandchildren.

90th Birthday

CORNELIA BRUXVOORT (KAY) 90 years old on February 6, 2012. Best Wishes from Don and Theresa and family. Greetings may be sent to: 110 Nth 5th Ave. W.#305, Newton, IA 50208

JENNIE (KROONENBERG) BULTMAN 3570 Westshire Circle, Delavan, WI 53115 will celebrate her 90th birthday on January 16. We, her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are thankful for her life and her influence in our lives. Happy Birthday!



GERALD HUIZENGA celebrated his 90th Birthday on December 27. Dad and Grandpa we thank God for you and for the service you gave your country and community.

EVA VANDORP (STUVE), 30 Litz Place, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2G 0V1 celebrates her 90th birthday Jan 20. We thank God for her many years. Love from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

NEW MEXICO ADVENTURE 2012
 WITH DR. JAMES C. SCHAAP, DR. ROBERT DE HAAN, & DIANNE DE WIT
 MAY 31 - JUNE 8

For more information, contact Dianne De Wit in the Dordt College Advancement Office at (712) 722-6029 or ddewit@dordt.edu or go to www.dordt.edu/events/new_mexico/

80th Birthday

REV. EUGENE F. RUBINGH 1935 Hidden Oak Ct., SE GR, MI 49546 will be 80 yrs. young Dec. 19, 2011! Cake & celebrating will take place after the 11am worship at Church of the Servant on January 1, 2012. Please join us there!

Anniversaries

70th Anniversary

KOOI Earl and Henrietta (Koopmans) celebrated their 70th anniversary December 22 and Earl's 90th birthday November 22. 4 Siblings, 6 children, 24 grandchildren, 29 great-grandchildren and their spouses give thanks to God for his faithfulness

65th Anniversary

BOER Harry and Beatrice of DeMotte, IN will celebrate 65 years of marriage on January 1. They and their family (4 children, 13 grandchildren, 20 great-grandchildren) give thanks to God for His blessings.

BOONSTRA Harold & Ann (Weidenaar), Jan. 24, 15245 S. Catalina Dr., Unit 2, Orland Park, IL, 60462. Children: Richard & Trena Boonstra, Jackie Archer, Donald & Janet Kosmal, 9 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren. We love you Mom & Dad!

60th Anniversary

DEN DULK Ron and Alice (Hofman) celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on December 1, 2011. We thank God for the blessing you have been in so many lives. With love from your children - Kathy (and Steve) Van Duyn, Vickie (and Dan) Altena, and Kevin (and Peri) den Dulk - and your many grandchildren, other family, and friends.

VAN DAM Fred & Alida of Hawthorne, NJ celebrated 60 years of marriage on November 30. With our children and grandchildren we thank God for his blessings.

VAN DYKE Dr. Louis Y. and Martena (Buys) Van Dyke, of Sioux Center, IA, celebrated 60 years of marriage on Dec. 21, 2011. Their heritage from the Lord is their children, Steve and Vonnie Van Dyke, Alan and Cyndie Van Dyke, Joan and Terry Crull, Mike and Lillian Van Dyke and Wayne Van Dyke, 9 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren, who testify to their love and faithfulness.

VAN HOFWEGEN Allan & Rosalee (Elders) married Oct 19, 1951, celebrated their 60th anniversary Aug 13 at their home in Ontario, CA with an Hawaiian Luau with family and friends. Their children Debby & Lee Wielenga, Julie & Rolando Recinos, Bryan & Rosemary Kamper, Nancy & Gerben Leyendekker, Heidi & Jim De Bie, Allan & Lynette Van Hofwegen, 19 grandchildren and 2 great-grandsons rejoiced with them in God's love and blessings.

ZIGTERMAN Ron and Chris (Dykstra) 8643 Kelly Drive, St John, IN 46373, will celebrate 60 years of marriage on January 18th. Children: Tom & Alicia, Pam and Bob Miedema, Gwen and Scott Vanderlee, and Myra and Curt Miller; 14 grandchildren, 9 great-grandchildren. Your love and faithfulness to God and to each other is a blessing to all of us.

Obituaries

CANAAN Ruth (Brink) age 84 went home to be with her Lord on Nov. 2, 2011. She was preceded in death by her husband Larry in 1987 and by her four brothers. Surviving are her sisters, Myra and Kathryn, and two stepsons, Rich and Chuck Canaan.

DE YOUNG John E. Sr. age 89. 321 N Blackhawk Dr, Westmont, IL 60559. Husband of the late Helen J. De Young, nee Glupker. Father of Nancy De Young, John E. Jr. (Rachel) De Young, Robert (Karen) De Young and Sue De Young. Grandfather of John III (Rhonda) and David (Jennifer) De Young, Tessa (Jaime) Bunn, Melissa and Becca De Young; great-grandfather of Kate, William and Wyatt De Young. Brother of Norman (JoAnn) De Young, the late Carole (George) Hoekstra, and the late Ken (Doris) De Young.

ELZINGA Julia Ann of Meridian, Idaho left this home to be with her Lord Jesus on October 19, 2011. She was 80 years of age. Julia was born in Exmorra, Netherlands in 1931. At age 20, she married Symon Elzinga. Immediately afterwards they emigrated to Sarnia, Ontario. In several years they moved to Wyckoff, NJ, where they would make their home for some 40 years. She is sorely missed by her companion

Church Position Announcements

FULL TIME PASTOR Phoenix CRC, Phoenix, AZ. We are a growing congregation located in a central Phoenix neighborhood. We desire an experienced pastor who is committed to passionate preaching and able to work with all age groups as well as the neighborhood community. If interested, contact Andy Keizer, search@phoenixcrrc.org, 623-875-5871, website: www.phoenixcrrc.org

PASTOR: KINGSTON, Ontario's Westside Fellowship CRC is a small church with a big heart in an historic university city of 117,000 on the shores of Lake Ontario. We are seeking a pastor who relates well to all ages, and will help us grow as a church through using his or her gifts of empowering leadership, engaging preaching, and effective worship planning. The new pastor will help renew our educational ministry and will support our efforts to reach out to our community. For further information, or to submit a pastoral profile please email admin@wfcrc.ca

WORSHIP DIRECTOR Milwood CRC, Kalamazoo, MI, is seeking a part-time worship director. A job description can be requested from Patti Landstra, plandstra@gmail.com.

CO-PASTOR: First CRC DeMotte IN is seeking a Pastor of Worship and Discipleship to partner in ministry with our Pastor of Worship and Pastoral Care. We seek an individual who will be able to help us implement our vision to grow our faith and share the good news of Jesus Christ with our neighbors. Please check our website for a job description at www.1stcrrdemotte.org and direct your inquiry to the executive committee at firstcrrc@netnitco.net.

SENIOR PASTOR POSITION Langley Immanuel CRC, located near Vancouver in beautiful British Columbia, Canada, is seeking a full-time senior pastor. We are prayerfully seeking an experienced pastor who is committed to Christ-centered preaching, who promotes relational, intergenerational ministry and pastoral care, and who is willing to work with our existing staff team. If you feel God may be calling you to our congregation consult our church profile and other resources available on our church website at www.langleyimmanuelcrrc.ca. You may also contact the search committee at their confidential e-mail address: Immanuel.search.committee@gmail.com, or by contacting Bert Moes at 604-534-0283. The search committee's mandate limits our search to male applicants who are a member of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

SENIOR PASTOR First Reformed Church of Grandville MI is looking for a new senior pastor. We are a multi-generational church and we seek a gifted and talented leader to challenge and guide us into the future. Our congregation is community-minded, family-oriented, and has a strong history and tradition for foreign missions. For a job description and additional info about the church, please visit: www.firstgrandville.org and click on the pastor search link. To apply for the position, please send an RCA profile to pastorsearchteam@firstgrandville.org.

CONG. CARE COORDINATOR Fellowship CRC in Brighton, ON, a growing and dynamic church of 500+, is seeking a Congregational Care Coordinator. This p/t position would be filled by someone who can guide our Congregational Care Team and our Small Group leaders, encourage formation of new Small Groups, inspire inter-generational ministry, coordinate with our pastors to improve member care and may be asked to participate in some worship services. Please contact Roxanne Ewing drgmewing@live.com.

HAVEN CRC in Zeeland, MI is seeking a full time Pastor. Please direct all inquiries and communications to: Rick Huizenga, Search Team, 541 Alice St. Zeeland, MI 49464 or email to rickh@egltech.net or phone at 616-886-1355.

PASTOR POSITION AVAILABLE San Diego, CA CRC is seeking a pastor. We are looking to grow through community outreach and missions. Our new pastor will have a commitment to sound Biblical teaching, faithfully leading us according to God's will. Sermons will be delivered with enthusiasm and sincerity and will be relevant to all age groups. Loving God & our neighbors and joining God in His mission is central to all we do. Check us out at sdccr.org. For information contact sdccr.pastorsearch@gmail.com. Please respond by end of February 2012.

SENIOR PASTOR River Terrace Church is an energetic, multi-generational, spiritually diverse Christian Reformed church, located on the edge of the Michigan State University campus. As a congregation we seek to cultivate hearts and minds to flourish in Christ. Responsibilities of the Senior Pastor include preaching, worship, and leadership as pastor of the congregation and head of staff. More info at www.riverterrace.org Send resumes and letters of interest by March 1, 2012 to: Search Committee, River Terrace Church, 1509 River Terrace Drive, East Lansing, MI 48823 or search@riverterrace.org.

PASTOR: Lafayette, IN CRC is looking for an experienced church-planter type of pastor to lead us in our plan to relocate our ministry to a new site in our growing community. If you have the gifts to lead in this exciting ministry venture while serving as senior pastor of a loving, caring congregation, please respond by sending your ministry profile to: Lafayette Christian Reformed Church, 1200 Tippecanoe St., Lafayette, IN 47904 or mail to: secretary@lafayettecrrc.org Our Search Team Chairman is Norbert Fisher at (765)447-4659.

WORSHIP COORDINATOR Fellowship CRC in Brighton, a growing and dynamic church of 500+ is seeking a Worship Coordinator. The successful applicant of this part time position would help organize our talented musicians and praise teams, provide leadership and meet with the pastors and worship committee to plan blended worship services and occasionally lead in the ministry of music. Ideal candidate would be able to play piano, guitar or organ. Please contact Tony Jeronimus 613-475-4455 or tonyj@peakltd.ca.

MISSING YOUTH DIRECTOR Last seen in Holland, MI wearing holy thrift store jeans and a "Got God" t-shirt. Works well with others; great with teenagers and parents. Equips others while following God's call. Has full-time passion for part-time pay. Reward: Seeing the next generation grow in their commitment to Jesus Christ. If you would like to help our kids become spiritually passionate followers of Jesus Christ, please visit our website at www.calvinministries.org.

PASTOR First Reformed Church is a friendly & caring congregation, with a wide diversity of ages. Our vision for the future involves outreach & discipleship. Prairie City is a small community 20 minutes east of Des Moines, Iowa. For more info contact the church at frcprairiecity@aol.com or 515 994-2250.

PASTOR: Trinity CRC of Ames, IA is seeking a pastor to lead our congregation with passion and vision in this unique university-based community. Trinity is a small but closely-connected church family looking to build in numbers and offer a distinctive witness of God's kingdom. We are looking for someone with the gifts and the desire necessary to minister to a broad audience of singles, college students, families and youth. If interested in learning more, please contact Bill Bokhoven, bbokhoven@gmail.com or 515-450-2755. Website: www.amestrinity.org

of 60 years, Symon. She is also survived by 4 sons, Jerry (Beth), Henry (Katherine), Bill (Laurel) and Glenn (Caryl). In addition, she leaves behind 14 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. Donations in Julia's honor can be sent to Eastern Christian School Association.

EMMELKAMP Margaret age 96, of Manhattan, MT, went home to be with the Lord on November 14, 2011. Her husband, Andrew, and daughter, Kathy, preceded her in death. She is survived by her children, Eldean (Len) Kamp, Truman (Vivian) Emmelkamp, Larry (Helen) Emmelkamp, Keith (Karen) Emmelkamp, Ken (Ardene) Emmelkamp, and son-in-law, Cor Pool; 19 grandchildren, 28 great-grandchildren and 4 step-great-grandchildren.

HAGLUND Lloyd, 82, went to be with the Lord on November 5, 2011. 4831 E Surrey Ave., Scottsdale AZ 85254. Survived by his wife Jeanette (nee Schipper), son Evan, daughter Brenda (Bruce) Lund. 4 grandchildren

HOEKSTRA Drewes "Duke", 83, of DeMotte, IN went to be with our Lord on October 20, 2011. Duke was preceded in death by his parents, Herman and Effie (Kooyenga) Hoekstra and two brothers, Menno and Thomas. He is survived by his wife, Evelyn (Schurman), and four sons: Jim (Cindy), Jack (Lynn), Dave (Barb), Don (Lisa); eight grandchildren, twelve great-grandchildren; a brother Jake (Illinois) and a sister Thelma Kok, of California.

KAMSTRA Peter, age 91, on Nov. 13, 2011 in Scottsdale, AZ. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 66 years Charlotte. Loving father to Bill and Peter Kamstra and Charlotte Bakker (Tom). Devoted grandfather to Jonathan Bakker (Katie) and Sarah Madderom (Jonathan) and great-grandfather to Samantha and Joshua Madderom and Tommy Bakker. To God be the Glory.

KIMM Allan, 89, passed away Sept. 28, 2011. Survived by wife, Evelyn (Vander Ark), children: Henry Kimm, Mary Ann Kimm, Judy (Allie) Rein, Arlene (Dan) Lubbers, Dan (Jan) Kimm, June (Karl) DeJonge, 11 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren.

KOOY Lifelong Lynden, Wa. resident, Sarah Kooy, nee Oordt, passed away November 5, 2011 at the age of 81. She is survived by her loving husband of 62 years, Harold; children Byron (Karen) Kooy and Jane (Irv) Timmermans, six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

LIGTENBERG Vernon, age 89, went to his heavenly home on October 31, 2011. 4754 Calle Camarada, Santa Barbara, CA 93110. He is dearly missed by Verla (nee Houseman), his loving wife of 65 years; his children, Sheri Ligtenberg and Candy Ornee (Glenn); and his grandchildren, Jamie Gilliland (Korey) and Danny Ornee. Beloved "Papa" to great grandchildren, Alana, Kaden and Brooke Gilliland.

MEIJERS Enno Jan - 1932-2011 (Barrie, ON, Canada) Following his wife (Lenie) by eleven months, Dad left this life confident that he would be received by his Saviour. Early on Dad knew and celebrated his dependence on the faithfulness of God. This served him well when he emigrated from Holland to Canada in 1953 where he and Mom raised a family, served and participated in church and enjoyed a lively immigrant community. In 1977 the family moved to Connecticut; then to Iowa in 1980. Dad thrived everywhere he went. He was a good friend, an honourable and well-liked employer and a faithful family man. Caring for his ailing wife was his highest priority in the last ten years of his life and he did so with love. Dad and Mom have six children, fifteen grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. We are: Helena (Henk) Top-Meijers, Daarlerveen, NL; Hinke (Ed) Meijers-Weening, Calgary, AB; Gloria (Calvin) Van-Eek Meijers, Kitchener, ON; Corinna Meijers, Brentwood Bay, BC; Enno (Ruby) Meijers, Barrie, ON; Phyllis (Jeff) Alberts-Meijers, Barrie, ON.

MULDER Ida, nee Tameling, 96, formerly of Westchester, IL went to be with Our Lord on November 4th, 2011. 1670 Spring Valley Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80921. Wife of the late George F. Mulder Sr.; Mother of Arlene (Philip) Bosma, Norma Turucz, Raymond (Cathy) Mulder and the late George F. Mulder Jr; Grandmother of thirteen; Great-Grandmother of thirteen. Preceded in death by four brothers and four sisters.

SYTSMA Marten, passed away peacefully on November 22, 2011 in his 98th year. Predeceased by his loving wife Julia (Jeltje) Sytsma (nee Swart) on September 18, 2011 in her 95th year. Lovingly remembered by their children, Ria & Al Zong, Thea & Clarence Smit, Tina & Lloyd Dekkema, Ann & (Ed) deceased VanHamburg, Emily & David Johnston, Suzanne Sytsma (deceased) Julia Pearl & Scott Urquhart, Andy & Conny Sytsma and JoAnn & Henry VanMeggelen. 30 grandchildren, 62 great-

grandchildren and 7 great-great grandchildren. Correspondence: Ria Zong 1494 St. John's Rd. Innisfil, ON Can. L9S 4N6

VANDEN AKKER Maynard (Mike), 84, November 10, 2011; 391 Purgatory Rd, Whitinsville, MA 01588. He will be missed by his wife of 58 years, Irene (Vander Baan); children: Duane & Paula Vanden Akker, Lori & Mark Miedema, Bruce & Laura Vanden Akker, Diane & Rev. Paul DeVries, Keith Vanden Akker & fiancé Naomi Youngsma; 14 grandchildren.

VAN PUTTEN Sharon A. (nee Zeeaphat) of Naples, FL traveled Home to her Lord and Saviour on November 9, 2011 at age 67. She was the loving wife of 47 years to Allen J. Van Putten and is survived by children she treasured: Debra L. Van Putten and Vicki L. Ruiter (Jon). Cherished grandmother of Timothy Ruiter, Charlie Ruiter and Juliana Ruiter. It was her family that was most precious to her. Dear sister-in-law of Mary Van Putten, Ronald (Gertrude) Van Putten and Laurie (Thomas) Vanden-Heuvel. She was preceded in death by her father (Neil) and brother (Rich) and is survived by her mother and two sisters. Sharon was born and raised in Chicago, IL and attended Chicago Christian High School

and Calvin College. Her death came somewhat unexpectedly despite a 15 year struggle with chronic illnesses. Memorials to the Grand Rapids Christian School Association - <http://www.grcs.org> or the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association - <http://www.aarda.org>

VAN WYK Anna M., age 86, November 22, 2011; 19917 Edinburg, Frankfort, IL 60423. Beloved wife of William, loving mother of Linda (Thomas) Somerville, Judith (John) Brogan, William (Lora Lockwood), Marilyn, Karen, and Robert (Laura). Cherished grandmother of 8 and great-grandmother of one. Forever in our hearts.

Employment

NANNY JOBS Northlight Nannies employs energetic nannies/sitters for Grand Rapids, MI area families. Part & Full-time jobs offer great opportunities for young adults. Contact jeff@northlightnannies.com.

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We encourage applications from women and members of ethnic minority groups. Applicants must be committed to the confessions and mission of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.



To submit nominations or to get further information, visit www.calvinseminary.edu/jobopenings



CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

3233 Burton St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Director of Back to God Ministries International



The Christian Reformed Church in North America is seeking a **Director of Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI)**. BTGMI fulfills a vital role in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world using various media that effectively communicate Christ in the "language of the heart" of the viewers and listeners.

The Director will give leadership in the strategic planning process and execution of policies that support the mission of BTGMI and the Christian Reformed Church. They will be able to articulate the vision and mission for developing worldwide partnerships.

The successful candidate will have demonstrated skills in casting vision, thinking strategically, have experience working in a leadership capacity, working in a global context and be an ordained minister of the Word in the CRC. Visit the web site at www.crcna.org for a complete job description and additional information about BTGMI. To apply send cover letter and resume to btgmisearch@crcna.org by **February 15, 2012**. The process will remain open until a nominee to fill the position is identified.

CAREGIVERS NEEDED Are you interested in working for the best living assistance services company in West Michigan? Visiting Angels is looking for people who can be excellent, not average; make a connection with our clients; be perfectly dependable; practice compassion and work with integrity. Contact Heather at 616-243-7080 or heather@vangels.com or visit our website at www.vangels.com and complete an online application.

DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR Camp Roger is seeking a full-time Development Director to help lead Camp Roger's healthy ministry. Information is available at camproger.org. Please contact Doug Vanderwell, Executive Director at 616-874-7286 or doug@camproger.org

GM CERTIFIED TECH Need an experienced technician for dealer in beautiful Conrad, MT. Excellent hunting & fishing, 65 miles from Glacier Nat'l Park! Visit www.vanmotors.com call 800-368-7575 or email: tammy@vanmotors.com

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HALF TIME MATH INSTRUCTOR PRACTITIONER POSITION – Renewable term position starts August 16, 2012. Master's degree in mathematics or mathematics education AND successful K-12 teaching experience required.

PSYCHOLOGY FACULTY POSITION – Renewable term position, which could become tenure track starts August 16, 2012. Ph.D. required, ABD considered; Expertise in clinical or counseling psychology required.

For additional job openings and application instructions, please visit www.trnty.edu/jobopenings.

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CARING FOR AGING PARENTS? Visiting Angels offers in-home assisted living. Our caregivers will prepare meals, do light housekeeping, run errands, provide transportation to appointments, and joyful companionship. Whether you need a few hours a day or live-in care, for assisted independent living in your home anywhere in West Michigan call Trish Borgdorff at 616-243-7080 or toll free at 888-264-3580. TRIP Participant.

**Real Estate:
Sales and Rental**

SCOTTSDALE CONDO - FOR RENT 2bd, 2 bath - Mc dowell mt views, pool, hottub, gym, 1150 sq ft; Dec-Jan-Mar-May @ \$750 wk - 2500 a Month- Details 512-591-7088 or 269-341-9752

CONDO FOR RENT GULF SHORES- on the beach, 2 bedroom - \$1000.00 per month, discount for additional months-Available, Dec-Jan-Feb. Call 616 335-2293 or 616 638-363

BEAUTIFUL LONG BOAT Key, Florida near Sarasota, Bradenton. 2 BR 2 BA condo directly on white sandy beach. Newly decorated. \$1,000 per week and up depending on season. 630-655-2888.

NAPLES AREA 2 bd. gated condo, great pool, beautiful residential area near gulf. Monthly anytime or lease Jan-Mar, get Dec or Apr free. Other months available. 616-974-6828.

ANNA MARIA ISLAND, FL CONDOS pool, beach access, linens, fully equipped. 1 and 2 bedrooms. \$650-750/wk. D. Redeker, 941-778-1915. redekercondos.com

BONITA SPRINGS, FL vacation rental - 1 BR, 1 BA across street from gulf beach. Great opportunity due to cancellation - available 2/5/12 to 3/19/12 (1 week min) 616-977-0039 for info & reasonable rates

WINTER IN FLORIDA Effi. & 1/1/ Apts w/full kitchen. Util. incl. fr \$350/w + taxes. Special monthly rates. 1 mile to Anna Maria Island-Bradenton. Hurry few left. Call 941-794-1238 Sorry No Pets

NAPLES, FL CONDO Bay front gated condo 2BR/2BA. Great pool, hot tub - 1.5 blocks to the beach. Available Feb, April-Dec. http://tinyurl.com/726v3wv Call 231-620-9259

KISSIMME HOME FOR RENT New, 6 bedroom, 4 bath, fully furnished home with private pool, 3 miles from Disney. www.floridavacahome.com. 708-372-2586

CONDO FOR RENT No. Hutchinson, Is, FL, 2 bedrooms & den, 2 baths, on ocean and river. Avail. Jan @ \$2600 & Feb @ \$3600. call 616-283-2385 or www.lagrandk@aol.com

FOR RENT IN FLORIDA: Condo near Clearwater, 2 BR, 2 BA, greatroom, new appliances, very clean, quiet, near shopping, beaches, golf courses. Avail. Dec 2011 - Apr 2012. Weekly/monthly rates, reasonable. Contact ljvandermeer@yahoo.com or 708-946-0265.

VACATION RENTAL JENSEN BEACH, FL Turtle Reef Club-2 br, 2ba unit on Atlantic ocean, sleeps 6. \$1100 wk. Weeks available in Dec, Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr. Email: garymaryb@yahoo.com 616-836-0136

BRADENTON, FL For sale, Gulf Lakes - 55+ manufactured home. 2b, 2b, sunroom - launi - covered car port, furnished. 941-755-7606

WEEKLY RENTAL: Douglas/Saugatuck, MI: Walk to the beaches of Lake Michigan from this Newly remodeled Vacation Home, 7Br, 4Ba - comfortably sleeps up to 14. Call Ken @ 630-268-1531 or email Groenjk@aol.com for info.

FT. MYERS POOL HOME FOR RENT 2 bed, 2 bath, sleeps 10, heated pool, hot tub, bikes, quiet cul-de-sac. 9 mi. to beach. Photos available. 905-332-6711

WEEKLY RENTAL: Douglas/Saugatuck, MI: Newly built Lake Michigan family guest house, 2br, loft w/ 2.5ba - sleeps 8-10. Lake Mi view & private beach. Call Ken @ 630-268-1531 or email Groenjk@aol.com for info.

KENTWOOD HOME FOR RENT NEAR GR Beautiful 3,000 sq/ft, 4-5 bedroom home, two car garage and pole barn storage. \$1,200/month + utilities: 810-417-6281

SOUTHERN MICHIGAN CONDO Thinking of getting away Thanksgiving, Christmas or Summer of 2012. Think South Haven, Michigan, right on the beach! Sleeps 8, 2 full and 1/2 baths, professionally decorated, wireless service and flatscreen TVs. Call Phil @ 269 344-8303

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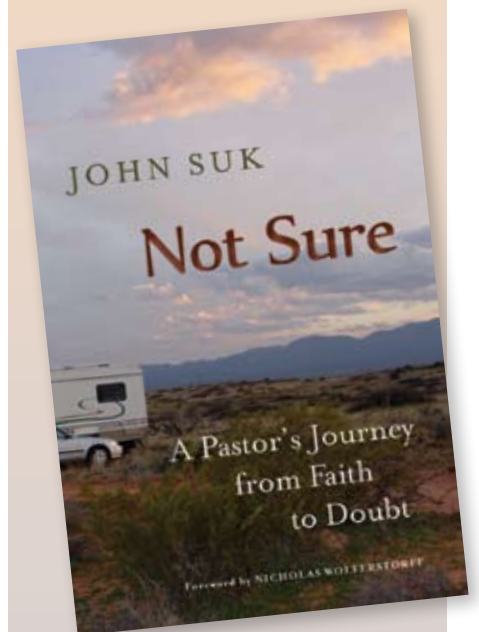
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Punch Lines

What has made *you* smile lately? Got a joke or funny incident you'd care to share with your wider church family? Please send it to *The Banner* at 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560; or email it to editorial@thebanner.org. Thanks!

A couple of dog owners were arguing about whose pet was smarter.

"My dog is so smart that every morning he waits for the paper boy to come around. He tips the kid and then brings the newspaper to me along with my morning coffee," said the first.

"I know," said the second owner.

"How do you know?"

"My dog told me."

—John Veltkamp

A woman came storming up to the receptionist's desk at the office of an eye surgeon.

"Someone stole my wig while I was having surgery yesterday," she complained.

The doctor came out and tried to calm her down. "I assure you that no one on my staff would have done such a thing," he said. "Why do you think it was taken here?"

"After the operation, I noticed the wig I was wearing was cheap-looking and ugly."

"I think," the surgeon explained gently, "that means your cataract surgery was a success."

—John Veltkamp

She was in the bathroom, putting on her makeup under the watchful eyes of her young granddaughter, as she'd done many times before.

After she applied her lipstick and started to leave, the little one said, "But Grandma, you forgot to kiss the toilet paper goodbye!"

—Pat Schnoor

My 3-year-old daughter Kaylyn and I were making cookies one afternoon. We put them on the table to cool. I told Kaylyn that she would have to wait to have a cookie until she ate all her supper.

A few minutes later I saw her eating a cookie, and said, "I told you that you had to finish your dinner before you got a cookie!"

"Don't worry, Mom," she said.

"I asked Jesus if I could have a cookie, and he said yes!"

—Tracey Braam

After entertaining our family for dinner one Sunday noon, I went to rest in my LazyBoy.

Soon our little granddaughter was standing at my side. I said, "Adalyn, would you like to sit on Grandma's lap?"

As she hopped into grandpa's chair, she responded happily, "Oh, no thank you, Grandma. I'll just sit on my own lap."

—Helen H. De Weerd

One day early in our marriage we were driving along a country road, not saying a word.

An earlier discussion had led to an argument, and neither of us was about to concede our position.

As we passed a barnyard of mules and pigs, I asked my wife sarcastically, "Are they relatives of yours?"

"Yup," she said. "I married into the family."

—Clarence A. Wildeboer

Bulletin bloopers:
Song: "Be Thou My Vision"
(Blue Hymnal #468)

(Congregation sins quietly on verse 1 and increases in volume on each verse.)

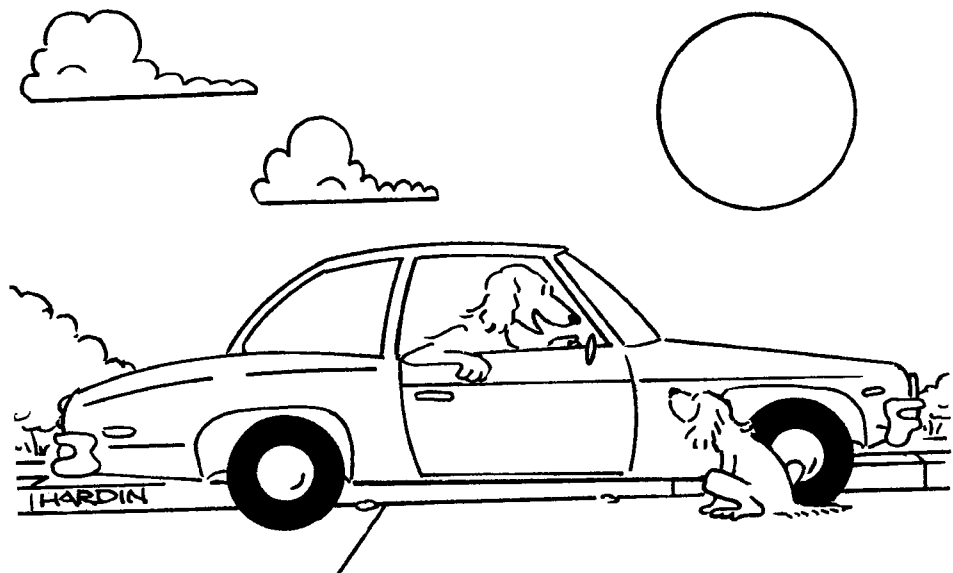
—Mark Boer

Hank fell asleep while watching Monday night football and remained in his chair through the night.

The next morning his wife shook him and said, "Hank, it's twenty to seven."

"Who's winning?" he responded.

—George Vander Weit



"I'll tell ya—it takes chasing cars to a whole new level."



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