

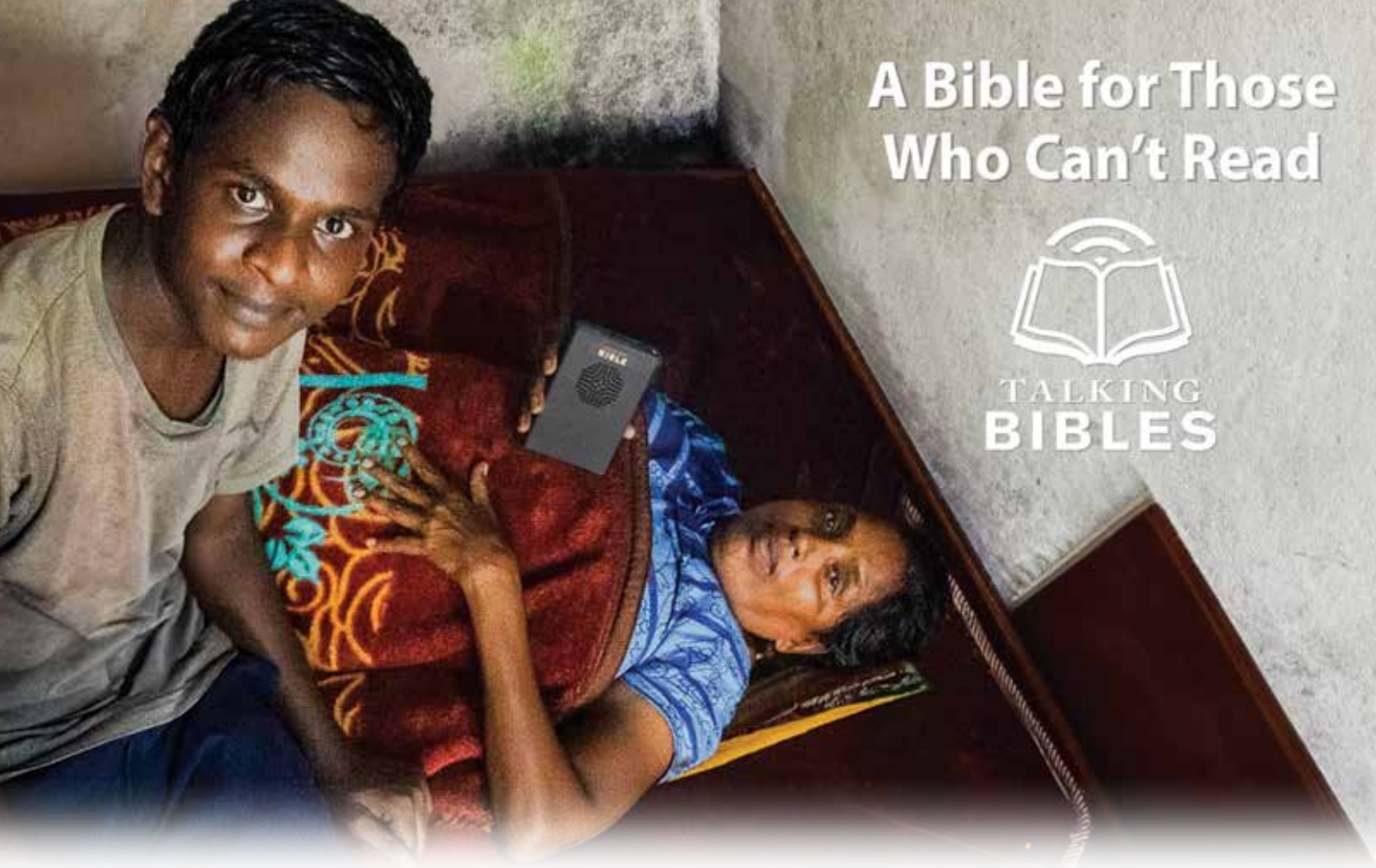
BANNER

JULY/AUGUST 2024

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A photograph of a man with a beard and a checkered shirt speaking at a microphone. He is looking down and to the left, with his hand near his chin. The background is a blurred crowd of people.

Synod 2024



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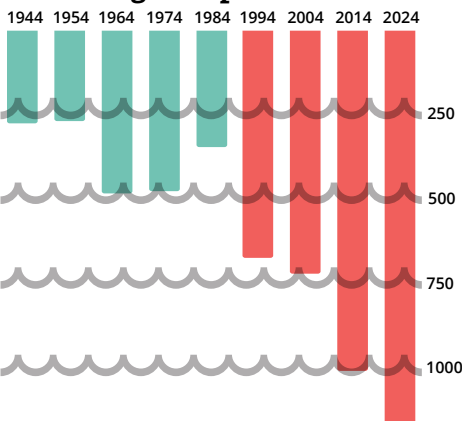


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BY THE NUMBERS

June's infographic showed an increasing number of requests and communications to synod. Not only are there more, they're also getting longer. A Christian Reformed blogger in Grand Rapids, Mich., used digitized agendas from Calvin University's Hekman Library website to find the **average number of words per overture** for nine different years going back to 1944. He thinks the sharp increase after 1984 stems from word processing and the personal computer: "Thanks to the PC, synod is now drowning in paper."

Drowning in Paper



Data from May 9, 2024, substack "CRC Musings" by Kent Hendricks. Used with permission.



Cover: Synod 2024 heard from many, many speakers over the seven days it met. There were moments of certainty, grief, and rejoicing. This image is David Salverda, Classis Toronto, addressing what he called "a low-trust environment" in the CRCNA.

WHAT'S ONLINE

Looking for more? Here are just a few of the stories you'll find online at *TheBanner.org*. (Try typing the headlines into the search box.)

- » Church Worldwide: Latest Numbers Show 'Nones' Growth Has Slowed
- » Movie review: *The Fall Guy*
- » Book review: *Learning to Disagree*, by John Inazu
- » Music review: *From Self With Love*, by Lowland Hum

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BANNER

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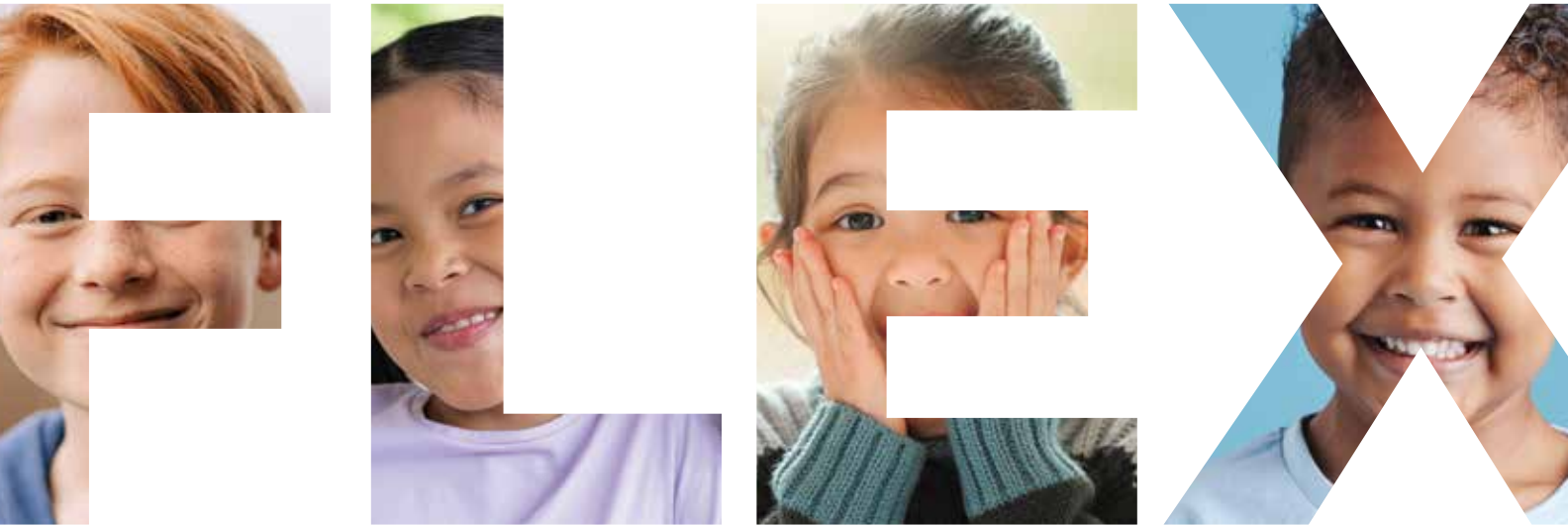
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God Is Still With Us

I might not understand why God allows crisis and upheaval, but I trust the promise that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”



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

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

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

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

THERE ARE TWO COMPETING narratives about Synod 2024. According to one narrative, this is the culmination of a godly revival: the Christian Reformed Church chose to stand firm on biblical truth, even when it was painful—but necessary and overdue—to discipline erring churches and officebearers. The other narrative describes Synod 2024 as a purge by hardliners in the denomination of all those who disagree doctrinally on same-sex marriage: a denomination that used to be more open to intellectual curiosity and exploration has become punitive and now polices people’s thoughts. As is often true, reality is probably messier than either of those narratives suggests. As the Canons of Dort remind us, “blemishes cling to even the best works of saints” (Art. 5.2).

I trust that Christians on both sides of the divide are wrestling and acting out of a genuine desire to faithfully follow Christ as best they know how. It would be harsh to attribute bad motives to any side and not heed synod president Derek Buikema’s plea to be gentle. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood,” not against our brothers and sisters in Christ, but “against the powers of this dark world” (Eph. 6:12). We must resist giving in to our dark inclinations.

I do believe, however, that the outcome of synod’s cumulative decisions, intended or not, is the disaffiliation, voluntary or otherwise, of a number of churches. Many members also will leave the denomination, causing sorrow and divisions within churches, families, and circles of friends. How many? How soon? I am not sure. This will be a time of upheaval and uncertainty, maybe even crisis, for the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

I believe God is sovereign and in control. I might not understand why

God allows crisis and upheaval, but I trust the promise that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). That promise is not qualified by the quality of our love. All of us love God imperfectly. We all struggle with sin in our lives. None of our theologies is perfect. But none of that disqualifies us from God’s promise to work, in all things, for the good of those who love God imperfectly and know God imperfectly.

“God With Us” was the theme for this year’s synod. Even in crisis and upheaval, God is still with us. God might not prevent the crisis, but God will be with us in and through the crisis. Whichever side you might be on the same-sex marriage debate—whether traditional, affirming, or not sure—God is still with you in whatever emotional, spiritual, or intellectual state you might find yourself in.

Some of you might be rejoicing; others might be in tears. Still others might be uncertain and undecided. Some might even be angry. Let us be kind and considerate to one another. Do not rub salt into wounds. Refrain from judging each other’s character. Remember that each of us has to answer to God, who knows our hearts and minds.

Above all, through the coming collective and individual uncertainties, whoever you are, whatever you may face, cling to this truth: God loves you. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). **B**



Photo by Kelvin Ballingit for Unsplash

A Stagnant Church

By Jay Shim

Thanks to technological progress forged in an individualistic culture, believers today can find Christian community in a nontraditional way.

Not only do online platforms offer timely alternatives to in-person gatherings, but they also create alternative Christian communities. Online, everyone is welcomed without prejudice, regardless of one's background or circumstances. Some prefer online communities because of the anonymity it allows and the control it gives over whom one associates with.

But while online platforms might seem to satisfy personal needs and offer conveniently selected unity, it also removes participants from traditional church responsibilities.

These days, people are asking questions like: Should I go to in-person church as people traditionally did? Is that the only or best way of being a Christian? Is traditional church membership a necessary condition of being a believer? What options do I have if the church decides or acts against my Christian conscience? Some believe that there are diverse ways of "being church," such as house churches, parachurches, café churches, or online churches, and that the church needs to change to meet contemporary needs.

While church leaders are understandably concerned about the church's

future, most people today are instead asking about what the gospel means for them in their own lives. They are not simply seeking excuses to stay away from church; instead, they are searching for what it means to be a believer in today's context.

The real challenge facing the church is not that people are not coming back to in-person church in the post-pandemic era, but that the church might have become stagnant with tradition. We can see examples of such stagnancy in how the church usually proclaims the gospel and in how the church handles the growing concerns of justice in our society.

Let's take a look at gospel proclamation. In the last half-century, the fastest-growing church movements tend to have an individualistic and utilitarian view of the gospel and consequently a narrowly pietistic spirituality. In some developing countries, such as Korea in the past, people absorbed the simple message that "faith alone" (in a personal, individualistic way) guarantees salvation. Weary fathers, mothers, and widows would attend Sunday services, early-morning prayer meetings, and revival meetings to hear the gospel message. The simple "faith alone" gospel worked, and the church grew even in harsh situations. However, once the gospel had been set in such personal and narrowly spiritual terms, many of those same people, now that they are richer and

freer, struggle to find how their faith is relevant to their lives. With their eyes set on heaven, many of them fail to see how God's salvation can impact their society. Consequently, the church's apathy toward justice issues and amoral social behaviors invites criticism from society.

Christians in advanced countries too face challenges when they sever their faith from their everyday lives. When the meaning of our Christian faith is not lived out in a conflict-torn society, when it merely looks forward to an otherworldly heaven, such a pietistic gospel can dwindle to focusing only on the self.

The challenge for ministry today is how to revive the church to live out the gospel of Christ in a polarized society. Diverse conflicts such as polarized political situations, approaches to gender and sexuality, or issues related to economic and racial justice produce anger, misunderstanding, prejudice, and suffering. These conflicts aggravate an already fragmented society and its relationships. The church is a victim of these conflicts even though it creates some itself and bypasses others.

Salvation Issues

Therefore, an essential goal for ministry today is to form a community whose aim is the justice, reconciliation, and unity that the gospel makes possible in the world. The Bible teaches that God is reconciling creation to

himself—the fundamental reason we should be asking how God is working salvation in and around ourselves and our communities. Reformed theology has long cherished this comprehensive theological view of God’s salvation. It’s not just about saving individual souls; it’s about God reconciling all things to God (Col. 1:20). This theology was formed through a trinitarian reading of Scripture, which describes the Christian vision for life as ultimately universal, not narrow. The Reformed mind sees the broad, comprehensive work of the triune God, who redeems the sin-damaged creation through Christ. There, human salvation, achieved by grace through faith, is only one part of God’s greater vision of cosmic salvation.

Within this greater context we can better understand God’s original purposes for humanity in God’s world. Salvation is creational in the sense that salvation achieves the Creator-ordained purpose of creation, and the Christian life is therefore communal, in that believers are born again to live in the creational community.

In this biblical view of cosmic salvation, human salvation is more glorious and dynamic than a merely passive movement of being transferred to heaven when we die. The Christian life in the present age is not meant to be a waiting room for heaven-bound passengers, but rather a stage to live out a glorious new life in Christ. Our present lives have purpose in God’s schedule of salvation. They are new and glorious lives because God has commissioned and equipped the redeemed to be the “rulers” of the world—or in Christ’s words, “ambassadors.” The new creation has already come and is working among believers (2 Cor. 5:17). Whatever believers do with this new life in Christ affects not only their own lives, but also God’s


The Christian life
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kingdom. Living this new life is meant to be a joyful responsibility, never a grudging duty. And the community, big or small, is the stage where believers live out their new life. This Reformed vision of the Christian life can serve as a needed antidote to modern individualistic and utilitarian ideas of salvation and of the Holy Spirit’s work.

Yet Christian responsibility to be active participants in creational reconciliation does not happen automatically. Most of the conflicts that undermine the church, whether confessional or practical, involve suffering. The conflicts regarding justice, reconciliation, and unity are never resolved by the church’s decisions alone. They require the church, individually and communally, to commit to humble listening, fair discernment, and long-suffering love.

Scripture gives many examples of God’s people proclaiming the gospel message within a cross-cultural context. Look at what happened to the

Israelites when God led them through all the surrounding cultures and formed his people out of all nations. Israel’s dealings with other people often included prejudice, misunderstanding, and even wars. The Israelites had to learn new languages and cultures wherever they went because they were called not only for their own sake, but also to serve as priests among foreign nations (Gen. 12:2-3). Through this long and arduous process, Israel came to realize its God-endowed identity for the sake of the world. Much later, in Acts 6, we witness an internal church conflict between Hellenistic Jews and Hebraic Jews. A series of compassionate and humble conversations were needed to deal with that conflict.

As long as we interpret Scripture’s teaching of God calling his people out of all nations and cultures as simply a religious or spiritual phenomenon, we are far from grasping the biblical mandate of practicing justice, reconciliation, and unity. We are commanded to understand and practice the spiritual fruit that can help resolve our human conflicts (Eph. 4:1-4). Christ has already established unity among believers of all people groups. On this basis, the church is Christ’s body together. In today’s terms this might mean that Christ has established unity among believers with diverse consciences. It is not our decisions or work that establishes unity; rather, we are called to joyfully recognize and faithfully live out that unity by practicing justice and reconciliation. 



Jay Shim earned his M.Div. and Ph.D. from Calvin Theological Seminary. He served Dordt University as professor of theology for 20 years and retired in 2023. Dordt University Press recently published his book *Engaging Faith: My Story in God’s Story*.

Turning Our Eyes to the Sun

As the sky
darkened, I
noticed the color,
but I also knew
to turn my eyes
somewhere else.

ON APRIL 8, 2024, many of us across the U.S. had the opportunity to view a solar eclipse from within the “path of totality.” That’s the narrow band of the country for which the moon would completely block the sun and allow people to briefly view the eclipse safely even without eye protection. It’s safe to look at the sky any time, whether it’s a sunny blue, a winter gray, a midnight black, or the soft, velvety eggplant color that appears during a total solar eclipse. But you’ll want to turn your eyes away from the beauty of this dark sky, because there is something else marvelous to see. I was blessed to experience 2017’s awe-inspiring solar eclipse in Tennessee, but I had only two minutes and 39 seconds to see it. As the sky darkened, I noticed the color, but I also knew to turn my eyes somewhere else.

It made me think about a question that all those trying to live out our faith in God’s world must ask themselves: Where are we turning our eyes? Our answer can’t just be “away from the darkness” or even “near the sun.” We need to turn our eyes directly toward the metaphorical sun itself—God’s face.

Away From the Darkness

Whether we’re talking about godly family life, faithfully serving God in our careers, or building a kingdom culture in a Christian school like the one where I now work, it’s not good enough to say that we are turning away from the darkness. When we do that, we define our efforts simply by what we’re trying to avoid: “Our family won’t be like other families.” “I’m not going to practice my career the way the world does.” “Our school is going to be a refuge from everything out there.” None of that is good enough.

We need to be turning our eyes not just away from something, but toward something.

Near the Corona

Usually it is impossible to see the sun’s corona—the plasma that explodes out into space from the sun’s burning gases. The brightness of the sun blinds anyone who tries to look in its direction. Even when a partial solar eclipse makes the sun feel dimmer, it is still dangerous and damaging to your eyes to look near the sun, and you won’t be able to see the corona.

However, by God’s design, there is one time when you can see the corona. Even though the sun is much larger than the moon, the sun is also much farther away. In fact, the moon is just the right distance from the earth so that it appears to us to be the same size as the sun in the sky. During a total eclipse, the moon lines up with the sun, blocking it out perfectly. When this happens, you can see gentle, almond-colored brushstrokes streaming out from the sun. The beauty of the corona, adjacent to the sun and emanating from it, is almost indescribable.

The same is true of the things that emanate from the grace and glory of God into our world. We might think of these things as the “atmosphere” of God’s kingdom. This includes the holy virtues we find believers practicing as they make their way through the world—love, joy, peace, and other spiritual fruit. This atmosphere also includes excellent Christian institutions, such as the schools, denominational agencies, book publishers, and charities that many of us in the Christian Reformed Church are familiar with. These things are distinctive in our world because they have the flavor of the fruit of the Spirit from the believers who built and maintain them. We identify this as “Christian culture.” We hope for it. We strive for it. Even our neighbors who are not believers often come to love it.



Rev. Nick Monsma serves as the chaplain and teacher of logic and literature at East Palmyra (N.Y.) Christian School, and he is a member of East Palmyra CRC. He is the author of *Worship, Mission, and the Church Year* (Cascade Books, 2019).



But just as the corona is not the sun itself, neither is a Christian culture the same thing as the saving grace of God. It is wrong to equate them, but it's tempting to do so. The atmosphere and products of a Christian culture are beautiful and desirable, but they can become idols. We can set our hearts on the wrong things. We can even "endanger our salvation," to use the language of the Heidelberg Catechism, when we try to live out Christian faith by turning our eyes merely toward a Christian culture—the corona of God's saving grace.

We're trying to remember this truth in our community around East Palmyra, N.Y. We seem to be witnessing exciting spiritual growth. In a county that hasn't been marked by a distinctively Christian culture for decades, theologically Reformed churches are growing, the Christian school has tripled in size, and there is a surge of interest in Reformed doctrine. But many of us try to keep reminding ourselves: the culture, the atmosphere of God's kingdom, is great, but it can't be what we

turn our eyes toward. If we do, we risk building institutions and teaching rituals that are beautiful but spiritually empty.

The Sun Itself

We need to turn our eyes toward the sun itself.


Not literally. It's impossible to look at the sun itself safely without serious eye protection. However, it is possible to seek our spiritual sun, the face of God, as we live out our faith in our homes, our workplaces, our schools, and elsewhere.

Psalm 27:8 reminds us of this: "Your face, LORD, I will seek."

To turn our eyes toward God's face is to seek the favor and approval of God through his grace. It means we enter

into God's holy place, where God's face shines on us. It means that God accepts us and considers us righteous through faith in Jesus Christ and not through righteous living or through merely identifying ourselves as Christians. It means we are comforted and hopeful most of all because of the blessings of heaven and eternal protection of our God. This is what should motivate and orient our lives as Christians.

As we live out our Christian faith with our eyes turned toward the sun itself, we should see our homes, careers, churches, and schools looking different from the world and a beautiful Christian culture being built in and around us. But these things—turning away from a sinful world and turning toward the atmosphere of God's grace—these can't define the working out of our faith. It must be defined by seeking God's face.

I hope the sky was clear for those of you in the path of totality during the April eclipse so you could see the unique color of the dark sky and majesty of the sun's atmosphere during a total solar eclipse. But my greater hope for all of us is that we will seek God's face and turn our eyes directly toward our Sun. 

Editor's note: A version of this article was first published online April 6 at TheBanner.org.

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Can Science Ever Replace Religion?

The most important questions in life cannot be answered with a laboratory experiment or a mathematical theory.



Deborah and Loren Haarsma are long-time members of the Christian Reformed Church. Loren is a professor in the physics and astronomy department at Calvin University, and Deborah is president of BioLogos.

SCIENCE CANNOT replace religion. But some people act as if it does. A friend of ours sent us a snapshot of a roadside billboard sponsored by the Freedom From Religion Foundation. The billboard shows a man saying, “I put my faith in science.” This isn’t science, but scientism—turning science into a sort of religion.

God gives us abilities to do science and learn about God’s creation. Science is very good at some things, like explaining how photosynthesis works or finding new medications to treat diseases. Science even addresses some questions that once were only in the realm of religion, like how the mountains formed and why the crops are more abundant in a given year.

In surveys today, an increasing number of people say they do not have any particular religious belief. So perhaps it’s not surprising that some of them turn to science instead. A few years ago, I (Deb) was at a conference and chatted with a university research scientist. The conversation turned to religion, and I tried to explain why I believe in God. He listened carefully, then responded, “That’s fine for you, but for me science is enough; I don’t need to add on God.” My heart broke. This man felt that science was the best source for truth and for the solutions to our problems.

But science is limited. Say there is a kettle of boiling water on the stove, and Loren walks into the kitchen and asks, “Why is the water boiling?” Science gives an answer to that question! Heat is being conducted from the stove to the water, causing a phase transition turning liquid water into gas. But if Deb answered that way, Loren would laugh or roll his eyes. The reason the water is boiling is because Deb’s prayer partner is coming over for tea.

There are many important questions that science cannot answer. While medicine and technology can give us the means to care for others, science cannot tell us that we morally ought to love our enemies as well as our friends. The most important questions in life cannot be answered with a laboratory experiment or a mathematical theory—questions like: What was I made for? What is God like? What happens after I die? These are in the realm of religion and philosophy. If someone says they look to science for all the answers, including questions like those, they are not talking about science; they are talking about an atheistic worldview that they have added onto science.

Christian faith provides incredibly rich answers to those big questions. One reason Christianity stands out from other religions and philosophies is that those answers are not just abstract, but centered in the person of Jesus Christ. In Christ’s incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, Christians discover surpassingly beautiful truths about God, about ourselves, and about where to place our hope for the future.

In our work as scientists, we sometimes talk to people like the scientist Deb met at that conference. We’ll agree with them that science can be used to do a lot of good, and we’ll gladly spend time debating the “big questions.” But our goal is to turn the conversation back to a Person. Those following scientism are missing more than answers to questions. They’re missing a relationship with their Creator. We hope they will discover the One behind all the marvels of the natural world, a Creator who loved them enough to die for them and can bring them hope and healing. **B**

Resounding Words

SYNOD 2024 NEWS

Brought to you by:

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"We have to move as a body to help them along in this process."

—Israel Ledee,
Classis Chicago South

Suspension. Discipline. Disaffiliation. Restoration. Wrestling. Doubt. Heartily believe. Settled conviction. Be gentle. Hold that line. These are some of the words reverberating after the close of Synod 2024. Those that echo the loudest will depend on who you are and where you're situated in the CRCNA. For those who sent communications protesting "Synod 2022's use of 'confessional status' to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022's ... declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful" (Communication 15, *Agenda for Synod 2024*), "discipline" might be what resounds. Other delegates came away from synod hearing "disciple" (p. 24).

It's unlikely that congregations who have "carefully deliberated, studied, and pastorally cared for one another as they have discussed LGBTQ+ issues" yet reached a different conclusion from synod's will be "disciplined" toward synod's understanding within a year. And as a response from the general assembly to those churches' "cries of the heart," it's insensitive.

But that's what synod did. It rejected a minority report—one that suggested synod only receive the protest communications, "understanding that they were written with much prayer, wrestling, and lament"—and approved the action recommended in a majority report. "We have to move as a body to help them (congregations in protest) along in this process," said Israel Ledee, Classis Chicago South.

No Exceptions to Confessions

The category of being "'in protest' regarding settled and binding synodical decisions concerning confessional matters" doesn't exist in the CRC, the reporting committee said. And now a mechanism to express belief contrary to the church's confessions and remain ordained as an officebearer—as scholar Alvin Plantinga once did—doesn't exist either. In discussions stretching across two days, Synod 2024 tightened the process for church councils to receive what's called a

confessional-difficulty gravamen, declaring that "confessional-difficulty gravamina are not meant, nor should be used as an exception to the confessions" (p. 18).

Officebearers who develop a concern with a confessional doctrine are to communicate it to their council, receive support to resolve the concern, and achieve resolution within three years. Those unable to resolve their concerns must resign their office.

Synod instructed the CRC's Office of General Secretary to communicate this practice for gravamina and to strike from the denomination's website an FAQ from Synod 2022 that described the tool according to one of the previously acceptable understandings of its use. Synod also is sharing the updated process with Calvin University and expects a response from its board of trustees with "language and processes in alignment" with those of the CRCNA (p. 25).

Some voiced concern over the requirement to be in complete alignment with every expressed doctrine in the confessions. Jim Poelman, Classis Ontario Southwest, said, "We're going down an avenue where the church is becoming more divisive." Others joyfully defended requiring unwavering commitment to the confessions and spoke with certainty about the need to discipline churches acting out of alignment with synod's decision that declared homosexual sex as sinful.

'Some People Are Going to Need to Say Farewell'

Officebearers from congregations "which directly contradict synod's decision on unchastity" are under limited suspension as of the conclusion of Synod 2024 and may not be delegated to assemblies of the church. How this decision will affect meetings of classes where several churches fall into this category isn't yet known. "This depends on the rules of procedure for each individual classis, so it's not something synod can adjudicate,"



It's time to "move on to all the other really important things that we need to talk about."

**—Herb Schreur,
Classis Northcentral Iowa**

synod president Derek Buikema said. "It's something that classes will need to figure out."

Synod didn't name churches, but some in the body identified themselves, including Paul Verhoef, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan; Ryan Schreiber, Classis Grand Rapids East; and Trish Borgdorff, Classis Grand Rapids East. Borgdorff was granted permission to express a farewell to the denomination on Synod 2024's closing day (p. 35).

I wasn't part of the CRC when Borgdorff's father, Peter Borgdorff, was executive director or in the years when Plantinga was teaching at Calvin. I joined 13 years ago, drawn by Christian education, the covenant family, and the warmth of a local congregation—a congregation with whom I haven't been worshiping for two and a half years that is now among those under discipline for expressing a view that contradicts synod's decision on unchastity.

What does this mean? The posture of the CRC has changed. Maybe the confessions haven't changed, but the room to wrestle with them—now three years or less—and the space to relate across differences, at least on the matters of sexuality, have. Synod is finished with the challenging conversations. It's time to "move on to all the other really important things that we need to talk about in this

denomination," said Herb Schreur, Classis North Central Iowa.

Going Global

Synod 2024 gave hints of where those things that will be: in all directions, but particularly south. Synod approved the report of the Global Vision Team, which was launched in response to a request from Classis California South and affiliated Venezuelan churches. More classes are also seeking support to envelop churches from outside North America (p. 28).

Synod approved "church in communion" status with the Christian Reformed Church in Liberia and dedicated its Tuesday afternoon banquet to hearing from two cultural ministry networks within the CRCNA: Consejo Latino and the Korean Ministry Association (p. 31). Synod launched a task force to look into multisite churches, a trend that is still small but of potential interest in the denomination (p. 30), and asked that the report being prepared on virtual churches "highlight the portions ... related to the online portions of traditional in-person churches or hybrid churches." Synod also wants more study "on the historical, biblical, and theological aspects of (church) membership," how confessional expectations for members compare with those for officebearers, and how the definition of "unchastity" in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 "functions in the life of the CRC." It tasked all of this to the Office of General Secretary, which will report back to Synod 2026 (p. 21).

A Different Time

Five years ago *The Banner* ran a cover with contrasting images from Synod 1938 and Synod 2019. In 2019, 41 women were among the delegates; no women, of course, participated in Synod 1938. In 2024, the number of women was down to 25. Suits and ties like those delegates wore in 1938 are long gone. What's on the outside—T-shirts, every-

day-casual attire, even a baseball cap—seemed inconsequential to Synod 2024.

Synod 2025 will be at Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ont., where it hasn't met since 2012. It's expecting the virtual church report, word from the Calvin University board on its confessional difficulty policy, some kind of status report on the churches synod said must enter the process of discipline (the Office of General Secretary is to produce resources by Nov. 29 to support and shepherd disaffiliating churches), and a report from the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee on conversations that group will have with the Reformed Church in America (p. 29).

Although the CRC is in a very different cultural moment than in 1876, when it founded Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin College, synod will commemorate that 150-year anniversary back at Calvin University in 2026.

Who will be there? With officebearers from noncompliant churches suspended, those with an unresolved gravamen asked to "recuse themselves from being delegated," and churches under discipline that are non-repentant expected to disaffiliate, the body is likely to be very different the next time synod convenes.

The CRCNA will find its way, God helping it, and in the words of departing delegate Trish Borgdorff, "We trust the Spirit will continue to move and chase after us—all of us—with goodness and mercy, and someday, together, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Then, with eternity on our side, we can find a way to live in unity."

*—Alissa Vernon,
Banner News Editor*

Synod Defines Confessional Difficulties, Removes Ambiguity in Gravamen Process

After Synod 2023’s conversation about gravamina was cut short, Synod 2024 became responsible for providing clarity on when a gravamen should be used and how a church council should process it. The discussion drew a full gallery and more people watching on livestream. Synod adopted almost all of the advisory committee’s recommendations, starting with affirming that “confessional-difficulty gravamina are not meant, nor should be used as an exception to the confessions.” That statement passed with a vote of 137 to 47 after almost two and a half hours of discussion. Seven delegates registered a negative vote.

Clarifying Between Two Understandings

The committee proposing the statement believed it was a necessary clarification after observing two understandings within the Christian Reformed Church about the use of gravamina. In one understanding, “an officebearer uses a confessional-difficulty gravamen to express a personal difficulty to a council. The council would then judge whether they could tolerate the officebearer’s disagreement with the confessions. If so, the officebearer could continue to serve with the



“We wanted integrity in the process.”
—Andy Sytsma,
Classis Yellowstone,
chair of Advisory Committee 9



“A gravamen is not just a tool for discipline; it’s an opportunity for discipleship.”
—Chad Werkhoven,
Classis Minnkota

gravamen submitted to their local council,” the committee report said. In the other understanding, “the purpose of expressing the difficulty is to determine whether the officebearer’s gravamen is in line with the doctrines of our confessions, and if not, to help the officebearer pursue a path toward alignment—enlisting the help of the classis and synod if necessary.”

The committee said that both understandings had some merit, and their report attempted to clarify for churches how to proceed. “Our intent is to provide a flexible and contextual plan of action while also clarifying the temporary nature of a confessional-difficulty gravamen,” the committee said.

Paul Verhoef, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, spoke against the committee’s first recommendation. “I think for 48 years we’ve had assemblies that have tolerated officebearers with disagreement to the confessions, and it’s actually worked,” he said, adding that the report recognizes that “both of these ways (of understanding confessional-difficulty gravamina) have merit, and then you use the word ‘clarify.’ ... I think

what we’re going to do tonight is choosing” between the two understandings, not clarifying.

Sherry TenClay, Classis Red Mesa, also cautioned against adopting too firm a position. “We are a denomination of lifelong learners, and I can’t imagine anybody to be set in cement enough to be fully settled.” She said she worried about marrying the gravamina process with the specific concern of disagreement with Synod 2022’s definition of “unchastity,” which was interpreted as confessional and therefore binding for officebearers. “If we aren’t careful, we will create a systemic bias, because we will remove all people from the conversation who do not agree with us,” TenClay said.



“What we’re going to do tonight is choosing.”
—Paul Verhoef,
Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan

Discipleship and Boundaries

Chad Werkhoven, Classis Minnkota, spoke in favor of the no-exceptions statement. “A gravamen is not just a tool for discipline; it’s an opportunity for discipleship,” he said. “These are not difficult doctrines. These are the core and the basis of our faith. How can we not delight in these things?”

Aaron Greydanus, Classis Heartland, also was in favor of defining gravamina this

way, saying, “These (the confessions) are our boundaries, and we are all called to work inside those boundaries and to call people outside the boundaries to repentance and to come in.” But Ken Douma, Classis Alberta North, said, “We need boundaries, and we have them in the confessions, but there has to be room to wrestle and struggle.”

Ryan Schreiber, Classis Grand Rapids East, reminded synod that prominent scholar Alvin Plantinga submitted a gravamen on reprobation yet was allowed to continue serving as an elder. Schreiber said Plantinga “lifted theism on the world stage, and this is why people come to Calvin University.” But with the new definition, Schreiber said, Plantinga couldn’t be Christian Reformed.

Patrick Anthony, Classis Central California, asserted that what makes one Christian Reformed is unwavering commitment to the confessions. His statement “I’m more Christian Reformed than Alvin Plantinga” drew some surprised murmurs.

Three-year Limit

Synod amended the Church Order supplement describing confessional-difficulty gravamina to outline a structured process for resolution within a three-year timeline that “prioritizes pastoral care and mutual understanding.” The adopted changes to the Church Order Supplement to Article 5 take effect without needing to be ratified by a subsequent synod.

Hayden Regeling, Classis Hamilton, was in favor of the supplement changes. “I want to continue to push this body and this denomination to keep thinking and praying about how we live out our confessionality in a way that is faithful to our theology, ecclesiology, and missiology,” he said. “Further confessional conversation needs to happen as we seek to be faithful and successful in guiding people into deeper relationship with God and the church.”



“I’d really love to see that timeline remain at the discernment of the church councils.”

**—Michelle Ellis,
Classis B.C. North-West**

Some delegates expressed concern about the three-year time period. Michelle Ellis, Classis B.C. North-West, said, “I’d really love to see that timeline remain at the discernment of the church councils.”

Andy Sytsma, Classis Yellowstone, chair of the committee proposing the revision, said the committee set a time frame for gravamina resolution because “we wanted integrity in the process.” The committee spent a long time determining how long that time frame should be, and he noted that three years aligns with deacon and elder terms in many congregations. Committee member Nathan Dykstra, Classis Illiana, added, “We believed that this timeline was flexible enough for the local church to be able to do its work and care for its people pastorally.”

Sharing his experience of wrestling with the doctrines of perseverance of the saints and infant baptism when he was a young pastor, David Bosscher, Classis Thornapple Valley, said, “I wish this had been clear for me when I needed it.” Then he could have approached his council with an expectation of how they would receive him. Instead he took his concerns to a friend.

Synod instructed the Office of General Secretary to “withdraw the Synod 2022 FAQ Questions 7-11 and develop a new FAQ statement in light of the decisions

of Synod 2024” on gravamina but did not set a timeline for that task. Zachary King, general secretary of the CRCNA, said, “We will ask for your grace as we prepare the FAQ and work toward some of the recommendations.”

New Process to Be Implemented Immediately

For current officebearers with confessional difficulties, Synod 2024 resolved that “synod instruct those who have submitted a confessional-difficulty gravamen that is still unresolved to use the process as outlined” in the changes to the supplement of Church Order Article 5.

Synod also asked for ongoing education on church confessions for members and officebearers and directed denominational agencies to review and update their policies according to Synod 2024’s decisions.

One of the committee’s recommendations did not pass. It asked Synod 2024 to defer Overture 42 (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 518), a request from Classis Holland to “create a category of ‘confessional-exception gravamen,’” because there wasn’t sufficient time to explore “the broader scope of Overture 42, (and) the church will be better served if Synod 2025 devotes time to examining it.”

Synod decided against that in a vote 79 to 101. “It relitigates everything we just did,” said Cory Nederveld, Classis Georgetown. Instead, the overture received no specific response but was included with all the others addressed by the committee’s report. Five negative votes were registered.

On the other recommendations related to gravamina, 32 negative votes were registered (some of those were by the same delegates, on different recommendations).

—Kristen Parker

Synod Requires Yearly Reaffirmation of Covenant for Officebearers

Synod 2024 has instructed all classes to “re-sign the Covenant for Officebearers on a yearly basis,” meaning classes are to select one meeting per year when delegates to that meeting would re-sign the covenant that all officebearers must sign when first ordained or installed.

The Covenant for Officebearers is a document that lays out the commitments and beliefs for officebearers in the church: ministers of the Word, elders, deacons, and commissioned pastors.

Jose Rayas, Classis Arizona, who served as chair of the committee proposing the new requirement, said “people signed it (the Covenant) 30 years ago, and their positions have changed over the years” and they “have never looked at it again. ... That’s why we’re talking about there’s an advantage to having a written declaration, as it confirms and it is a witness that they continue to hold that line.”

Sherry TenClay, Classis Red Mesa, was against the recommendation. “I was married 51 years this past Sunday, and I never asked my husband to sign up for it again,” she said. “We trust each other, we love each other, and we hold each other accountable. ... I trust the people in my classis.”

But James Reed, Classis Yellowstone, said, “It should be an absolute joy to sign this every single year.”

The proposal to have classes re-sign the covenant each year came in response to requests asking synod to require synodical delegates to re-sign the Covenant for Officebearers, but the responding committee instead suggested synod continue the current practice of



A classis’ written declaration “confirms and ... is a witness that they continue to hold that line.”

—Jose Rayas, Classis Arizona

standing in agreement with the Public Declaration of Agreement with the Beliefs of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

That practice was disrupted at the beginning of Synod 2024 when some delegates questioned others’ ability to pledge full agreement with the confessions.

Until synod made its new rulings on gravamina (p. 18) the potential non-disclosed use of a confessional-difficulty gravamen posed a possibility that present delegates had misgivings over a piece of doctrine. An overture on the matter stated “a delegate who has filed a gravamen is not in full agreement with what the church confesses.” Synod president Derek Buikema said he would trust delegates’ consciences and indicated that if someone had a settled conviction against a church doctrine they should not stand in agreement. Afterward Buikema asked anyone who remained seated to speak with the officers of synod to “find a way to move forward.” After privately speaking with the delegates who came forward (about 10), Buikema assured synod that they “committed to doing our work within our confessional positions.” Synod continued with the full delegation.

—Kristen Parker

Not Necessary to Declare Unrepented Sin a ‘Salvation Issue’

Synod 2024 rejected a request from Classis Lakota that synod “declare that Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 addresses a salvation issue.” Some delegates spoke firmly in favor of needing a declaration on the matter, but others said a new statement would add nothing to what the confessions already declare.

Calvin Theological Seminary professor Mary Vanden Berg cautioned that the term “salvation issue” is “exceedingly ambiguous.”

“It seems to suggest condemnation. (But you don’t know who’s in and who’s out,” Vanden Berg said. “The Reformed scholastics were insistent on this.”

Synod rejected the overture with a vote of 103 to 59. Eight negative votes were registered.

“Scripture is already clear that all sin, including unrepentant sin, is a ‘salvation issue’ as is reflected in the Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer 87, and therefore does not need a statement to declare that,” synod said in rejecting the overture.

Synod also rejected a request from the council of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Burbank, Ill., to “declare as heresy the belief that Scripture sanctions homosexual marriage.” The request “as presented does not meet the high standards of definition and articulation needed for declaring a heresy as outlined by *Acts of Synod 2022* (pp. 843-44),” synod said.

—Greg Chandler

Request for Clarification on Confessional Expectations for Church Members

Synod 2024 believes the church needs guidance “on the historical, biblical, and theological aspects of (church) membership,” and it has tasked the Office of General Secretary to report back to Synod 2026 with that theological reflection and advice.

Synod also encouraged local councils to work out particular situations of church membership “under the principle of original authority—Church Order Article 27—within their context and in submission to our creeds and confessions.”

These decisions are aimed at clarifying “the difference in the relative commitment to the confessions between a member and an officebearer,” the committee presenting the recommendations said.

A person making profession of faith, for example, might “have not fully comprehended all the nuances of the creeds and confessions,” the committee said.

Reporting for the committee, Anthony DeKorte, Classis Arizona, said, “There needs to be some room for them to get on board with being a Christian before committing to every part of every confession.”

Patrick Anthony, Classis Central California, suggested that a decision made at Synod 1964 regarding the membership of a couple who did not support infant baptism indicated a “precedent” for the recommendation. In that case, synod decided not to sustain a protest of the couple’s membership, reasoning that the couple was otherwise in line with Christian Reformed doctrine and had agreed not to “propagate any views conflicting with the doctrinal position of the church.”

Joseph Vanden Akker, Classis Grandville, spoke against the recommendation. “I just heard the statement that the local church has the authority to receive members who totally do not agree with



“There needs to be some room for them to get on board with being a Christian before committing to every part of every confession.”

**—Anthony DeKorte,
Classis Arizona**

our creeds and confessions,” he said incredulously. “How in the world can that be consistent with the Church Order?”

Ryan Schreiber, Classis Grand Rapids East, asked how this advice would apply in the case of a same-sex couple seeking membership. DeKorte reread the recommendation, which states that church councils must work out situations “in submission to our creeds and confessions.”

Synod decided that the theological reflection assignment for the Office of General Secretary would also be its answer to another request: to clarify how “unchastity,” as defined by Synod 2022, “functions in the life of” the denomination.

—Grace Buller

Sorting Out Categories of Synodical Decisions

Synod opted to appoint a small group of people to clarify “the distinctions in categories of synodical pronouncements, decisions, reports, positions, and advice and the nature and extent to which each is ‘settled and binding’ on members, officebearers, and churches.” This was in response to a request from Classis Ontario Southwest deferred from 2021. It passed 126-51.

The phrase “settled and binding” comes from a report to Synod 1975, but its meaning and how it should be applied is still in dispute. The committee recommending a report on the matter noted, “The statements adopted by Synod 1975—Synodical Decisions and the Confessions—‘expressing the use and function of synodical pronouncements on doctrinal and ethical matters and their relation to the confessions’ are not uniformly interpreted by those who read them.” Synod 2024 decided that clarity on the distinctions among categories would be helpful. The small group—something not quite as hefty as a task force or study committee—will report to Synod 2025.

Matthew Hochhalter, Classis Holland, said he was in favor of the recommendation because a “dear Bible teacher” of his from Holland Christian High School often said that “a text without context is a pretext for trouble.”

“I would like to implore synod to go through a proper process and to not take that text (the phrase ‘settled and binding’) out of the broader report of 1975,” Hochhalter said.

—Kristen Parker

Discipline for CRC Churches Acting Contrary to CRC Teachings

Synod 2024 asked for repentance from churches acting in ways contrary to Christian Reformed teachings on sexuality, and as of the close of synod, “all office-bearers from churches in non-compliance ... shall be placed on a limited suspension.”

The instructions, which passed in a 134-50 vote, relate to “churches who have made public statements, by their actions or in any form of media, which directly contradict synod’s decision on unchastity.”

Synod 2022’s decision on unchastity declared that the Heidelberg Catechism’s definition includes homosexual sex and that this interpretation has confessional status.

Synod 2024 didn’t name any churches, but some delegates identified themselves or their congregations as affected by the decision.

The committee considering the question of discipline presented majority and minority reports, with slight differences in wording and in specifics for the suspension. The majority favored language of repentance, while the minority favored language of restoration, though both reports referenced 1 John 1:9-10 and Galatians 6:1 and expressed desire for churches to be restored.

Synod adopted the majority report and instructed the affected churches “to repent and to honor their covenant commitments to the CRCNA.” Repentance should be demonstrated by action, synod



“As a person who is going to be disfellowshipped, ... I need to hear about the implications for my classis.”

—Ryan Schreiber,
Classis Grand Rapids East

said, including publicly declaring repentance to their classes and retracting all public statements and instructional materials that contradict CRCNA teachings on chastity. They must commit to abstain from ordaining individuals in same-sex marriages or relationships inconsistent with traditional Christian sexual ethics.

Additionally, officebearers must not speak or act against the CRCNA’s stance in their preaching, teaching, writing, service, or personal lives. They must pledge not to recognize same-sex marriages ecclesiastically, including in officiating or blessing wedding or baptismal rites, and must ensure that officebearers refrain from serving in organizations that specifically advocate against CRCNA teachings and confessions. Responding to a question from the floor about what kinds of organizations that includes, Lora Copley, reporter for the majority report, said, “We had identified organizations like All One Body or Hesed,” groups formed by CRC members in 2011 and 2021 whose websites describe their missions to promote “unrestricted participation in all areas of church life by all members who confess Christ as Savior and Lord without



“We had identified organizations like All One Body or Hesed” as ones advocating against CRCNA teachings.

—Lora Copley, Classis Northcentral Iowa, reporter for Committee 8

regard to sexual orientation or gender identity” (All One Body) and “to provide resources for those with questions about the way the Christian Reformed Church in North America is responding to current concerns” (Hesed Project).

Officebearers facing limited suspension may not be delegated to larger CRCNA assemblies, synod said. The Office of General Secretary was tasked with developing resources by Nov. 29 to aid classes and churches either in repentance and restoration or, if they don’t demonstrate “continued momentum towards repentance and restoration,” in a disaffiliation process.

Churches can continue in the restoration process if there is progress toward repentance, monitored through specific benchmarks. This process aims to conclude within one year and may not exceed two years.

If a church “refuses to engage the process or prevents the process from moving forward in a timely manner,” synod said, its classis may initiate disciplinary action. Failure to achieve restoration or disaffiliation within the suspension period might lead to removal of the council and

Synod Mandates Review of Church Order Discipline Articles

placement of the church under a neighboring council's authority.

Greg Harnden, Classis Quinte, said he was in favor of making these moves because "we need a clear path of discipline."

"The fear, I sense, is that some churches may leave rather than submit to discipline," he explained. "I don't want to see anyone leave, but as Abraham was asked to offer up Isaac in obedience to faith, I see this as an act of obedience to faith."

Dave Bosscher, Classis Thornapple Valley, also was in favor of the proposal. "Every year we spend discussing this, there are things we aren't discussing," he said. He talked about the challenges of dealing with pastoral care situations. "As long as we are talking here about basic principles, we are not moving on to how to provide proper, loving care in light of what we believe in Scripture."

Despite all the recommendations passing, not everyone agreed with them. "I think we need to show grace and allow time for the churches to come into alignment with our confessions," said Philip Fritschle, Classis Arizona. Ken Douma, Classis Alberta North, also spoke against the majority report because "this isn't just a theological conversation; ... this is about our brothers and sisters who we love." He said he would "err on the side of grace."

Ryan Schreiber, Classis Grand Rapids East, said, "As a person who is going to be disfellowshipped, ... I need to hear about the implications for my classis."

Derek Buikema, president of Synod 2024, said, "This depends on the rules of procedure for each individual classis, so it's not something synod can adjudicate. ... It's something that classes will need to figure out."

Sixteen negative votes were registered.

—Kristen Parker

Synod 2024 rejected a request to add to the current supplement to Church Order Articles 82-84 on special discipline, but changes could come later. Synod mandated a task force to "develop Church Order procedures to discipline officebearers, including disaffiliation initiated by a major assembly." The task force will report to Synod 2026.

The appointment of a task force was in response to a request from Classis Hackensack that was deferred for two synods. The task force will "engage in biblical and theological study of church discipline in order to develop principles for application" and then "suggest Church Order changes to provide councils, classes, and synod with guidelines for biblical church discipline."

The task force will study the relationships among councils, classes, and synod in regard to discipline from the broader assemblies. "The relationships between the assemblies in some cases are not clear," said Michael Borgert, Classis Ontario Southwest, reporting for the advisory committee. This task force will "clarify those relationships" and "bring some unity to the process," Borgert said. Right now, "it's hard to follow a process that doesn't exist."

Synod opted to defer a request for a broader theological study of the relationships among the assemblies of the church. Overture 75 to "evaluate polity to clarify relationship of assemblies" will now go to Synod 2025.

—Kristen Parker



"The relationships between the assemblies in some cases are not clear."

**—Michael Borgert,
Classis Ontario Southwest**

Discipline for Those ‘In Protest’

Synod 2024 received 12 communications that expressed some degree of protest toward “Synod 2022’s use of ‘confessional status’ to require all members of the CRC to agree with Synod 2022’s confessional declaration that all same-sex sexual activity is sinful, including same-sex sexual activity within a faithful, lifelong, and legal marriage” (Communication 15, *Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 588). Some writing the communications declared themselves “to be ‘members in protest’ in the Christian Reformed Church,” a category that synod rejected.

“There is no category in Church Order for members, officebearers, councils, or classes to be ‘in protest’ regarding settled and binding synodical decisions concerning confessional matters, or to add ‘metaphorical asterisks’ by their names,” wrote the advisory committee reviewing the communications.

Following the committee’s recommendation, synod declared the churches, members, and officebearers “that have declared themselves to be in the status of one in protest with ecclesiastical intent” shall be entered into the process



Discipline is “a process for restoration.”

—Cory Nederveld,
Classis Georgetown

of discipline that Synod 2024 previously mandated for churches acting contrary to the CRC’s teaching on sexuality (p. 22).

Ryan Schreiber, Classis Grand Rapids East, spoke against the recommendation, saying it didn’t show the distinctions in each specific communication. Recognizing that he, a minister from Grand Rapids East, would be “under suspension starting this afternoon,” Schreiber said he was concerned about churches being “lumped together.”

“We cannot move these people as a category under discipline,” he said. “I don’t want these churches to suffer how I’m suffering. Please have mercy.”

Cory Nederveld, Classis Georgetown, reported for the committee that brought the recommendation. “The word ‘discipline’ is often only seen as negative,” he said, but “that is not the case. ... It’s a process for restoration.”

In introducing the committee’s recommendations, Nederveld expressed sympathy for “those who could see no



“These letters to our synod ... were signed by 140 different members of our denomination and about a dozen councils.”

—Sid Jansma Jr.,
Grand Rapids South

other way to share what they were dealing with” than to send the communications of protest.

A few delegates requested clarification on the difference between a communication that is sent to synod in a form of protest, and people who declare themselves to be “in protest.” Nederveld said synod’s ruling applies to churches, members, and officebearers who have the “status” of being “in protest” but not necessarily those who have written a protest to synod.

Nederveld further clarified that this has to do with “ecclesiastical intent.” He said the process of discipline “could help clear up” any misunderstanding of what was intended with each communication, saying that a possible outcome in some situations might just be an apology for any confusion.

“Discipline is discipleship,” Nederveld said, “and that’s a part of our ongoing sanctification as a body.”

The committee also produced a minority report, which was read but not adopted. It suggested synod only receive and not act on the communications,

Instructions for Calvin University on Faculty Gravamen Process

“understanding that they were written with much prayer, wrestling, and lament.”

Sid Jansma Jr., Classis Grand Rapids South, served on the committee. “These letters to our synod and our committee were signed by 140 different members of our denomination and about a dozen councils,” he noted.

Israel Ledee, Classis Chicago South, was in favor of the process of discipline for the churches “in protest.”

“There seems to be a lack of willingness, at least in some, not to enter into that dialogue,” he said. “Therefore, we have to move as a body to help them along in this process.”

James Heyboer, Classis Grandville, wanted clarification, asking, “Will a church currently in this category of protest have an opportunity to present their letter or have a conversation before being put into this disciplinary process?” Nederveld said that the first conversation is the beginning of the process.

Paul Verhoef, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, spoke against the action of discipline, recognizing that some of the communications were created carefully with whole congregations, and others might have been made only by the council without congregational input. He said he thinks “people will be so surprised” when they learn that their “entire council is in discipline.”

The recommendation passed 129-54, with three abstentions. There were 12 registered negative votes.

—Kristen Parker

Synod 2024 instructed Calvin University’s board of trustees to “define the differences in Calvin’s use of ‘confessional difficulties’ in relation to the decisions of synod concerning gravamen” and to develop “language and processes in alignment” with those in the Christian Reformed Church in order to “build trust in its relationships with CRC churches.”

Earlier, Synod 2024 affirmed that “confessional-difficulty gravamina are not meant, nor should be used as an exception to the confessions” for church officebearers (p. 18).

The instruction to Calvin’s board came in response to what the committee report called a “breakdown of trust” between the university and some church members, especially concerning agreement on the definition of “unchastity.” Synod 2022 included homosexual sex among a list of behaviors that are “unchaste” and in violation of the seventh commandment. A request to Synod 2024 from Classis Minnkota asked that synod “not allow Calvin University faculty to take exceptions to the Covenant for Faculty Members,” a document similar but not identical to the CRC’s Covenant for Officebearers that lays out confessional commitments for members of the university faculty.

In response to the overture, synod noted Calvin’s “efforts to be faithful to the Reformed confessions in the context of academic inquiry” and asked Calvin’s board to report to Synod 2025 on its progress in aligning its “language and processes” with those in the CRC.

Synod 2024 also looked at a deferred request to Synod 2023 from Classis Heartland that wanted the CRC to withhold funding from the university “until faculty and staff adhere to CRCNA covenantal standards.” Synod 2024 declined to do that.

Decisions regarding the university’s process for accepting faculty’s confessional difficulties were deferred from



We are grateful for (Calvin University’s) commitment to walking in step ... with the denomination’s confessions.”

—Chris deWinter,
Classis B.C. South-East

Synod 2023. That synod’s advisory committee report on the matter was sent as a communication to Synod 2024. It recommended that “synod allow Calvin University to continue their current course of action with respect to their faculty taking exceptions to their Covenant for Faculty, while encouraging Calvin University to diligently oversee alignment with our (the CRC’s) confessional standards.”

A number of Calvin University faculty filed confessional-difficulty gravamina following Synod 2022’s ruling of confessional status for the denomination’s position that homosexual sex is sin.

Chris deWinter, Classis B.C. South-East, committee chair, commended Calvin University provost Noah Toly and interim president Greg Elzinga and spoke favorably of the university itself. “We are grateful for their commitment to walking ‘in step’—and that is their word—with the denomination’s confessions,” deWinter said.

—Grace Buller

Celebrating 25 New Candidates for Ministry Amid 'Pastoral Leadership Shortage'



Before introducing 25 new candidates for ministry of the Word, director of Candidacy Susan LaClear spoke frankly to Synod 2024 about realities in leadership preparation and what she would like to see from the denomination.

LaClear told synod that the Christian Reformed Church in North America, like many other denominations, is facing a "pastoral leadership shortage." Among the causes for the decline, she said, are fears about financial burdens, potential disruption of relocating for ministry, and even a perceived lack of support for theological education and negativity within the denomination.

Highlighting solutions to many of the practical concerns, LaClear encouraged interested seminarians to be aware of "the amazing financial support from our classes and our church," reminded people about the opportunities to study remotely, and drew attention to how some classes "have gotten creative and strategic in their training efforts" for new pastors.

LaClear specifically mentioned Classis Red Mesa's leadership training and mentorship program, which equips Navajo and Zuni church leaders in their

Six of the newly welcomed candidates for ministry with Candidacy director Susan LaClear (at podium).

contexts. "Classis Red Mesa now has most of their pulpits filled," said LaClear.

LaClear also spoke of how people within churches play an important role in raising up candidates for ministry. She mentioned that women candidates often don't receive "the same level of affirmation" as male candidates and that there is a lack of "African American leaders coming through the candidacy pathway. ... In my conversations with leaders in this demographic," LaClear said, "I have heard of challenging and triggering experiences they've faced in the last few years."

According to LaClear, some who might be interested in ministry might be discouraged from pursuing theological education because of messages they have received comparing the requirements for candidacy as "hoops to jump through," implying that theological education is an "unreasonable expectation." Others are put off from pursuing a career in ministry by "broken trust" within the denomination. "Emerging leaders are watching our attitudes and behaviors," said LaClear. "It's confusing and discouraging to them."

After LaClear's address, 14 candidates entered synod's meeting place in Calvin University's chapel to standing applause while the other candidates participated virtually. LaClear called for thanks to



Synod participants pray with candidate Melissa Burmaster.

those "who have played a role in encouraging and confirming their call." Several delegates stood during the applause that followed.

Members of the Candidacy Committee—Lora Copley, Classis Northcentral Iowa; Andy Sytsma, Classis Yellowstone; Henry Kranenburg, Classis Alberta North; and Zachary King, general secretary of the CRCNA—led the body in a litany based on passages from 2 Timothy and Ephesians.

Seminary president Jul Medenblik addressed the candidates: "Even though there are times of anxiety and uncertainty, you are invited to participate in the joy of ministry that is not dependent on circumstances."

The presentation of candidates concluded with a prayer from Derek Buikema, synod president, the singing of "The Cause of Christ," and a blessing from Numbers 6:24-26.

One candidate, Patrick Y. Lin, was attending synod as an ethnic adviser. Lin plans to continue ministry at Golden Gate CRC in San Francisco, Calif., where he serves as a commissioned pastor, but he is open to a call elsewhere as God leads.

—Grace Buller

See all the candidates, plus a message from LaClear, on page 43.

Church Order Now References CRC Code of Conduct

Synod 2024 adopted an addition to Church Order, proposed by Synod 2023, stating that all officebearers shall “uphold the standards of behavior” of the Christian Reformed Church’s Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders—a document approved by Synod 2023 after being originally proposed in a set of recommendations from Synod 2019.

The Code of Conduct, which received feedback from churches and classes before being approved last year, applies to officebearers (pastors, elders, and deacons), CRC staff members, and members of the Council of Delegates, but local councils are encouraged to use it for all church staff and volunteers “who are providing leadership in the church as ministry leaders.”

Church Order is a record of guidelines that Christian Reformed congregations have covenanted together to keep. Articles may only be changed by the proposal of one synod and adoption by a subsequent synod.

Discussing the proposed inclusion, Rob Braun, Classis Lake Superior, said he “never quite understood why we’re doing a code of conduct” when the denomination already has “several layers of accountability,” such as the Covenant for Officebearers, the Church Order, the Scriptures, and the Judicial Code.

Peter Jonker, Classis Grand Rapids South, chair of the committee bringing the recommendation, said the purpose of the code is to “make explicit what we already know.”

Karen Bastian, Classis Eastern Canada, said the code of conduct was important because it could apply to ministry leaders who don’t sign the Covenant for Officebearers, such as nursery attendants and Sunday school teachers. “I think it’s important that we have a code of conduct so that ... when we represent the church we understand how to behave.”

The motion carried after a close voice vote with two negative votes registered.

—Grace Buller

Synod Leaves Pension Decisions to Trustees, Suggests Financial Education for Pastors

Synod 2024 discussed pastors’ pensions with some conversation around inflation and whether retired pastors are adequately supported by the current Canadian and American plans.

The discussions stemmed from two overtures to synod to either reassess the pension salary calculation or close the pension fund to new members and create a new retirement fund.

The committee considering those requests recommended synod ask pension trustees to explore “a broader retirement benefit that may include a blend of defined contribution plans along with the defined benefit plans” instead of altering the average salary calculation or ending the ministers’ pension plans. They also approved consulting with a diverse group of U.S. and Canadian pastors, including bivocational and those recently ordained, for feedback. Additionally, synod instructed the pension board, along with the Candidacy Committee and Calvin Theological Seminary, to educate pastors and churches about both the current defined pension plan and available defined contribution options.

Ryan Schreiber, Classis Grand Rapids East, was against the recommendations. He said a volunteer minister who has other employment, “I think many ministers here are confused and wondering if they’re getting the best deal that they can with their benefits.” He said he’d like to see the pension board create a “really thorough report of different benefit suites so that ministers really have a definitive understanding of what’s going on.”

Jonathan Westra, Classis Pacific Northwest, the reporter for the committee making the recommendations, said that the committee was asking trustees, “Can we have a look at increasing wealth while maintaining security?” The committee was trying to “give the trustees a broader playing field to say ‘Come back



Adjusting for inflation is not “wealth building.”

—Maria Bowater,
Classis Kalamazoo

to next year’s synod and tell us what you came up with,” Westra added.

Maria Bowater, Classis Kalamazoo, said, “I’m hearing this language of ‘wealth building’ versus ‘security.’ Adjusting for inflation is not ‘wealth building.’ ... My concern is that we’re emphasizing educating our ministers that they should be investing in other ways for wealth building,” but “our churches believe our pension is building security for pastors.”

David Salverda, Classis Toronto, wanted synod to remember the potential financial burden on small churches. “I’d hate for the pension plan to be a reason to not keep the doors open,” he said.

According to the Rules for Synodical Procedure, synod may not enact direct changes to the pension plans but must “defer action ... that involve(s) substantive matters concerning the denomination’s retirement plans until advised by the U.S. and Canadian pension trustees.” (*Acts of Synod 2004*, pp. 623-24)

—Kristen Parker

Global Vision: Strengthening Relationships With Churches Outside North America

Delegates to Synod 2024 unanimously approved recommendations aimed at strengthening relationships between the Christian Reformed Church in North America and churches outside North America, adopting the Global Vision Team report from the Council of Delegates (the church's ecclesiastical board that works on behalf of synod in between meetings of synod).

A vision implementation team will work long-term on “the possibility of developing an ecclesiastical body that would be the global CRC church,” said Zachary King, CRCNA general secretary. The body would not be a “single global denomination,” but rather an opportunity for the CRCNA and its global denominational partners “to go deeper in partnership” with each other, King said.

More immediately, according to the approved recommendations, the team would focus on making an “inventory of resources” for churches and classes considering affiliations from worldwide churches.

“What we're doing immediately is working with the classes themselves so they can dive deeper into the relationships they're already having with churches outside of North America,” King said.

The team will give an update of its progress at the Council of Delegates' winter meeting.

Synod also voted to encourage classes “to continue developing their own connections to international churches” using the adopted Global Vision Team report as a guide.

CRCNA classes and churches have developed relationships with a number of congregations outside North America. Peace Christian Reformed Church of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Gate of Testimony Church of Gbarnga, Liberia, for instance, established a relationship as “sister churches” in March 2023; they have shared two online worship services.



“If we are open to holding our hopes, dreams, and aspirations loosely ... and perhaps being willing to die and give up our lives, God can grow new life in those seeds he is planting in us.”

—Zachary King, general secretary of the CRCNA

Gate of Testimony Church's home denomination, the Christian Reformed Church of Liberia, was approved earlier in the synod session as the CRCNA's latest “church in cooperation.” The “church in cooperation” status indicates a “stage of exploration for a closer relationship, or with which there is a memorandum of understanding or some other form of partnership,” according to the CRCNA's ecumenical charter.

In his annual address to synod on the state of the church, King named the development of the Global Vision Team as one of the hopeful seeds he sees God planting “in the congregations, classes, agencies, institutions, and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church.”

The center of Christianity has moved to the south and east of North America and Europe, King said. Though many churches are struggling economically, or persecuted, he said, “They are sending their sons and daughters to us. They want to engage, serve, and live among us. They want to be our missionaries.”

—Grace Buller and Kristen Parker

Guests From African Reformed Churches Greet Synod 2024

Along with an ecumenical visit from the Reformed Church in America, Synod 2024 heard from three siblings in Christ in related denominations in Africa—the Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria, the Reformed Church of East Africa, and the Sudanese Reformed Church in South Sudan.

Isaiah Jirapye Magaji, president of the Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria, thanked synod for its support to strengthen the church in his homeland, calling it “a labor of love.”

“Thanks to God, and thank you CRC North America (and the) leadership of the synod in making all those sacrifices, sending people, sending resources, to make sure that people like us are rescued from the hand of Islam and from the hand of idolatry and idol worship,” Magaji said.

The Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria has grown to 193 local consistories in 20 classes with about 500,000 worshippers, Jirapye Magaji said. It supports one theological school and Christian schools and healthcare facilities throughout the country, Magaji said.

Luka Ariko Ekitala, general secretary of the Reformed Church of East Africa, which has about 1,200 congregations, spoke of his denomination's work in Kenya and neighboring countries, which includes supporting schools, health care, and community development efforts.

“Sponsorship (in local schools) means we provide spiritual guidance ... at schools and into the universities. The church plays a critical role, and we are given opportunity to proselytize and also guide students and lead them to Christ,” Ekitala said.

Patrick Jok, general secretary of the Sudanese Reformed Church in South

CRC Synod Has Questions for RCA



Isaiah Jirapye Magaji, president of the Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria

Sudan, shared challenges his denomination faces in a country that has been wracked by civil war and economic hardship, and yet, he said, the church is growing there.

“When I came here last (in 2017), we had 16 congregations and three church plants and zero Christian schools,” Jok said. “Today we have 16 churches and 18 church plants. This brings the total number of our congregations to 34, and we have made a strategy of planting another 34 (churches) in the next three years. We have four Christian schools, and we have completed (constructing) 70% of the SRC’s synod office in Juba.”

Synod 2024 delegates prayed for each speaker and the churches they represent.

—Greg Chandler

Responding to a request from Classis Iakota to “reexamine the ecumenical relationship with the Reformed Church in America,” Synod 2024 voted to instruct its Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to communicate with the RCA General Secretary and the Commission on Christian Unity on several points and give a report to Synod 2025.

The request, which passed in a 135-39 vote, instructs the EIRC to communicate:

- » a “desire for shared commitment to our confessional Reformed heritage, doctrine, and practice,”
- » a “concern regarding the nature of churches” that have left the RCA as being in alignment with positions of the Christian Reformed Church,
- » a “request for clarification on the RCA’s ongoing commitment in faith and practice to Heidelberg Catechism Q&A’s 108 and 109, specifically as it relating to the forbidding of unchastity, which encompasses homosexual sex,” and
- » a request for clarification on whether RCA clergy have been or are being permitted to bless same-sex marriages or be in same-sex relationships themselves while remaining ministers in good standing.

Synod asked the EIRC to provide a recommendation by March 15, 2025, regarding the RCA’s “church in communion” status with the CRC.

Aaron Greydanus, Classis Heartland, reporter for the advisory committee that considered the request, said, “Our faithfulness as a church in communion requires encouragement toward faithful statements and faithful practices related to our common Reformed confession.”

Chris DeVos, Classis Holland, opposed the directive. “I think that the timeline is way too tight for denominations to have conversations about their confessional standards,” he said.



Laura Osborne, a minister in the Reformed Church in America and the RCA’s coordinator of interreligious relations, was an ecumenical guest of Synod 2024.

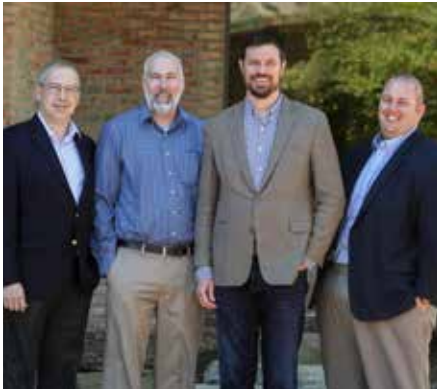
Synod approved only two of the committee’s three recommendations after synod’s presiding officer found that a recommendation to “pause the new acceptance of ordained ministers (from the RCA) through Church Order Article 8B” was out of order. A synod can’t make part of the Church Order inoperative, even temporarily, without proposing the change to a subsequent synod.

Laura Osborne, a minister in the Reformed Church in America and the RCA’s coordinator of interreligious relations, was an ecumenical guest of Synod 2024. In her greetings to the body and as part of the discussion on the instructions to the EIRC, Osborne clarified that the RCA’s articulated position on same-sex marriage has not changed, and the RCA’s polity giving classes the responsibility of ordination of ministers has not changed.

“We have our historical stance that marriage is between one man and one woman,” Osborne said. “Many of our classes still will not ordain or solemnize same-sex marriages,” but “some will.”

—Greg Chandler

Four Pastors Serve as Officers of Synod 2024



The officers of Synod 2024 were (from left) Stephen Terpstra, Josh Christoffels, Derek Buikema, and Dan De Graff.

The officers of Synod 2024 had the distinction, for only the second time, of having been elected to their positions ahead of synod's in-person meeting in a video conference convening May 29. Derek Buikema, pastor of Orland Park (Ill.) Christian Reformed Church, served as president. He served synod as vice president in 2022. Stephen Terpstra, a pastor at Borculo CRC in Zeeland, Mich., served as vice president and as synod's organist for the week. Joshua Christoffels, pastor at Hammond (Ind.) CRC, and Daniel De Graff, pastor of Baldwin (Wis.) CRC, served as synod's two clerks.

The four now make up the program committee for the next synod, scheduled for June 13-19, 2025, in Ancaster, Ont.

Can Multisite Churches Fit in CRC Polity?

Responding to a request from Classis Chicago South, Synod 2024 appointed a task force to study multisite churches with a mandate to research current iterations of these churches and report back to Synod 2026.

The task force is to provide direction, advice, and guidance on selecting models for multi-campus churches that best align with Reformed theology and polity, as well as advising against models deemed unsuitable for Reformed churches. Synod also asked for a road map for churches interested in becoming multisite campuses or incorporating campuses into their structure. The task force is also invited to make recommendations for changes to Church Order or its supplements to clarify and support the proper functioning of multisite churches.

Erik Pluemer, Classis Southeast U.S., spoke in favor of the report, seeing the possibility for mission. "This may be a different avenue for church planting," Pluemer said.

Todd Ritzema, Classis Grand Rapids North, was against the recommendation because "church, by its nature, is a gathering, and a multisite church does not gather"—at least not as one body. He also was concerned that this wasn't the best use of denominational funds. Patrick Anthony, Classis Central California, echoed Ritzema's understanding of church as a gathering and said the idea of multisite churches "doesn't seem like it fits with Reformed theology at all."

Aaron Greydanus, Classis Heartland, the reporter for the committee proposing the task force, said the goal is to look at



Multisite churches "may be a different avenue for church planting."

**—Erik Pluemer,
Classis Southeast U.S.**

existing models and to make recommendations. Committee member Mark Vande Zande, Classis Zeeland, suggested financial costs could be limited by having the task force meet via Zoom.

Classis Chicago South, which sent the original request, said it would "like to see a process developed to allow for churches to move forward without multi-year exploration processes" on how the concept could fit in their frameworks.

Gavin Schaefer, a young adult representative attending his second synod, said, "I love this idea" because "it gives opportunity to revitalize churches in the CRC who are struggling and bring new life to them." He commented on how there is a pastoral shortage, and this is an opportunity to "raise up more leaders."

The task force is to include "at least two pastors from multisite congregations, at least one biblical or systematic Reformed theologian, a Church Order expert, and a young adult representative."

Including the two-campus church from Chicago South, there are eight multisite congregations comprising 23 sites, according to CRCNA yearbook data.

—Kristen Parker

'Our Journey' Continues, With a Review

Synod 2024 voted to extend the Christian Reformed Church's Our Journey 2025 ministry plan to 2030 "with the appropriate evaluation and updated communication strategy."

That includes instructing the Council of Delegates to "review the wording and intent of pillar (milestone) three—Grow in Diversity—and (its) underlying materials." There have been "concerns that the emphasis of the pillar should be on the virtue of hospitality rather than the fulfillment of ethnic quotas."

Our Journey 2025 was developed during 2018 and 2019 and approved by the Council of Delegates in June 2020. Its implementation was delayed due to COVID-19. Synod decided not to develop an entirely new ministry plan, concluding that Our Journey 2025 is still suitable. "Staff time would better be spent evaluating and strengthening the current ministry plan," synod said.

JP Trabbold was one of Synod 2024's ethnic advisers, a role intended to ensure voices from multiple cultures within the CRC are present at synod.

With support from fellow ethnic adviser Patrick Lin, Trabbold, a commissioned pastor in Ripon, Calif., said while this milestone is called "Grow in Diversity," he is "afraid this is working against the very nature of our diversity." He said we should "stop showing ethnic partiality" because it "hinders the work of the spirit."

Milestone three reads: "Grow in diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome, sharing our faith as we build relationships with and honor the cultures of our neighbors and newcomers."

The Council of Delegates will report back to Synod 2025 with its review of the wording and intent of the "Grow in Diversity" milestone.

—Kristen Parker



Commissioned pastor JP Trabbold served as an adviser on the committee recommending review of the "Grow in Diversity" milestone.

Presentations from Consejo Latino and Korean Ministers' Association



Young adult representative Samantha Sebastia addresses the Synod 2024 banquet attendees.

Two of the Christian Reformed Church's cultural ministry networks—Consejo Latino and the Korean Ministers' Association—shared some history and milestones at the Synod 2024 banquet.

Jose Rayas, Classis Arizona, described Consejo Latino, which was formed following Synod 2012, as an organization centered on

connecting "the needs of the (Hispanic) ethnic community with the gospel mission of the denomination."

The organization offers training to Hispanic church leaders and maintains connections with Reformed churches in Latin America. It has helped some churches in Venezuela to come into fellowship with the CRCNA and will advise churches looking at starting ministries with Hispanic people.

"The Consejo Latino is at your service," said Rayas.

Rayas invited young adult representative Samantha Sebastia, whom he called part of the next generation of Latino leadership, to address synod following his remarks. Sebastia said she was grateful for the organization that has helped Latino CRC congregations "adhere to Reformed theology."

Earlier, Synod 2024 voted to recognize the work of Consejo Latino and encourage Resonate Global Mission to work with Consejo on its report to Synod 2025. Some delegates worried about the group reporting through Resonate. Kevin DeRaaf, Resonate's director, suggested that "the appropriate response would be to send this to the Office of General Secretary for discernment" because Consejo Latino works with many CRCNA agencies, not just Resonate.

Edward Yoon, stated clerk of Classis Hanmi, spoke to delegates about the Korean Ministers' Association. Formed in April 2024, it replaced the Korean Council established in 1984. Yoon said about 60 Korean churches belong to one of two Korean classes or nearby English-speaking classes.

—Grace Buller

Worship, Workshops, and More

Every synod includes events outside of the advisory committee meetings and plenary sessions, and despite its heavy agenda, Synod 2024 was no exception.

Elaine May, Lesli van Milligen, and Amanda Benckhuysen, all ordained ministers of the Word who work with Thrive, hosted the annual women's dinner Friday evening.



Elaine May, Thrive, hosted a presentation on the Gather initiative.

Greg Elzinga, interim president of Calvin University, and Jul Medenblik, president of Calvin Theological Seminary, co-hosted the annual President's Picnic Saturday evening. Traditionally hosted on Calvin University's Commons lawn, for the past two years it's been indoors at Prince Conference Center's Great Hall. Elzinga called it the "fanciest picnic" he's attended.

Al Postma, executive director, Canada, for the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and Greta Luimes, chair of the Canada Ministry Board, hosted a presentation on ministry in Canada on Sunday afternoon.



Women attending Synod 2024 enjoy food and fellowship at the annual women's dinner.

Later on Sunday, Elaine May, a project director for Thrive, hosted a presentation on the denomination's Gather initiative, an effort to hear from classes about where God is renewing the church.

Lee Street CRC in Wyoming, Mich., welcomed Synod 2024 and its guests to its Sunday evening worship service. Children from the congregation prayed, and afterwards church members shared lemonade and treats on the lawn.



Greta Luimes, chair of the Canada Ministry Board of the CRCNA, and Al Postma, executive director, Canada

Intercessors at Synod

Thirty intercessors—Christian Reformed members committed to patient, listening, confidential prayer—attended Synod 2024, an expansion of the prayer support from recent years.

Jodi Gillmore, a prayer coordinator with Classis Holland, volunteered to care for the synod intercessory team. She said intercessors had designated seats in the gallery of the Calvin University chapel when synod was in session and otherwise roamed campus, open to praying as God directed.

Gillmore was an elder delegate to Synod 2023.

"It was important to me that the people coming (to pray) have gifts of knowledge, wisdom, and even prophecy—to be able to hear from God and speak that—and to be indifferent in their prayers," Gillmore said. "It's easy to pray with an agenda, but that's not what we're doing. We are praying God's will be done. We need people who are taking the time and the space so they can hear God. As a delegate, there is not always space for that."

Gillmore said she recruited volunteers from other classes with prayer coordinators, from people who registered for pre-synod prayer, and from connections through other prayer ministries. People from 13 classes were involved.

Eileen Christofferson, an intercessor from Classis Rocky Mountain, wasn't one of Gillmore's recruits but readily joined the prayer culture of synod and was welcomed into the team.

Christofferson's classis funded her trip to synod from Boulder, Colo., repeating an action it took 30 years ago.

"I had been praying for my council and classis," Christofferson said, and "built rapport and a good reputation as a woman of prayer. ... When there got to be so much trouble at synod," she asked to be sent as an intercessor in 1994, when disputes at synod were over women

Young Adult Representatives Invested in the Direction of the Denomination



Jodi Gillmore, left, and Eileen Christofferson were two of 30 intercessors at Synod 2024.

serving in church office. “This year I felt called to go again,” Christofferson said. “I see the denomination really struggling with wisdom and knowing the right thing to do.”

Christofferson arrived with the rest of the prayer team June 11, a couple of days before most delegates arrived. Throughout the days when advisory committees were meeting, she would join the plenary session worship at 8 a.m. and then talk with other intercessors about where to go and pray. “There’ve been a couple of committees with teary-eyed people,” Christofferson said. She said she would sit outside, near where those committees were meeting, “and just pray—to bless them and that they would come to a conclusion that is pleasing to God.”

—Alissa Vernon

Seven young adult representatives to the Christian Reformed Church in North America’s Synod 2024 said they came to learn. They’re also engaged and interested in the direction of the denomination.

Three of this year’s young adult representatives (18- to 26-year-olds nominated by church councils or pastors and appointed by the Council of Delegates), also attended Synod 2023. Samantha Sebastia and Gavin Schaefer were young adult representatives that year, and Lain Martinez Vasquez was an observer. Iain Monroe, Verity Johnston, Eric Katerberg, and Ireland Bosworth attended synod for the first time in 2024.

Schaefer, who is pursuing a vocation as minister of the Word, came because he wants to “help other young adults fit in with the main hub of our denomination and help them understand what has been going on.”

Martinez Vasquez said she hoped attending synod would help her “learn more about and gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the CRC as a whole.” She had also sent a communication to synod expressing concern “about how the CRCNA has made its recent decisions regarding human sexuality and their impact” on those in the denomination who, like Martinez Vasquez, are part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Monroe, from Sioux Center, Iowa, attended alongside his father, Kurt Monroe, a minister delegate. He said he “felt it my duty to serve the denomination and the Lord by bringing an orthodox, biblical voice to a synod which has been increasingly dominated by the zeitgeist of worldly religion.”

Sebastia is originally from Puerto Ordaz, Venezuela, and has called Katy, Texas, home for almost 10 years.

“I feel the passion God has placed in my heart, the wisdom, and the Holy Spirit’s guidance in me,” said Sebastia, who creates Spanish-language Christian content for TikTok and Instagram.



Synod 2024 Young Adult Representatives (from left) Lain Martinez Vasquez, Ireland Bosworth, Verity Johnston, Eric Katerberg, Iain Monroe, and Gavin Schaefer (not pictured: Samantha Sebastia)

Many of the representatives spoke positively about their experience at synod.

“It has been helpful to understand more of the context and processes” of the denomination, Johnston said, “and to have the opportunity to hear the thoughts and heart behind each person’s perspective.”

“We have been welcomed into the discussions, and it has really felt like our voices have been heard,” said Katerberg, who attends Palmerston (Ont.) CRC.

To those who might be interested in serving as a young adult representative, Bosworth, who attends Tacoma (Wash.) Christian Reformed Community Church, says, “Being part of synod is very serious. These are big decisions that will ultimately impact every congregation.” However, she encourages those who feel called and are selected to go.

“God will use you in ways you never considered,” Bosworth. “Also, your voice very much matters, so don’t be afraid to express your opinions.”

—Grace Buller

Glimpses of Worship



The worship theme of Synod 2024, facilitated by staff from the Christian Reformed Church's Thrive ministry, was God With Us. Throughout each day with prayers, Scripture, hymns, and worship songs, CRC leaders centered the assembly on that truth.



Singers from Lee Street CRC joined synod in worship June 13.

In an early plenary session Buikema asked each classis to indicate a prayer representative on whom vice president Stephen Terpstra could call to offer prayer at various points of the meeting.



Steve DeVries of Lee Street CRC preached at synod's opening worship session.

Synod was bookended with sermons—the opening one by Steve De Vries, a pastor of Synod 2024's convening congregation, Lee Street CRC in Wyoming, Mich., and the closing one by Synod 2024 president Derek Buikema.



Delegates Aaron Thompson and David Salverda shared their musical gifts in worship.



Emphasizing the spiritual aspects of synod was a passion of former synodical services director Scott DeVries, who only served one synod in that role. He was appointed in November 2022 and died earlier this year from cancer, only a few weeks after diagnosis. DeVries was mentioned often by his colleagues during Synod 2024.



General secretary Zachary King said DeVries saw in the CRC "an imperfect people prayerfully grasping and wrestling with God's Spirit in a time of great upheaval."

Synod passed a resolution to convey appreciation and encouragement to DeVries' family: "Scott DeVries served the CRCNA faithfully ... The confidence of God's people in his leadership was publicly affirmed often during the different opportunities of service he accepted."

—Alissa Vernon and Kristen Parker

Farewell From Grand Rapids East Delegate

Trish Borgdorff, Classis Grand Rapids East, was granted the floor to share a farewell with the denomination just before the close of Synod 2024.

Derek Buikema, synod president, said that Borgdorff sent her farewell words to him and she allowed him to make a few edits. Buikema said he wanted to allow Borgdorff the privilege of the floor because “some people are going to need to say farewell,” and he wanted to “acknowledge this reality.”

Borgdorff is an elder in Classis Grand Rapids East, which has several congregations in protest of Synod 2022’s confessional decision on unchastity (Communication 26, *Agenda for Synod 2024*).

Borgdorff is a member of Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. The church has a public statement that says, “Everyone is welcome here. Whatever your age, sex, race, abilities, economic status, sexual orientation, or gender identity, you are invited to participate fully in our Jesus-following community of faith.” Eastern Avenue has been a Christian Reformed congregation for almost 150 years.

Borgdorff began her remarks, which she said she wrote earlier in the week, by observing that the denomination is excited to welcome new church plants, but added, “How we leave is also important to consider.”

It is “our desire to further his kingdom, and somehow we see it all very differently,” Borgdorff said, noting, “I don’t come to you with a spirit of ‘us vs. them.’”

“Today there is sadness, but there is also peace and hope,” Borgdorff said. “We believe that God’s church is bigger than any denomination, and his call extends beyond the boundaries of the CRC. We will remain faithful to God’s call on our community, trusting in his guidance and provision.”

—Kristen Parker



Trish Borgdorff, daughter of past CRCNA executive director Peter Borgdorff, described the CRC as “our home in the truest sense of the word.”

Buikema's Closing Message: 'Be Gentle'



In the closing worship service of Synod 2024, president Derek Buikema urged delegates to be gentle with one another and with those they might encounter who have strong opinions on the actions taken during synod.

At several points, Buikema emphasized, “Gentleness is strong.”

“Gentleness is strong.”
—Derek Buikema,
president of Synod 2024

“I recognize that as we go from here, there’s going to be a major temptation to fight in all manner of ways, to engage in kind of the bad fight of acrimony or even slander of other people, when you talk about synod or when you talk about individuals,” Buikema said at the beginning of his message.

“I want to encourage us to leave and fight the good fight—something that rejects all of that.”

Buikema quoted from 1 Timothy 6:11-12, where the apostle Paul urges the pursuit of “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness.”

“The good fight in which we engage is not a fight against other churches, or peoples, or denominations,” Buikema said. He implied instead it’s a deeper, spiritual fight. He referenced the story from 1 Samuel 16:23, where a young David faces an evil spirit that is troubling King Saul and plays the lyre to comfort the king and cause the spirit to leave.

“When you’re fighting a big fight, when you’re fighting the big guns, you have to break out the big weapons. The sword of a giant is not enough,” Buikema said. “When you’re engaged in a fight like that, all you can do is sing—play and sing.”

Also in the closing worship, Kevin DeRaaf, executive director of Resonate Global Mission, led delegates in prayer using Philippians 4 as a guide.

“Our hearts are grieved with the weight of our ongoing disagreements and divisions. We long to follow you fully and faithfully, yet we recognize that we do not agree on what that looks like. We lament the pain and the brokenness we share as your body of Christ,” DeRaaf said, pausing after each sentence to allow for silence and silent prayer.

—Greg Chandler

Other Actions of Synod 2024

Some items in the Agenda for Synod 2024 passed with little to no discussion. Here are those things that synod **did** or **didn't** do.

Synod 2024:

- » thanked William T. Koopmans, James Joosse, and Ruth Hofman for serving the cause of ecumenicity for the Christian Reformed Church and reappointed Joy Engelsman to a second three-year term on the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, one of three standing committees of synod
- » noted the EIRC's progress report about the relationship with the Alliance of Reformed Churches as a church in cooperation with a view toward its transitioning to the status of church in communion in the future
- » commended the work of the Candidacy Committee, encouraged councils and ministry leadership teams of all classes to identify potential leaders, and instructed Candidacy to "explore the development of more consistent approaches to contextual individualized learning plans for commissioned pastors"
- » approved an addition to Church Order Article 24 requiring commissioned pastors who were released from office to receive approval from their previous classis to seek re-examination
- » adopted changes to Church Order Articles 14, 15, and 23 and their supplements in support of bivocational pastors, as proposed by Synod 2023
- » adopted and recommended to Synod 2025 over 100 pages of proposed changes to Church Order Articles 8, 12-13, 14-17, and 42 and their supplements (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 63-166)
- » expressed gratitude to Edward Bosveld, Cindy de Jong, and Kim Rhodes for their years of service on the Judicial Code Committee
- » received the report of the Judicial Code Review Team and adopted the seven recommended changes to Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c, Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures
- » approved Jack Beeksma and Adam Ramirez, previously appointed as interim board members by the Council of Delegates, as members of Calvin University's board of trustees
- » regarding Communication 5, instructed Classis Holland to meet with one of its member churches, Church of the Savior of South Bend, Ind., to discuss a confessional-revision gravamen submitted by a church member
- » received for information Communication 7 from members of Fourteenth Street CRC of Holland, Mich., and Communication 9 from that congregation's council
- » thanked Lain Martinez Vasquez "for the pastoral heart displayed in Communication 10," which was received for information
- » recognized Communication 11 from a young member of River Park CRC in Calgary, Alta., "celebrating the author's courage in its creation and the thoughtfulness in its expression"
- » commended the work of World Renew, ReFrame, and Resonate Global Mission and recognized ReFrame's 85th anniversary
- » noted the six years of observance of the Day of Justice, which will no longer be observed with denominational resources in that form
- » received for information the report on CRCNA statements on social, economic, or political matters



William Koopmans, outgoing chair of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, talks with Luka Arikoto, general secretary of the Reformed Church of East Africa, at Synod 2024.

- » acknowledged and thanked former Centre for Public Dialogue director Mike Hogeterp for his 21 years of service to the ministry of CPD
- » commended codirectors Lesli van Milligen and Chris Schoon for their work leading Thrive, received their report for information, and recognized the 30th anniversary of the work of Safe Church, now part of Thrive
- » received for information the Indigenous Ministry (Canada) report and thanked Adrian Jacobs for his ongoing work as the senior leader for Indigenous justice and reconciliation (Canada)
- » in response to Overtures 8 and 9, lamented that "racism continues to be present in our world" and encouraged churches to continue to engage in racial reconciliation, including the use of the 1996 synodical report "God's Diverse and Unified Family" and the recently developed Hearts Exchanged program



Greg Elzinga, interim president of Calvin University, welcomed Synod 2024 to Calvin's campus.

- » received a presentation from Jul Medenblik, president of Calvin Theological Seminary, and learned the seminary is “a global community of faith” with students from 28 countries
- » received a greeting and welcome from Calvin University’s interim president, Gregory Elzinga
- » received reports from and commended the work of Calvin University, Dordt University, Institute for Christian Studies, The King’s University, Trinity Christian College, Kuyper College, and Redeemer University
- » heard five appeals in closed session and publicly read the results of four of them: in the appeal of a member of Grace CRC against Classis Grand Rapids East, synod sustained the appeal, and in the appeal of Moline CRC against Classis Grand Rapids South, synod did not sustain the appeal; additionally, synod did not sustain the appeal of Granum (Alta.) CRC and Covenant CRC in Calgary, Alta., against Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan or the appeal of Trinity CRC in Fremont, Mich., against Classis Muskegon.



Jul Medenblik, president of Calvin Theological Seminary, gave a presentation to Synod 2024.

Synod 2024 did *not*:

- » accede to the request of Overture 1 to designate the role of the Council of Delegates as “administrative and advisory only” in the nomination process of its members
- » approve a request for an apology to a Council of Delegates nominee over previous interpretations of the guidelines
- » establish a conflict of interest policy for delegates to synod, saying “a simple adaptation of the COD Conflict of Interest Policy is not possible” because “the potential conflicts of interest for synodical delegates and COD delegates are considerably different”
- » introduce elections for synod parliamentarians, leaving the selection of this annual functionary to the synodical program committee
- » accede to two requests to “shepherd congregations into another denomination” or “shape a gentle pathway for those departing the CRCNA,” saying that Thrive already offers support for disaffiliating churches

- » accede to a request to “enable listening to facilitate discernment” (Overture 69, deferred from 2023), saying office-bearers “are already permitted to collaborate with others on a confessional-revision gravamina”
- » appoint a committee to explore the need for a CRCNA licensing board for CRCNA pastors
- » accede to a request to restore a footnoted portion of the Belgic Confession to the main text because the footnoted section of Article 36, created by Synod 1958, “is still available in denominationally provided resources for discussion if churches or individuals want to use it” and “a change to a confession requires a high bar and substantial effort”
- » solicit resources for LGBTQ ministry from the churches, noting Thrive already has resources available
- » suspend the work of the Dignity Team, the mandate for which should come to Synod 2025 for approval
- » appoint a task force to review the Covenant for Officebearers, as requested by Classis Eastern Canada

—Alissa Vernon

CRC Chaplain Co-organizes Spiritual Care Conference



Christian Reformed chaplains Alida van Dijk, Tim De Jonge, Femke Visser-Elenbaas, and Jolene Veenstra all attended the CASC/ACSS National Conference in London, Ont.

Alida van Dijk, an endorsed chaplain of the Christian Reformed Church and the chair of the educational standards commission of the Canadian Association for Spiritual Care/ Association canadienne de soins spirituels, co-chaired the association's annual conference in April. Co-led by Dale Nikkel, the conference attracted about 200 participants and 60 volunteers.

Calvin University Settles Legal Matter With Former President

Calvin University's Board of Trustees and its former president Wiebe Boer and his wife, Joanna Boer, issued a joint statement June 13 announcing they have settled the legal matter between them. According to the joint statement, "The parties are grateful for God's grace and wish each other well."

In February, Boer resigned from his position amid allegations of "concerning and inappropriate" conduct. In April, he and Joanna Boer filed a lawsuit against Calvin University alleging breach of contract and defamation.

Calvin University was founded by the Christian Reformed Church in North America in 1876. Its board membership, which has full discretion to govern the school according to its bylaws, is approved by the CRCNA synod.

Glory Girls: 5K Training and Bible-based Character Building

The Glory Girls Run Club at Kalamazoo (Mich.) Christian School ran its third 5K event May 17, closing off another season for the program that combines training with a Bible-based character-building curriculum for girls in third through fifth grade.

Wes Gunst, a parent who attends Third Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, said the program positively affected his daughters when they were in fifth grade in 2023. Gunst has volunteered at all three year-end running events.

"The club was started by a group of moms at the school who wanted to continue a 'Girls on the Run'-type of program but taught from a Christian perspective," Gunst said.

"We wanted to find encouraging ways to help young girls grow in their confidence, establish healthy habits, and enjoy running," said Kendra Muller, one of four women who founded the club.

Co-founder Amanda Deters said the team wanted to lean on the benefits of running to "improve body image, increase self-worth, improve mood, and decrease stress."

And co-founder Jill Kirshman said, "We believe that things like mental toughness, perseverance, and teamwork translate to many aspects of life outside of running. It is our hope these skills stick with each girl as they grow older."

Glory Girls began in 2022 with 60-70 girls participating each year. Teams of 15-20 girls meet after school twice a week for eight weeks. They're supported by parents and grandparents who "step up as coaches, helpers, snack providers, and 5K coordinators," Kirshman said.

Kathryn Bouman, the fourth parent involved in creating the curriculum, said they designed it "to help the girls achieve a 5K while teaching values that align with their faith." Each lesson starts with prayer and a devotional, "and the workout incorporates the theme to help the girls apply and remember what they learned." This year's theme was "Perfect Peace": "You will keep in perfect peace whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you" (Isa. 26:3).

—Alissa Vernon



Glory Girls Run Club participants and their supporters begin Kalamazoo Christian School's 2024 5K May 17.

Photo by Daniel J Cooke

Senior Leader for Intercultural Ministry Leaving Role



Pablo Kim Sun

Pablo Kim Sun, the first senior leader for intercultural ministry for the Canadian ministry board of the Christian Reformed Church, is stepping down and transitioning to a new role with the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Kim Sun's last day with the CRC is July 31, and he will begin working with the PCC

as intercultural liaison Aug. 1. Kim Sun said the new role is "similar in nature" to the CRC position and is an executive-level position that is a "next-level challenge for me."

"My work is to discern how we can make sure that whatever background—cultural, ethnic, racial—you're coming from, we create a place of belonging for everyone," he said, adding that his experience with the CRC has been filled with joy, gratitude, and some challenges. He also noted the importance of including antiracism teaching alongside the goal of diversity. "By focusing on diversity, you can create a diverse community of welcoming, but it won't lead to a diverse community of belonging."

Kim Sun has served for three years in the intercultural role, originally called "senior leader for anti-racism and intercultural conciliation." He also has been involved in forming the Decolonization and Antiracism Collective, a national advisory committee that worked closely with him to "listen, plan, discern, and execute projects to help the denomination be a more healthy intercultural community," he said. The Canadian Ministry Board has approved terms of reference for the collective's ongoing work, helping to ensure the group continues past Kim Sun's tenure.

Al Postma, the CRC's executive director, Canada, said, "I'm personally grateful for Pablo's work with the Christian Reformed Church these last three years and have experienced him as a wise colleague and mentor. I look forward to ensuring that the work he was doing continues with the least disruption possible."

—Kristen Parker

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. David John Weemhoff

1954-2024

Dave Weemhoff was a humble man with a ready smile and a caring and gentle spirit. He died May 2 after living with cancer for 10 months. He was 69.

After graduation from Calvin College (now University) and Calvin Theological Seminary, Dave was ordained in 1981 and served Prosper Christian Reformed Church, Falmouth, Mich.; Beaverdam CRC, Hudsonville, Mich.; John Calvin CRC, Truro, N.S.; Ellsworth (Mich.) CRC; First CRC, Sarnia, Ont.; Morrison (Ill.) CRC; Terra Ceia CRC, Pantego, N.C.; and Faith Community Church, Colton, S.D. After retiring in 2020, he and his wife moved closer to family in Tavares, Fla.

Dave had a servant's heart and always watched for ways to be the eyes, hands, and feet of Christ. Over the years he pursued many things, including prison ministry, teaching pastors in Haiti, working on CRC boards and committees, driving school buses, being a substitute teacher, serving on World Renew disaster response teams, and delivering meals to seniors.

Dave loved history and enjoyed family adventures such as camping, climbing lighthouses, exploring forts, walking beaches, and hiking mountain trails.

Dave is survived by Kathy, his wife of 48 years; four children and their spouses; and eight grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Scott A. DeVries

1976-2024

Scott DeVries had a calm demeanor and shared his strengths of patience, strategic thinking, and curiosity with the world around him. At his memorial service, two of his brothers spoke of Scott's love for others. He died April 27, five weeks after being diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer. He was 47.

"Those of us who had the privilege of conversing with Scott during his final weeks witnessed the steady courage and unswerving trust that characterized Scott throughout his illness," said Zachary King, general secretary of the CRCNA. "That courage and trust was rooted in Jesus Christ and his unshakable promises."

First earning an engineering degree from Michigan State University, Scott later graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary. Ordained in 2008, he pastored West Olive (Mich.) CRC and Bethany CRC in Holland, Mich. From 2016 to 2018, he was ministries coordinator for Classis Holland, and then he served in denominational ministry. At the end of 2022 he became director of synodical services, the position he held at the time of his death.

Scott was an avid reader and also enjoyed backpacking, fishing, camping, hiking, and skiing.

A loving husband and father, Scott is survived by his wife, Sara, and their two teenage children.

—Janet A. Greidanus



Parenting Adult Children

By Robert and Laura Keeley

Navigating a relationship with adult children can be rewarding. It is wonderful to see them grow, experience independence, and strike out on their own. But this is also a period that has some challenges. While many of the challenges are unique to this particular time in history, some challenges are literally thousands of years old.

In the third chapter of Mark's gospel, we read a passage that doesn't seem to get talked about very often. Mark wastes no time in getting to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We get no birth narrative; the first story in Mark is about John the Baptist's work. So by the time we get to chapter 3, we've already read many short passages about Jesus teaching, healing people, eating with sinners, and appointing his 12 disciples. It really is astonishing how much Mark packs into the first

few pages of his gospel. Then, in Mark 3:20, we read, "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'"

A few verses later Jesus' family shows up:

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

It's interesting that Jesus' mother shows up where people gathered to hear him with the intent of taking him home. It seems that Mary, like all of us who have adult children, was still concerned about how her son was doing.

Of course she was. Just because children hit the age of legal adulthood doesn't mean our parenting instincts automatically turn off. At the same time, they are adults, and to a certain extent our job as parents is done. So we find ourselves in a liminal space, and, as with all transitions, it can be tough on everyone as we get used to our new roles. They are still our children, but they are no longer children. How do we relate to them now?

Parenting adult children at this point in history is different from how it was for parents a number of years ago. Telecommunication and social media have made it easy to reach out

and touch base with our kids. Today's parents of young adults did not have as much easy access to their parents as today's young adults do. Because almost everyone has a cellphone, many young adults have frequent conversations (or at least texts) with their parents even if they live far away. It's hard to say whether this change has been mostly positive, giving additional support to young adults as they strike out on their own, or whether it makes young adults too dependent on parental input when making adult decisions.

Still, the goal of this stage of parenting has remained the same. We want our children to be independent, well-functioning adults who love the Lord and strive to serve God. There is no magical process that will help us get there. Some of our children will not flourish as young adults despite our best efforts, while others will do very well despite our epic failures. It's important for us to remember that God continues to be with them as they navigate this new stage of life. Nonetheless, we want to do the best we can for our children, regardless of their age.

Here are a few things we've learned from launching our own children and hearing from other parents.

Parenting adult children starts early. Anyone who has adult children knows that the personality traits you see in them as adults were present when they were much younger. Maturity happens, of course, but one can look back and see that a lot of who our children are as adults was always there. So in many ways, parenting adult children starts when the kids are quite small.

In some ways parenting is a continuous act of letting go. The difference between how closely you watch a two-year-old and a four-year-old is significant. As our children grow older, we

In many ways,
parenting adult
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expect them to be able to make more and more good decisions. Parenting adult children is the natural last step in that process. What this means is that the process of letting go should be well underway when your teens are in high school.

When one of our children was in her first year of college, she did not feel well. She called to ask if she should go to class or not. She was in the process of making the transition to being in charge of her own decisions and still desired our input. Later that year she no longer needed our input or approval to make those decisions. One couple we know was deliberate in preparing their middle school children by giving them responsibility for purchasing and washing their own clothes. Each family will come up with their own ways of helping children prepare for this important transition.

The relationships we have with our children before they are adults will inform the relationships we have with them when they are grown. You will also heavily influence their faith journeys. Children and teens learn how to be adults by watching you. How you treat your spouse is central to their

learning how to treat others, including their future significant others. How you disagree with others, how you use your money, and how you treat them as children are all important as they figure out what it means to be an adult. Model being a person whose faith and everyday life are not two disparate things but rather integrated into a whole. If they have seen you weave things about your faith into conversations—not in a preachy or artificial way, but in a way that shows that your faith affects your everyday decisions and your long-term goals—they will see that as a natural way to integrate their faith with their everyday living.

One size does not fit all. Any parent knows that you need to adjust your parenting for each child. That does not stop when they reach adulthood. Just as each child is different, the circumstances of your adult children will vary.

The daughter we described earlier who asked for advice about whether to miss class for illness has a twin brother. He never asked for that kind of input. In fact, when he was diagnosed with mononucleosis as a college student, he called and said, "I'm fine. They gave me a brochure." The differences in how these two responded illustrates how two people raised in the same environment still will have different personalities and will need different types of parental involvement as they reach adulthood.

All of these factors will make a difference in how you relate to adult children. One child might be completely independent while another might need emotional support, financial support, or help with making life decisions. Parenting a child who leaves home will be quite different from parenting a child who stays living in your house. There is no best way to approach all these differences.

Prioritize the relationship. One of the joys of parenting is when your children grow up to be interesting, bright adults who are fun to be with. But that relationship can be fraught as you navigate the transition from childhood to adulthood. They are making lots of changes in their lives, from deciding on college majors to finding a career. They might be meeting a significant other, which adds another complex layer into the whole enterprise. You can only be as much a part of their lives as they are willing to let you be, so make it easy for them to invite you in. Ask them how they are doing. Ask about things they are interested in.

Remember when you were their age? Your life was busy. You were in the early stages of your career and perhaps also in the early stages of an important relationship. Because they are caught up in their own lives, which are also in transition, there is a good chance they won't call you. It isn't because they don't care.

Be available and encouraging.

Getting the approval of our parents remains important to us even as we reach adulthood. Young adults want their parents to be proud of them. They want to know they have a place where they can turn for support, love, and encouragement. So being encouraging needs to be important to their parents.

We all know that people tend to dwell on criticism, and criticism from parents sticks with us for a long time. Things we say that might seem neutral to us might come across to our kids as a critique, and unsolicited advice might seem like code for "You should be doing better."

As one of our friends said, "We advise when we are asked. But we also know that they want our approval!" Be authentic in your encouragement. We're not suggesting that you be


dishonestly positive in your comments, but if you see your children doing well, tell them. Some of us assume our kids know that we are proud of them, but it means more to them when you say so. Because of the dynamics at play, our children cannot always hear what we are trying to tell them without interpreting it as critical.

It has been a joy for us to be the parents of adult children. Ours have all taken different paths, but they have all become people we enjoy being with. We're especially grateful that we continue to have relationships with all of them. Of all the things we've learned over the years as parents, one of the most important lessons is that even if we disagree with our children's decisions, we should prioritize the relationships. That has paid off for us.

Encourage faith. The data is pretty clear that today's young adults are not attending church as much as older generations did. Many young adults appear to love the Lord, but being part of a church congregation is more than they are willing to commit to.

All Christian parents want their children to be people of faith too, but badgering them about church attendance is probably not helpful. Very few people have benefited from being shamed into going to church. While church attendance is one indicator of the faith of a person, it is not necessarily the best indicator. Your children might well have a strong faith despite their relationship with the church. So continue to model your faith and even talk about it without scolding them for not acting on their faith in the ways you would like them to. One of our friends said that sometimes as parents they've needed to just "shut up and pray." God remains faithful even when we, or our children, are not. Prayer is the best and most effective way to bring them back to a full relationship

with God. The promises we heard at baptism are still true.

The good news is that many of our young adult children remain in the church, continue to make their faith a central aspect of their lives, and become leaders in their congregations. They will have much to teach us about how to be people of faith in this current age. God has brought the church through scores of generations, and he will continue to see it through the next generation and the one after that. 



Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer in faith formation with Thrive, the ministry agency of the Christian Reformed Church.



Robert Keeley is a professor emeritus of education at Calvin University. The Keeleys recently retired after 31 years as directors of children's ministries at 14th St. CRC in Holland, Mich.

1. What were your experiences either with parenting adult children or with being parented as an adult? Are those experiences mostly positive or negative?
2. "In some ways parenting is a continuous act of letting go." Is it hard to let go? Was it hard when your parents started to let you go? Why or why not?

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Mamas, Please Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Pastors

Pastors have the sacred privilege of leading people to Christ and equipping others to do the same.

IN 2008, SOME CLEVER PERSON from Florida Hospital Church penned a spoof of the country song “Mammas, Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys” that cautioned parents instead to keep their children from becoming pastors. The parody lightly pokes fun at the quirks and challenges of the pastoring life, including burnt Sunday dinners due to having to shake everyone’s hand after an over-long sermon.

I’m sure it would be harder to keep a video on that theme light today, after the recent coronavirus pandemic, when for many pastors the challenges rose to traumatizing levels. Polarization and distrust are no laughing matters. And it’s understandable that the rising criticism and falling esteem pastors face in their communities could cause some parents to think twice about letting their babies grow up to be pastors. Some ministry candidates have told me that their pastors and mentors reminded them of Charles Spurgeon’s advice: “If you can do anything else, do it. If you can stay out of the ministry, stay out of the ministry.”

But even with all the discouragements, distractions, and pressures that our emerging leaders likely face these days, I want to suggest—with all due respect to Spurgeon and his solid point about needing a strong sense of internal and external calling—that it might be more helpful to encourage anyone sensing such a call to listen to the voice of God and step out in obedience rather than to explore all other vocational options until they hit a dead end (as some tell me they did after hearing Spurgeon’s advice).

We might also help them by highlighting the beauty of the pastoral vocation. Even the most discouraged pastor will usually admit they feel blessed to have a job description that includes listening to God through Scripture, proclaiming the gospel, and leading people into

a deeper relationship with God. Pastors are invited into significant moments of people’s lives and accompany them in their deepest sorrows and joys. Pastors have the sacred privilege of leading people to Christ and equipping others to do the same. And along with the heartbreak that comes with loving and leading the church, pastors experience a deep sense of eternal purpose in even the most mundane ministerial activities. Even while sowing in tears, pastors know they will someday reap with songs of joy (Ps. 126:5). They encounter God in surprising ways through the diverse, Spirit-filled people that make up their congregations. It’s these sorts of blessed realities that motivate pastors to faithfully love and serve the church.

Today, just as in Jesus’ day, “the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Luke 10:2), so the Candidacy committee invites you to join us in asking the Lord of the harvest to send more workers into the field. Ask God to open the eyes and hearts of all people to the Spirit’s work in their families, workplaces, and friendships. Then ask God to raise up pastoral leaders to equip the body for this great mission.

As you pray, God might prompt you to encourage someone in their pastoral gifts. Many candidates testify that they first heard God’s call to ministry through a comment from one of their teachers, mentors, or family members. Someone saw in them what they did not see and encouraged them to think about ministry. If you see pastoral gifts in someone, tell them what you’ve noticed and ask if they’ve ever considered pastoral ministry. If they have, offer to connect them with a pastor, council member, or classis leader who can help them discern their next steps.

For contact information, biographical information, eligibility status, and testimonies from each candidate, visit the Candidacy committee website at crcna.org/candidacy.



Susan LaClear lives in Hudsonville, Mich., and currently serves as the director of Candidacy for the Christian Reformed Church. Monroe Community Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., is her calling church.



Jeremiah Basuric



William Brouwers



Melissa Burmaster



Rob Golding



Caleb Harper



Keith Hoekstra



Josiah Huisman



Austin Kammeraad



David Kerkstra



Daniel Le Forestier



Yohan Lee



Young Geol Lee



Patrick Lin



Jeremiah Mitchell



Kevin Moxon



Charles Mutinga



Michelle Oh



Jonathan Sturrus



Matthew Timms



Daniel Unterkofler



Lorinda Vander Werp



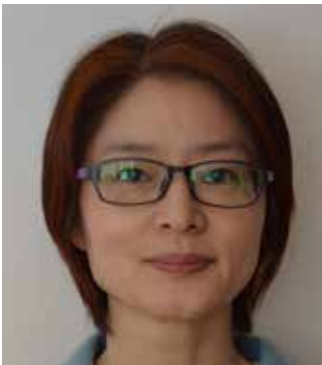
Nick VanderPloeg



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Community

YOU'LL FIND IT GROWING on rocks, logs, and trees, in all sorts of colors from splashy oranges to dull grays and bright whites. It can be flat and crusty or look like leaves. Sometimes it looks like hair or like ocean coral growing on the forest floor. There are over 3,600 species of it just in North America. It's not a plant and not just a fungus. What is it? Lichen!

Lichen is a combination of an alga and a fungus that work together to grow and thrive. The alga is able to photosynthesize—to use sunlight, carbon dioxide, and nitrogen to make energy and oxygen, just like plants do. The fungus uses that energy to grow, protecting the alga and allowing it to grow too. You can find lichen in all sorts of places, often in places that are too hard for plants who need to use their roots to grow, like on a rock or a tree trunk.

Lichen can help us understand many things too. Lichens help to filter air, so scientists can look at what lichens have trapped to see what pollution is in an area. Certain lichens will not grow where there is too much pollution, so those lichens can show us where there is clean air. And lichens provide food for animals such as caribou (reindeer) in places where plants can have a hard time growing.

Lichens also can teach us a lot about the importance of community. There are different parts to the lichen, but each part needs the other to survive. Without each other, neither is able to survive. And without lichens, the air would be dirtier, and animals that depend on the lichen for food would have a harder time surviving.

In 1 Corinthians 12, the church is compared to a body. All the parts depend on each other and have to work together, just like the fungus and the alga in the lichen. And just as

the greater world beyond the lichen needs the lichen to survive, so too does the wider world need the church. When the church works properly as a community and shows the love of Christ, many other things are affected. Sharing meals, hosting food banks, and offering drop-in centers are all ways the church can be the lichen of their community.

Dive Deeper

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. How is the church compared to a body? What does it say about how a body works? What are some ways the church can show the love of Christ to the greater community?

Try This!

Do a little research about lichens and find some lichens right in your community!



Susie Vander Vaart is an environmental educator and ecologist who spends most of her time outside exploring creation.

The Power of an Enthralling Book Premise

IT'S A TRANSFIXING premise that makes a book mesmerizing and unputdownable.

Between You and Us, by Kendra Broekhuis, boasts one of the most alluring premises I have ever heard:

"When a grieving woman unexpectedly steps into a different version of her life, she must choose between the husband she loves and the daughter she lost in this brave, gripping novel." Readers, I was *propelled* through this book, staying up too late on several nights to finish it and discover the how, the what, and the why behind the main character's choices.

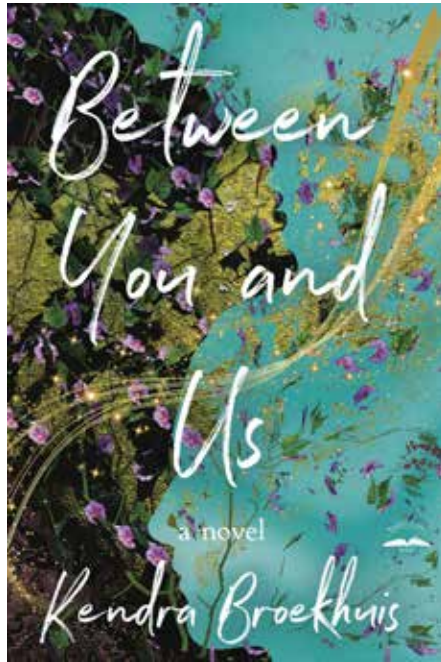
When I found that Broekhuis, who grew up near Grand Rapids, Mich., was a member of City Reformed Church, a Christian Reformed congregation in downtown Milwaukee, Wis., I had to get the tea straight from the author herself. I had many questions, including how she was inspired to write this extraordinary book.

"I never considered fiction when I began writing; it was not on my radar," Broekhuis said. "I preferred reading fiction but writing nonfiction."

But a personal tragedy set her and her husband, Collin, on a path of grief and awareness for which there were no easy answers. Nine years ago, Broekhuis delivered their beloved second daughter, Aliza, stillborn at 33 weeks.

"Grief had begun," she said, at her 20-week ultrasound, when doctors determined that the baby had triploidy, a rare, life-threatening chromosomal disorder that occurs when a fetus has three copies of each chromosome instead of the usual two. Aliza was not developing properly and was not expected to live.

"People are living hard stories," Broekhuis said. "What does it feel like to honestly grieve while living with a



shred of hope? Grief brings up so many what-if questions, too. You are grieving the memories you were going to make but didn't get the chance to."

This experience of sorrow helped shape her character Leona's story of loss and life after loss. While watching a Marvel movie set in a multiverse (the idea that beyond the evident universe, other universes might exist as well), Leona's choices unfurled.

In the novel, Leona is presented with an otherworldly choice when she steps into an alternative universe where her late daughter, Vera, is alive and growing, but her relationship with her husband is cold and strained. Will she choose to live in the world where her daughter's heart beats, or the one in which her marriage is warm and enduring? Is she even able to choose?

Broekhuis drew from her own life experience of growing up in a "privileged" neighborhood but then choosing as an adult to live in an urban environment where "the majority live at or below the poverty line" to add

"socioeconomic threads" to "complicate (Leona's) choice."

The result is an enthralling novel that offers "perceptive renderings of the nuances of grief, the challenges of healing, and what it means to trust God's will," a review in *Publishers Weekly* said.

Broekhuis, who lives with her husband and four children—Jocelyn, Levi, Cecily, and Marre—calls her book "clean fiction" as opposed to overtly "Christian fiction."

"I wrote this thinking it would be shopped to a general market," she said. "I wanted the book to have redemptive themes and to end feeling hopeful. I didn't want to spiritually bypass anyone's loss, but as Christians we have hope."

The author is working on her second book for Waterbrook, the Christian division of Penguin Random House. The hook? "The (main character) finds out on the day of her dad's funeral that he is not her biological dad."

Well, that sounds like another unputdownable read to me. **B**



Lorilee Craker, a native of Winnipeg, Man., lives in Grand Rapids, Mich. The author of 15 books, she is the Mixed Media editor of *The Banner*. Find her on Instagram @thebooksellersdaughter or on her podcast *Eat Like a Heroine*.



Sight

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Sight is based on the true life story of Dr. Ming Wang, a Chinese immigrant who faced trauma and loss in his homeland but who eventually pioneered an eye surgery technique that has restored sight to millions around the world.

The movie flashes back and forth from the present, where Dr. Wang, played by Terry Chen, is an established eye surgeon in Nashville, Tenn., attempting to restore sight to an orphan girl from India, to the past and Wang's upbringing in Hangzhou, China, where his dreams of following in the footsteps of his physician parents are interrupted by a brutal uprising.

Though some scenes are heavy-handed, the movie uses a light touch where faith is concerned. Chen is moving and persuasive as the gentle doctor, who proves that true success lies in helping others. (Rated PG-13, Angel Studios)



The Bamboo Pastors Podcast

Reviewed by Daniel Jung

Pastors Jalon Chan and Jon Mann joke that their podcast started unambitiously—they were simply going to rate the congregational lunches their respective churches served. Had they gone that route, I doubt they'd still be putting out new episodes almost four years later. Instead, their podcast "explores the joys and challenges of being English-speaking pastors in the Chinese church" and does so with intention, candor, and humor.

TBPP is a perfect example of the need for representation for what might have been considered a niche audience in the past. While they started the podcast as a fun way to rate meals, Chan and Mann have been innovators in their own right, becoming unintentional trailblazers serving God's people from their respective corners of the kingdom.



The Super Mario Bros. Movie

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

The Super Mario Bros. Movie is an animated action-adventure comedy based on Nintendo's Super Mario Bros. video games. The film is an origin story for brothers Mario and Luigi, Italian American plumbers who start their own plumbing business in Brooklyn, N.Y. Within the first 15 minutes, the brothers are sucked through a pipe into an alternative reality where there is a brewing conflict between the Mushroom Kingdom, ruled by Princess Peach, and the Koopa Kingdom, led by the dragon-like creature Bowser.

The film grossed \$1.36 billion worldwide and broke multiple box office records, including the biggest worldwide opening weekend ever for an animated film. Although the film lacks any overt spiritual themes, the values of friendship, goodness, loyalty, and sacrifice are front and center. (Netflix; rated PG for action and mild violence)

Lead Like the Real You:

Amy Orr-Ewing pens a deeply personal and engaging collection of letters to women who lead in the workplace, classroom, church, and home, as well as to those who support them. This book empowers the next generation of Christian women who hope to change the world to live and lead well, knowing they are not alone. (Brazos Press, August)

Texas Families Adopt

77 Kids: Inspired by a true story, *Sound of Hope: The Story of Possum Trot* follows Donna and Reverend Martin as they ignite a fire in the hearts of their rural church to embrace kids in the foster system that nobody else will take. (PG-13, Angel Studios; in theaters July 4)

The Sixth Live-Action

Star Wars Spinoff: *The Acolyte* will shed light on the dark side of the Force—specifically, on how its powers came to be. It takes place about 100 years before *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*, carving out a brand-new timeline from the already enormous web of plots. (Disney+)

Maria: Maria von Trapp:

You know her name and the iconic songs, but do you know her real story? This dramatic novel, based on the woman glamorized in *The Sound of Music*, brings Maria to life as never before. (Dell, July 30)



Why Justice Matters

By Naomi Bula, World Renew

Justice is an important concept throughout all of Scripture. As Christ-followers, we believe the pursuit of justice is a key aspect of our faith walk. As members of the Christian Reformed Church, we embrace this as one part of our five-fold calling by saying, “Hearing the cries of the oppressed, forsaken and disadvantaged, we seek to act justly and love mercy as we walk humbly with our God” (crcna.org/welcome/our-vision-our-mission-our-calling). But why does justice matter? And what does it look like when we pursue this calling in our lives? Recently, several justice seekers from various CRC agencies and ministries sat down to discuss this.

Andrew Oppong, Thrive’s social justice content

manager: If we look at Micah 6:8, the part where it says “What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God,” it’s a very beautiful passage. We love it in the CRC. But what is happening in the previous verses? It’s Israel wondering, “With what shall I come before the LORD? ... Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, ... with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?” (Micah 6:6-7). That’s good, but it is incomplete. In the work that we are doing at Thrive, we are trying to remind people of that basic connection between biblical justice and discipleship. How you live your life, how you worship, how you do faith formation, how you do everything—it’s not a separate thing. They are all inextricably linked.

Cindy Stover, the CRCNA’s justice mobilization program

manager: If we have this original creational order within our Reformed theology of understanding the way God intended the world to be—a place where there was justice, where there was shalom, where there was flourishing for all people and all of creation—then really that means relationships. Theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff talks about how the relational nature of righteousness and justice means to be in right relationship with one another and with all of creation. So to do God’s justice in the world is an inherently social act.

Adrian Jacobs, the CRCNA’s senior leader for Indigenous justice and reconciliation:

I’ve been asked what the difference between Indigenous spirituality and Christianity is, and what I’ve always come up with is that an Indigenous spirituality and understanding of the spiritual world is embodied. Indigenous spirituality encompasses (questions such as): What is my relationship to the land? What is my relationship to other people? To me, Christianity and justice

World Renew agriculture program participants at their home in Malawi have experienced how successful crops allow them more freedom to contribute to justice in their community.



Members of First CRC in Toronto, Ont., learned about letter writing and advocacy with justice mobilizer Cindy Stover (front left).

are sometimes not seen that way. I think of the long history of residential schools that occurred in Canada with leaders of the church, including the highest-trained leaders, priests, and nuns doing things to Indigenous children that are just so totally opposite to their propositional beliefs. If you are a Christian who is justice oriented, it has to be reflected in what you do.

Jodi Koeman, World Renew’s Church With Community

coordinator: We need our churches to help us *be* justice so that when people experience our “putting things right” and wonder “Who do they look like?”, we can point them to Jesus and respond, “We look just like our Father.” We need our churches to help us be the justice the world is longing for.

Rachel Vroege, regional ministry developer (western Canada) for Diaconal Ministries Canada:

In our denomination’s mandate for deacons is the calling to benevolence and justice ministry and how they’re intertwined. It says, “Deacons offer holistic responses that respect the dignity of all people, working to change exploitative structures and systems, equipping the church for ministries of reconciliation and peacemaking, and seeking opportunities for advocacy.” We’re well beyond “Why does it matter?” It matters to God, so then it matters to us, the people of God, and we have a mandate to live that out.

How does a deacon team offer holistic responses? Once you’re down that road and you’re working with people and building relationships with them, then you will see the way injustice is at work in our society, whether that’s a senior

living on a fixed income, people with disabilities, or those struggling with chronic illnesses. How is the housing crisis affecting the refugee family the church has sponsored? Churches are directly involved with justice; maybe it's just a matter of learning to see it and then not being overwhelmed. We need to see how to respond and work together.

Chris Orme, World Renew's church relations representative: My starting point in answering why justice matters is usually to go back to Luke 4, when Jesus goes into the synagogue of Nazareth, opens up the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and says, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, ... freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Justice matters because it's the blueprint for Jesus' ministry. It's the key to understanding what we're being invited into.

Jacobs: Embodying your Christian faith in that manner of hospitality, that's where the invitational life is. It's in you. Jesus said: "Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). So it's contagious. There's something powerful about getting to know people, becoming engaged with them, and working through the tough stuff.

Vroege: Diaconal Ministries Canada works with a financial life coach. A deacon team in British Columbia had her come out and coach them in particular benevolent situations. She worked with people the church was supporting, and now those people may no longer need the financial support of the church. When a church engages sincerely and accesses the right resources, people can be empowered and lifted up to be able to have more agency in their own situations. You don't want to be paralyzed by the fear of doing the wrong thing, but there are all kinds of barriers that can be addressed.

Koeman: I just started working with four congregations on shifting their food ministries from "food charity" to a "food justice" focus—not that they're going to do a lot differently, but they're going to work through a process of understanding and shifting focus. It's not that we're going to do less charity, but we have to add more justice.


Orme: If I'm part of a church in an urban food desert and we're all about advocating for access to food locally, I'm going to talk about it globally too. World Renew is working with one congregation in Malawi building food security through garden irrigation. The pastor told us, "The church works better when people have enough to eat. It gives them more capacity to care for each other well, and to love each other well, and to look beyond the congregation too and see



Rachel Vroege leads a workshop in Abbotsford, B.C., with diaconal coach David Hornor.

who else needs support." Justice matters because it's the heart of God. There's no shortage of ways for how and what we can be involved in, but it's better when more people are working together in community.

Oppong: I always encourage people that we are all interwoven in the great tapestry of God's faithfulness. Wherever you are, there's something to contribute. We always have to be invitational and know that we all have something to give. We all have different roles to play in justice work.

For more of this conversation, visit worldrenew.ca/stories. 

Taking Learning Outside the Classroom

SUMMER IS HERE, and school is out—but that’s no reason to stop learning.

Each year, Calvin University hosts a range of summer camp offerings for students ages 5-18 on topics as varied as chemistry, nature, music, sports, and health care. The camps offer a fresh look at familiar and important subjects, giving campers a chance to delve into new experiences in a personalized, interactive learning environment.

“Formal schooling is rhythmic. It starts and stops with the seasons. It stops on the weekends, on holidays, and in the summer. But at Calvin University, our hope is that education never stops,” said Sarah Visser, executive vice president for student experience and strategy. “Students’ minds are their most precious assets, and our stewardship of their education shouldn’t stop at the end of a semester. Summer campers come here and have a chance to grapple with some of the most interesting concepts and problems they’ll encounter in the course of their education. We offer STEM, arts, and athletics concentrations to help accommodate different learning styles and preferences.”

The camps aim not only to educate campers but to reconnect and inspire them. To keep up with the camps’ growing popularity, Calvin has evolved its offerings. Last summer, for instance, Calvin’s health care camp was available only to girls. This summer, Calvin made it available for free to all students who want to learn more about healthy living and explore careers in health care.

“Last year, we were ecstatic about kicking off a H.E.A.L.T.H. (Health Education and Leadership Training for a Hopeful Future) Camp for girls,” said Dr. Adejoke Ayoola, dean of Calvin University’s School of Health and Nursing. “After years of teaching local




Calvin University’s H.E.A.L.T.H. Camp offers boys and girls the chance to embrace and explore the complexities of medicine in ways that are fun, age-appropriate, and hands-on.

moms about women’s health care, we heeded their call to invite daughters into the mix. We saw these girls light up, engaging with the tasks many medical professionals take on day to day. This year we were pleased to introduce this camp to boys, too. In our unique H.E.A.L.T.H. Camp, students embrace and explore the complexities of medicine in a way that is fun, age-appropriate, and hands-on.”

The chemistry camp caters to students in sixth through eighth grades and offers experiments and demonstrations intended to enliven early chemistry learning. The H.E.A.L.T.H. camp is divided into several sessions broken out by gender and age. Knollcrest Music Camp offers two sessions: one for seventh- and eighth-grade students and another for high schoolers.

The nature camp divides campers ages 6-14 into three age groups to improve the camp experience in sessions spread out over June and July. The sports camps offer boys and girls the chance to engage in new team environments and sharpen their skills.

“We are always learning,” Visser said. “We believe one way to inspire learning in the ‘offseasons’ is through our on-campus summer camps, which help to uplift and direct students in the Grand Rapids area (by) providing hands-on, innovative, creative learning experiences in topics they might not otherwise encounter or enjoy.” 

—Calvin University

The View From Here

Reflections on Ecclesiastical Governance and the Passing of a Friend

WHEN IT COMES TO CHOOSING a restaurant with my family of six, no one gets exactly what they want. My middle daughter and I advocate for Japanese or Mexican food. My son lobbies for anyplace that serves an epic quantity of carbohydrates for his insatiable teenage-male appetite. My wife and youngest daughter agitate for “healthy options.” My oldest daughter just tries her best to tune out this whole conversation. Nevertheless, after all the drama, everyone usually leaves the restaurant full.

We are familiar with this lobbying approach in our local, state/provincial, and federal assemblies. We see it in our school boards, in shareholder meetings, and in our corporate boardrooms.

It seems that, since COVID, this lobbying approach is often the norm rather than the exception. The same process sometimes happens in our church councils, our classis meetings, and at synod.

As Christians, we sometimes default to this approach because of our strong convictions. However, when it comes to the church, our focus is less on our convictions and more about something else.

My friend and colleague Rev. Scott DeVries died from complications of cancer April 27 at age 47. For 16 months I had the privilege of supervising Scott in his work as the director of synodical services (the position responsible for organizing synod).

Scott taught me something about the governance of the church—or rather, God taught me something through Scott: God’s Holy Spirit is at work in our ecclesiastical governance no matter how broken we think that governance is. Why does God work through it? Is it because we Christian Reformed folks are well educated, wise, or holy? No.

Our Father will not
leave us without
blessings and
corrections. We
will need both.

—Scott DeVries

God works through our governance because we belong to God.

In the last weeks of his life, I asked Scott to reflect on God’s work through synod. Here is a portion of what he wrote: “Our Father will not leave us without blessings and corrections. We will need both. And we will receive both from almost every decision we make and every action we take. We’ll need to report back to future synods what God has blessed and confirmed, and what God seems to be correcting. To be sure, not every challenge is a correction, nor is every perceived blessing truly a confirmation of our path. But so long as we look to our Father, our Lord, and the Spirit to continue guiding us, we can assemble again, reassess, and take another humble step forward this year.”


Scott lived convinced that God works through our ecclesiastical governance—even when we don’t get it right.

That makes a difference in our approach to governing the church. It doesn’t mean that we arrive at our councils, classis meetings, and synods as blank slates. We necessarily bring our convictions to the spiritual process of deliberation. It doesn’t mean that we won’t be passionate about our beliefs. God is also passionate about truth.

What does it mean? It means that above all, our church governance will be bathed in prayer and rooted in Scripture—Spirit and truth. Jesus said, “When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you in all the truth” (John 16:13).

It also means that we should exhibit the deepest humility, love, and respect for each other as demonstrated by Christ Jesus, our Lord (Phil. 2:1-11). How we make our decisions is as important as what decisions we make. Since God is indeed working through our church governance, we must come prepared to listen to God.

As I write this article a few weeks before synod, I recognize these are dangerous words. It’s certain some delegates will leave Synod 2024 deeply frustrated and hurt, perhaps questioning their future in our denomination. Many others will leave recognizing God’s presence in our midst despite difficult moments. As for me, I’ve learned a lesson from Scott DeVries: God works through our church governance.

James writes, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (James 1:5). We’ve asked in faith. God will show up. 



Rev. Zachary King is the general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. He is a member of Fuller Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

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

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

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

Under the Shea Tree

KANG HEO JOINED the circle of women under a big shea tree next to a Ugandan village's grass-thatched church. The sun blazed overhead, and the church was stifling in the heat. The tree provided some much-needed shade as the group read from the Bible together.

Heo, a student at Calvin Theological Seminary, was volunteering with Resonate Global Mission missionary Stephen Omoko to lead Timothy Leadership Training sessions. That day they had traveled two hours over bumpy, dusty roads from the bustling city of Soroti to this rural village to lead a group through TLT.

Available in more than 35 languages, TLT provides theologically sound biblical training for church pastors and lay leaders around the world, especially in places with little access to formal training.

Women in Uganda, especially those in rural villages, don't typically have the same opportunities as men for education and careers. It's uncommon for a woman to be a pastor, but women still play crucial roles as leaders in their communities and churches. Pastors' wives in particular shoulder much responsibility and have considerable influence over members of their churches. Helping them to learn and grow has benefits that can quickly spread through the whole community. That's why Resonate had come to this village to lead TLT training specifically with pastors' wives.

"They were very excited to listen and learn," Heo said. "They really have a curiosity about the Bible and its application to their lives. ... We wanted them to have freedom in truth in the Bible, and they were really passionate."

Heo hopes to be a pastor someday. While studying at Calvin Theological Seminary, he had an opportunity to



A group of pastors' wives gather under a shea tree in rural Uganda for Timothy Leadership Training.

participate in TLT himself. He volunteered with Resonate to see how TLT worked in a context different from what he knew growing up in South Korea and studying in the United States. Calvin Theological Seminary also requires students to gain cross-cultural experience through an internship before graduating.

"Resonate has missionaries all over the world and a good support system for volunteers," Heo said. "I was sure that if I worked with Resonate, I would have a good experience and maximize my cross-cultural experience."

Omoko took Heo under his wing as they traveled to lead TLT with the female leaders in the village. Heo stayed with a pastor's family. The lack of electricity or running water in the village was very different from what he was accustomed to, but he valued the opportunity.

"They all welcomed me with their whole hearts," Heo said.

Some of his favorite experiences were the warm hospitality of the people he visited and being able to worship with

them at a community-wide prayer gathering.

"Their passions, their attitudes to listen to holy words, (were) really great," Heo said. "That was the biggest takeaway for me. In Korea and the U.S., churches often have big buildings, but I don't always see that passion."

"(Heo) was very quick to form friends in the church and the community," Omoko said. "He was also able to learn a few words in the local language."

At the end of the TLT session, each of the women walked away with an action plan to solve a problem in their churches and communities. While Heo won't be there for the next session under the shea tree, he is continuing to partner with TLT by praying for and providing financial support for its work in Uganda.

—Cassie Marcionetti,
Resonate Global Mission

Reaching Ukraine's Military Spouses

ANGELINA WAS BEGINNING to dread the calls. What used to be a highlight in her otherwise horrible days had become a regular reminder of just how much the war in Ukraine had already changed her beloved husband.

"His psychological condition isn't good," Angelina said. "His calls have become aggressive, jealous, and filled with insults."

Power outages, land mines, shelling, and air-raid sirens are now part of everyday life for millions of people like Angelina who are caught in the midst of Ukraine's war with Russia. Many mothers with young children are unable to leave Ukraine and remain amid the danger and uncertainty. With their husbands serving on the front lines, these women are feeling especially heartbroken and helpless.

"We see the deep need to minister to these internally displaced people," said Rev. Sergei Sosedkin, Russian-language ministry leader for ReFrame



When people contact ReFrame's partners in Ukraine, they're often connected to local pastors such as Pastor Andre, pictured here holding a fragment of a military missile that crashed near his home.

Ministries, the worldwide media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church. "In many cases, the social support systems within the country are less than those in refugee host nations. Women and children are truly on their own. We want to walk beside them with messages of hope, love, trust, and peace in Christ. We want to share the gospel!"

This year, ReFrame's Russian-language ministry team established a phone and internet chat hotline for internally displaced people in Ukraine. The hotline is available 14 hours every day and is hosted by Christian psychologists.

Every hour, an announcement broadcast by ReFrame's radio partners in many of Ukraine's major cities announces, "You don't have to endure your pain alone. We're here to listen and share your burden. Reach out now. Our team is standing by, ready to support you."

When Angelina heard these words, she tearfully recalled yet another troubling interaction with her husband. She both resents and pities him, but she also knows that the horrors of war are really to blame. She decided to call the hotline.

"We engaged in an empathetic conversation," one of the psychologists shared after her phone call with Angelina. "I provided online resources, a contact for Christian psychotherapy, prayer support, and spiritual guidance."

The call did not solve everything, but Angelina was grateful for the support she received through the new hotline, and she said she felt relief—a relief CRC congregations and individuals helped provide through their prayers and support.

—Brian Clark,
ReFrame Ministries

Justice: An Everyday Spiritual Journey

WHEN PEOPLE START talking about justice, it can get complicated right away. How can we best address long-term systems of injustice while also being responsive to immediate needs in our communities? Many Christians have questions about how to deal with this complexity.

The Centre for Public Dialogue's latest workshop helps people explore how the Bible talks about communities of peace, justice, and faithful action. These insights can serve as a launching point for work individuals and churches might undertake in their local contexts.

"Participants will not only be grounded in a biblical vision of what it means to do justice, but also become more aware of the assets they already have to address injustice when it impacts them and their neighbors," workshop facilitator Cindy Stover said.

Workshop participants learn how exploitative structures cause injustice, explore how advocacy can bring



Participants from Canada's Maritime Provinces show their *Justice: An Everyday Spiritual Journey* workbooks.

change, unpack the need for healing when injustice has been done, and identify practical steps to bring justice and shalom to their local contexts.

This free workshop is offered both in person and online for those who like to work at their own pace. A version of this workshop specifically designed for deacons also is available.

Learn more at bit.ly/JusticeEverydaySpiritualJourney.

—Victoria Veenstra,
CRC Communications

Sign up for a Hearts Exchanged Cohort

HEARTS EXCHANGED is all about going beyond the headlines into deep work that wrestles with how churches can become places of belonging and embrace God's call to reconciliation with Indigenous neighbors in Canada.

Participants can sign up with their church or in a mixed cohort of Christians in their region. Typically cohorts start in the fall, so now is a great time to express interest.

"The Hearts Exchanged program has taught me a great deal about the histories of Canada, our continent, our society, and our church," said Julia Verbrugge, a previous Hearts Exchanged participant. "Much of it isn't pretty; however, it is so important to know and understand how we have to come to this place in history in order to repair relationships going forward. The Hearts Exchanged program has certainly opened my eyes and heart to see Indigenous peoples and the history of Canada with a new perspective."

Get more information at crcna.org/hearts-exchanged.

—Victoria Veenstra,
CRC Communications



DEADLINES: Ads for the September issue are due July 26, 2024; October: August 30, 2024. Subject to availability. Details online at thebanner.org/classifieds, or for display ads see thebanner.org/ads. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

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Obituaries



BOSMA, Bette DeBruyn, 96, of Grand Haven, MI, passed into glory May 5, 2024. Youngest child of Rev. Jacob Cornelius and Alice (Bajema) DeBruyn, she devoted her life to family, education and community, teaching reading at Christian and public schools and from 1976-1992 at Calvin Col-

lege. Preceding her in death were husband John (1924-2014) and seven siblings; surviving her are Susan (David) Hoekema, Tim (Kim) Bosma, Jane (Brian) Vanderploeg, and Paul (Alice) Bosma; 11 grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren. Funeral (May 21) will be archived on Second CRC's Youtube page.



HOFF, SUSAN B (JELINEK) age 69. 1409 35th St. Downers Grove, IL 60515. At home with her Lord May 25, 2024. Wife of Harry Hoff. Mother of Stacey (James) Lanenga, Brian (Kristi) Hoff, and Brenda (Michael) Holtrop.

Grandmother of 10. Sister of Carol (Max) Van Wyk, Ruth (Richard) Vander Kamp, Kathryn Jelinek, Elaine (John) Hiskes; and sister-in-law of Linda (Robert) Brannigan, Howard (Kimberly) Hoff; aunt of many nieces and nephews. Sue will be remembered for her 29 years of service in administration at Timothy Christian Schools in Elmhurst, IL.

HOOKER, Geraldine "Gerry" (Swart), age 93, passed away peacefully on May 12, 2024 at her home in Largo, FL. Gerry is survived by her children Vicki Jager, Sandi/Tom Post, Gary/Kim, Jim/Lisa, Mary/Peter Boonstra, Carol/Dave Decker, Bob/Christy; 20 grand-

children and 22 great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by a son, Marvie, her son-in-law Steve Jager and her husband of 68 years, Marvin. John 14:6

TAMELING, JUNE nee Venhuizen, age 85. 7425 Soper Rd, Burr Ridge IL 60527. At home with her Lord May 26, 2024. Wife of the late Peter John Tameling. Mother of Susan (Joseph) Folkerts, Edwin (Sherry) Tameling, Gary Tameling, and Kimberly (Kevin) Vlietstra. Grandmother of 16 and great-grandmother of 26. Sister of Gertrude (the late Louis) Tazelaar, the late William (the late Anne) Ven Housen, the late Peter (Mary) Ven Housen, the late Robert (Carol and the late Donna) Venhousen, and the late Kathryn (the late Peter) Holtrop, Andrew (Sharon) Venhousen.

VER SCHURE, HELEN (BONNEMA) 89, of Denver passed away April 21, 2024. She is survived by her sister and brother-in-law Bonnie and Jack VanDerSlik; her children Lauri Ver Schure (Michael Cordova), Diann (Paul) Jeplawy, and Dave (Suzie) Ver Schure. Her grandchildren Katie (Brad) Breuker, Liz Jeplawy, Craig Jeplawy, Joann Jeplawy (Ryan Smith), Ineke Cordova. We will always remember the joy mom found spending time with her family in her beloved Colorado mountains.

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 65 YEARS



TOLSMA, RYAN AND MIRIAM (Boven) celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary together on June 16th at their home of 55 years in Redlands California. Their legacy includes 5 children/spouses; 15 grandchildren/spouses; 1 great grandchild. We all give thanks to God for blessing their years together.

Birthday

BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS

VENEMA, LOIS celebrated 100 years on June 28. Her children are so thankful to have been blessed by her love and kindness and generosity for a century. Celebrating with her are her 5 children, 13 grandchildren and 24 great grandchildren. We thank God for her unwavering faith and love of Jesus and for her love and appreciation for God's creation. Birthday wishes can be sent to her at 1427 Holes Creek Trace, Dayton, OH 45458

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BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

KAMP, GRACE (VOSS) from Tinley Park, IL will be celebrating her 90th birthday on July 24. She and her late husband Henry, were blessed with 7 children, 23 grandchildren, and 26+ great grandchildren. Praise God for His amazing grace and faithfulness.

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England: Heritage & Countryside Exploration
Sep 11 - Sep 20

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On Love and Unconscious Bias

Though it seems small, my friend's act was a powerful act of allyship.

This article was first published Oct. 27, 2023, on TheBanner.org. As I Was Saying is a forum for a variety of perspectives meant to foster faith-related conversations among our readers with the goal of mutual learning, even in disagreement. Apart from articles written by editorial staff, these perspectives do not necessarily reflect the views of The Banner.

IT WAS A LOVELY autumn day, with leaves the color of sunflowers, as I wheeled into a small neighborhood mall. In recent years, this mall has rebranded itself as a community hub, right down to the "I'd like to talk" bench where anyone can sit and hope to make a new friend.

I rode my power chair through the mall to a small café, where I was immediately enveloped by its warm, inviting atmosphere.

I joined my dear friend of many years and her particularly adorable toddler at a table. Our server was a cheerful woman with kind eyes who brought our soup and sandwiches with a smile.

All progressed as expected for a lunch date with a much-loved friend as we caught each other up on our busy lives and active families. Then the server returned.

"How's it tasting?" she questioned my friend. "Would you like some salt?" She kept her eyes only on my friend, listening carefully to her answer.

Wanting to answer too, I went to press play on my AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) device, which I use instead of verbal speech. But the server had whirled away.

It's a fairly common experience for servers to ignore me and talk only to the non-disabled person I'm dining with. Usually this isn't done with intention or malice. Instead, it often

stems from an assumption of my incompetence or a discomfort in talking to someone "different."

Quickly my friend called the server back so I could tell her that my lunch was lovely and that I declined salt.

Though it seems small, my friend's act was a powerful act of allyship. She came beside me to proclaim that my differences do not negate the value of my voice and opinions, even about salt. This allyship means the world to me.

It's possible, of course, that ignoring me and only speaking to my non-disabled friend was an oversight by a tired server with many customers. But this sort of situation happens to me often.

At restaurants, I've gotten used to my husband or friends occasionally being asked right in front of me what I want to order. If I do order, my dining partner will sometimes be asked if I'd like fries with my meal. At one popular retailer, my young child standing beside me was asked if I would like a receipt for the purchases I'd just made.

In a way I never fathomed until I began to use an AAC device and gait aides ranging from a wheelchair to a cane, there is tremendous built-in stigma and subtle but powerful cues against people who are seen as "different," including because of disability.

Known as unconscious bias, this stigma permeates the core of society. It is a bias based on implicit assumptions about a person's capacities, power, value, and place.

It's human nature—consciously or not—to rapidly assess other people to make predictions and conclusions. Being a Christ follower does not automatically remove unconscious bias. To deny this and claim that we have no biases only serves to close our eyes



Jenna C. Hoff is a freelance writer and editor in Edmonton, Alta. She is a member of Inglewood Christian Reformed Church.



As I Was Saying

Read more perspective to foster faith-related conversation at TheBanner.org/as-i-was-saying.

to the pain of those we make judgments about.

I've found that the effects of these biases are cumulative. Living in a world filled with small unconscious biases against you for something you have no control over, such as a disability, permeates all aspects of how you live and see yourself.

This hit home the other week when another friend invited me to a performance at a local theater. Many theaters have designated wheelchair-accessible seating in the back next to a regular chair for a friend without a wheelchair.

Checking the theater's ticket website, we noticed that the only two wheelchair-accessible seats were for "wheelchair users and their assistants."

This wording sent a powerful message that a person like me would attend the theater only with an assistant—not a friend, child, spouse, or first date.

It made me question why the world doesn't see me as the ordinary woman I am who happens to use mobility

equipment—a woman who has been married for 18 years and has four kids and lots of friends.

Of course, many people with disabilities do require an assistant to help them attend a theater event; there is nothing wrong with needing and accepting help. In fact, for the first several years of my mobility disabilities, I did need an assistant to take or accompany me places, and I still need assistance sometimes. But to assume this is always the case reveals unconscious bias.

It's brutal to grapple with, especially because unconscious bias against people who live with disabilities is so thoroughly woven into all aspects of life. That it's rarely intentional makes it even more insidious and harmful.

At the beginning of this article, I deliberately emphasized the café's warm


atmosphere and its location in a mall where there's a community-minded focus and connection flourishes. I tried to create a picture of the server's kind nature to demonstrate how even the kindest people can act in ways that reflect their unconscious biases.

But just because unconscious biases are present doesn't mean we can't take steps to mitigate them.

Throughout the Bible, God's people are called to love their neighbors. One way to do this is to actively identify and challenge our unconscious biases and then modify how we interact with people on the receiving end of them.

We can do this by prayerfully asking God to reveal our unconscious biases and by taking time to learn about them. One way to do this is to listen to the voices of people we may be unconsciously biased against, such as people with disabilities.

Another way is to closely examine our interactions with those we may have an unconscious bias against. Do we strive to treat them and all people with equality, justice, equity, mercy, and honor?

When we follow in the footsteps of our Savior in putting others before ourselves, we begin to truly love one another. 

Enjoying Life

How can we in a fallen world enjoy life and even honor God in our enjoyment?



Paul Delger is a long-time professional writer and inspirational speaker to young people. He lives in Kanawha, Iowa.

I FOUND A LIBERATING story online titled “Enjoying Life Isn’t a Sin.” Michelle Van Loon talks about enjoying the goodness of God and life itself, and she suggests that enjoyment itself can become a meaningful way to imitate Christ.

That piece gave this struggling “I really want to enjoy life” guy hope.

Life presents many enjoyment stealers. Health concerns plague numerous people; others deal with major family conflicts; addictions trap people; expectations of others and oneself create problems; and political bickering seems endless. For me, my religious training and view of God have affected my ability to enjoy life.

I grew up in a small, rural Christian Reformed congregation. While I certainly appreciated learning about the sovereignty of God and salvation through the cross, at times I felt like living the believer’s life was like carrying a huge piano on my back. God was up in heaven, and every time I sinned, he wanted to whack me with a baseball bat. Church seemed like a series of rules and regulations. Do this, don’t do this: that’s how you please God. Sermons were often long, graceless, and lacking application. As a teenager, I was expected to attend two worship services, Sunday school, and an evening Bible study each week. Sundays were a burden, not a joy. This affected not only my psyche but my witness to others as well. I attended a Christian college and remember one of my unbelieving friends remarking one day: “Delg is in a bad mood. It must be Sunday.” Ouch!

But how can we in a fallen world enjoy life and even honor God in our enjoyment?

I think it starts with a better understanding of how God sees us Christians. God has granted us an

unbelievable future that starts in this life. God has given us forgiveness, mercy, purpose, and his abiding presence through the Holy Spirit. We don’t have to prove anything to others or ourselves because God believes we are worthy of his love through Christ. We are free to be ourselves with the gifts and talents he has provided. God has provided us boundless grace. We can live in that grace and freedom.

Another factor is thankfulness. When we are grateful, it’s easier to enjoy life. God has given us many spiritual and material blessings. Struggling with thankfulness? Return to two basics: “Thank you, Lord, for giving me another day to live on this earth, and thank you for the air to breathe.”

Another factor is self-love. As the saying goes, “Be kind to you.” Often we are hard on ourselves and create unrealistic expectations for ourselves. We compare our lives to others’. We forget God loves us just the way we are. We need to encourage ourselves and speak positive things.

Enjoying life also involves shifting our eyes away from ourselves and onto others. Be available, whether it’s with time or resources. Sometimes just a friendly hello or a smile will give someone hope.

It also helps to keep physically and mentally active. That could mean physical work or play, reading a book, taking up a new hobby, or putting together a puzzle.

Finally, we must realize some days life is just not enjoyable. As a football coach struggling with major health issues while caring for a special needs child said, “You’re not going to eat ice cream sundaes every day.”

But in the end, God has not called us to a miserable life. And we don’t have to wait until heaven to enjoy it. The time is now. **B**

Breaking and Sinking

Are his blessings
about to
become curses?

THERE'S A STARTLING component to Luke's narrative of Jesus and his love when he describes a scene on the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1-11). Jesus sees a couple of boats and some fishermen washing their nets. Because a large crowd is pressing him, he asks the men to row him offshore a bit so he can address the eager audience. His sermon over, he tells Simon, whose boat had been his pulpit, to row out and try his luck at fishing. Against his better judgment, Simon, who's caught nothing all night, follows instructions and—voilà!—his luck changes in spades. It's a miracle! His net becomes filled to overflowing with fish that had eluded him all night.


That's good news indeed, and more than the fisherman could have hoped for. But Simon has no time to wonder at it all. With blessings come problems that call for immediate attention. His net starts to break under the weight of the madly squirming fish. To make matters worse, his boat is threatening to go under. He has breaking and sinking to deal with. Are his blessings about to become curses?

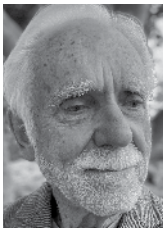
One wonders how Jesus is taking this in. He's in the sinking boat, after all. Is he thinking that perhaps he's gone a little overboard with his largesse? Is he still unsure of how to balance his humanity with his divinity? Or is he, by mixing blessings with alarm, teaching the fishermen—and all who read of their adventure ever after—an important life lesson? What kind of blessing is it that causes breaking and sinking?

Maybe breaking and sinking were nothing more than a dramatic way for Luke to illustrate just how great the catch of fish was, the magnitude of the miracle, and the amazing, superhuman power invested in the Son of Man. The catch of fish did not seem to be an answer to prayer, after all—though we're not told whether the weary

disciples had raised heaven-directed pleas during that unproductive night.

I don't know what to make of it. I can't shake off the incongruity of what's happening to the Galilean fishermen who, after a humdrum night of casting and recasting their nets, have become the recipients of a blessing so immense that their nets tear and their boat is about to sink. It's a blessing that threatens to ruin them. What kind of blessing is that? We're not told how or even whether they managed to save the catch and the boat. Maybe they did or maybe they didn't. What matters, I suppose, is that Jesus got their attention and their fealty (v. 11).

After Jesus had finished his mission on earth, he once more advised his disciples to cast a net after they had caught nothing all night (John 21:1-11). Again there was a miraculous catch, but this time the net did not break. Could it be that because of what Jesus has accomplished on Golgotha we no longer have to worry about breaking and sinking? 



Hank Ottens is a retired orthopedic surgeon and an active gardener, photographer, and singer. He attends Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, Mich.

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