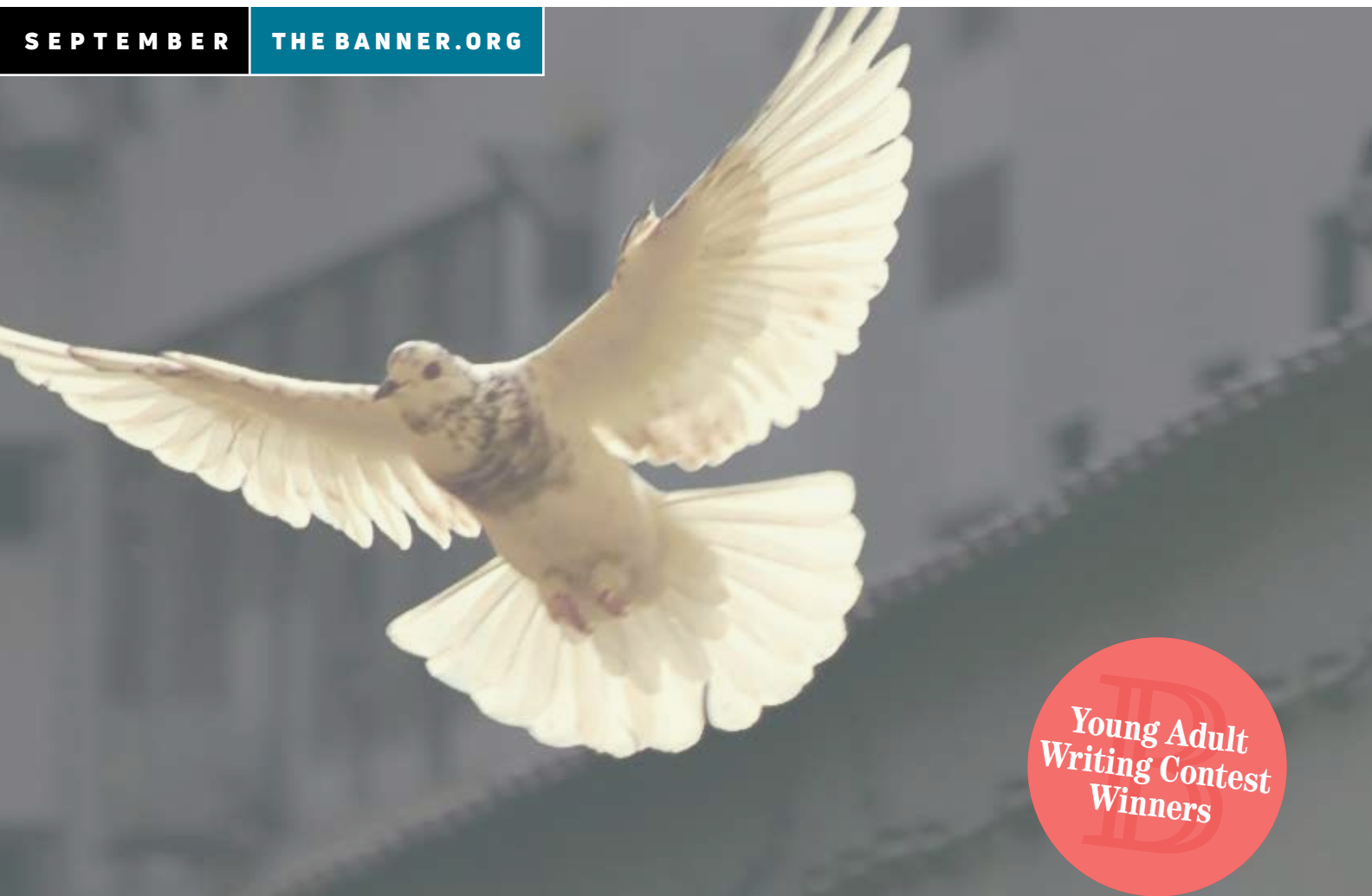


# BANNER

SEPTEMBER

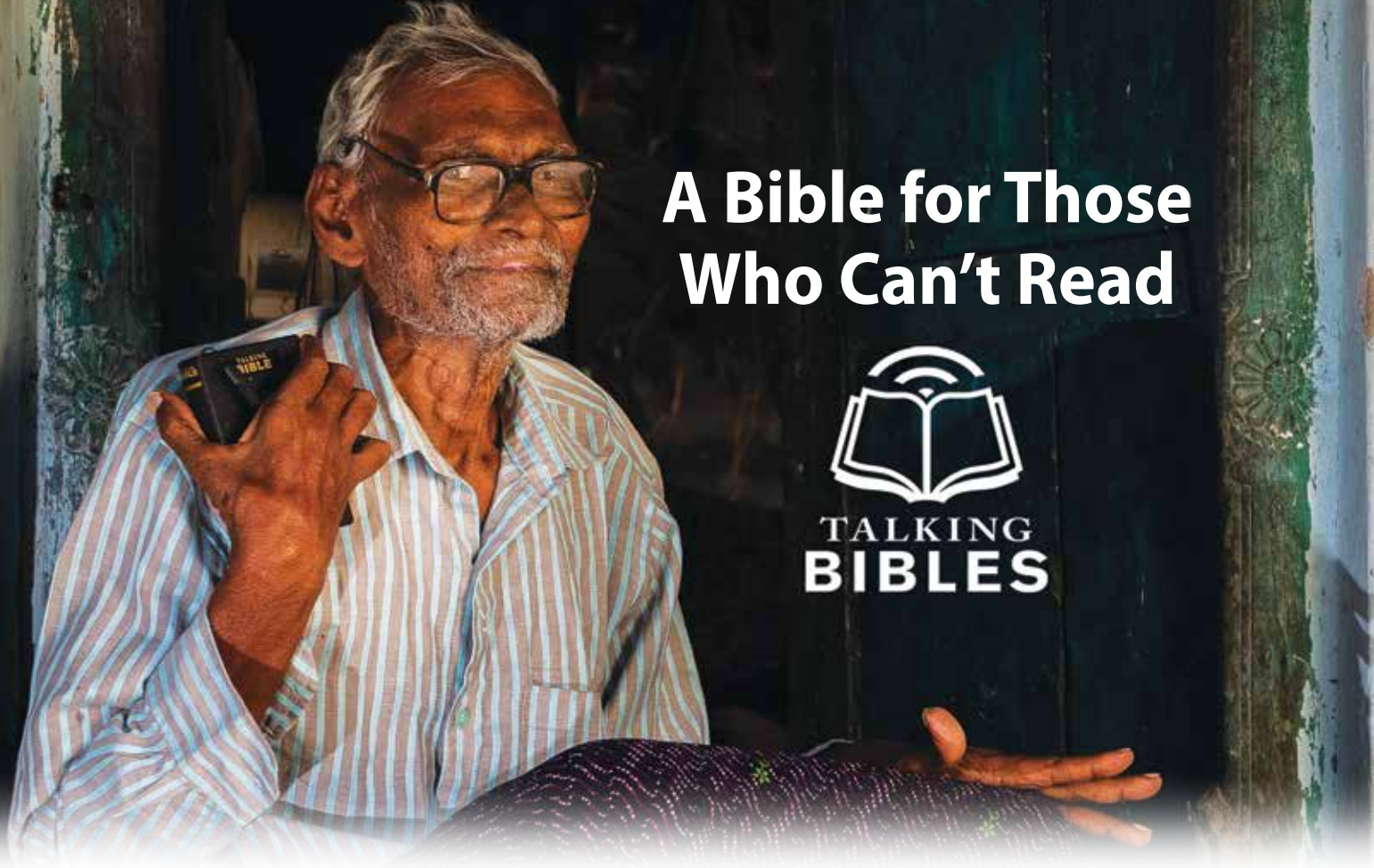
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Young Adult  
Writing Contest  
Winners

# Peacemaking

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# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

A report from the Christian Reformed Church's Candidacy Committee on the current leadership landscape of the denomination was included in the *Agenda for Synod 2024*. It counted ministers (see May infographic), those in training, and those formerly known as evangelists or ministry associates and now called commissioned pastors (Church Order Art. 23).

## Counting Commissioned Pastors

**44** serve established churches\*

**+46** serve emerging churches

**90** total commissioned pastors serving in a solo or lead role in a church

\*The Church Order allows this only under four circumstances. Respondents to the Candidacy Committee's survey showed the following percentages for Commissioned Pastors serving:

- » Term call with progression toward Minister of the Word: **45%**
- » Unique ministry context with a barrier to theological education: **38%**
- » After co-pastor Minister of the Word left (exceptional circumstances): **27%**
- » After planting what then became an organized church (reasonable time): **21%**

Survey responses were received from 82 classis leaders, representing 39 of 49 classes.



**Cover:** Fourteen young adults submitted essays for this year's contest on the topic of peacemaking.

## 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.)
- » Religion News: Theatrical Release for All-sign-language Movie *Jesus: A Deaf Missions Film*
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  - » Podcast review: *Scamanda*
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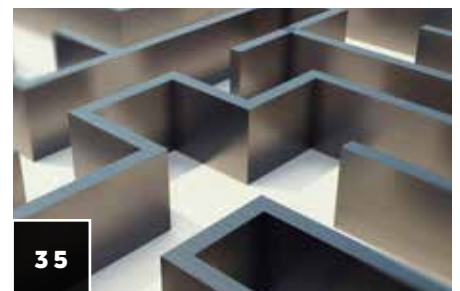
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**BANNER**

*The Banner* is the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church. Opinions expressed in *The Banner* are not necessarily those of the editor or the CRCNA.

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## Slippery Slope?

I worry about the proverbial slippery slope in practice, if not in theory, toward earning God's favor by doing rightly and believing rightly.



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](http://TheBanner.org).

이 기사의 한글번역은 [TheBanner.org/korean](http://TheBanner.org/korean) 에서 보실 수 있습니다.

Este artículo está disponible en español en [TheBanner.org/spanish](http://TheBanner.org/spanish).

**I DEARLY LOVE** the Reformed doctrine of God's grace. It is one of the reasons I love the Reformed tradition and the Christian Reformed Church. The booklet *What It Means to Be Reformed: An Identity Statement* (2006) defined grace as "the unmerited favor of God toward those who do not deserve it. Grace is the unconditional and freely given love of God to people who can do nothing to earn it but can only accept it as a gift. ... Grace is the astounding truth that nothing we do can make God love us more or less. God loves us because he loves us. God loves us because he is rich in love" (pp. 14-15). It is a balm to my sick soul because I know that I can never earn God's love. Nothing we can do—whether by word, deed, or thought—can make God love us more or love us less. I always thought this was a Reformed emphasis.

Hence I feel the urge to sound a warning. Though well-intentioned, synod's recent zeal to discipline not only those who behave differently but also those who believe differently might inadvertently send a wrong message: that God's favor is conditional on our acting "correctly" and believing "correctly." Without a counterbalancing emphasis on grace and compassion, all the energy and urgency directed not only at proclaiming something to be wrong but at clarifying and codifying rules to either discipline or exclude those who think otherwise can send that wrong message.

I worry about the proverbial slippery slope in practice, if not in theory, toward earning God's favor by doing rightly and believing rightly. That is not a historic Reformed emphasis, though it is often a temptation for Reformed Christians. The 19th-century Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck warned about a "righteousness by good doctrine" posture (*The Certainty of Faith*, p. 26), which he

thought his fellow Protestants were dangerously flirting with, as opposed to Catholics' tendency toward "righteousness by good works." Either posture moves us away from God's grace, God's unearned favor.

Good works, obedience, and—in my opinion—even good theologizing do not earn us God's favor. They are, rather, our responses of gratitude to God and signs of our placing our trust correctly: in Christ. The *What It Means to Be Reformed* booklet also speaks of gratitude as a Reformed emphasis:

One of the most significant features of the Heidelberg Catechism is the placement of its teaching on the Ten Commandments. Of the three sections of the catechism—Our Guilt, God's Grace, Our Gratitude—the Ten Commandments are placed in the section on gratitude. Christians don't obey God *in order* to get rid of their guilt or *in order* to earn their salvation. They obey *because* God already has removed their guilt and given them the free gift of salvation. Obedience is the Christian's way of saying thank you for the gift of salvation, not the way of earning salvation (p. 24).

I don't fear that we would change our written theology away from salvation by God's grace alone through faith in Christ Jesus. But I do fear that our unspoken theology in practice can devolve into anxiously policing ourselves and others in both right actions and right thinking in order to earn God's love and favor. I fear our focus is slipping into drawing boundaries for God's love rather than gratefully exploring the depths of God's love. I pray that it would not be so. **B**



## REPLY ALL

To send letters to the editor, please see our guidelines at [thebanner.org/letters](http://thebanner.org/letters).

### June Issue

I've been reading the June *Banner* while listening, watching, and reading about synod. I first read that ministry share income is down 63% since 2018. I then read that Synod 2023 requested a "strategy and plan to arrest and reverse the trend of decline ... of membership." That seems to be a moot point now, as Synod 2024 just voted to suspend or recommend discipline for churches, pastors, officebearers, and even individual members of the Christian Reformed Church: churches on the front line of ministry, working in their communities to reach the lost with the good news of Jesus Christ. Pastors who are leading, guiding, teaching, and shepherding their congregations. Officebearers who are likely working full-time jobs and/or raising families and still devote countless hours caring for their congregation and community. And CRC members—many of us lifetime members!—following the commands of Christ the best we can and ultimately contributing to those ministry shares. Membership and ministry shares can only continue their downward trend after Synod 2024.

» Jane E. Hilbrand // Hudsonville, Mich.

### Hell and Back

I appreciate how the article "Seven Miles Into Hell" (March 2024) explored what the writers of the Apostles' Creed might have meant in saying that Christ "descended into hell." If I might add: How about the cross? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Perhaps Jesus simply stated these words to say, "I'm fulfilling this psalm right now." But if Jesus isn't just quoting Scripture, then it sounds like he's speaking to the Father. Can one member of the triune God truly experience separation from another? If it is possible that Jesus was forsaken by the Father in that moment, did he not temporarily experience hell? If we reject our heavenly Father and choose separation from him, we will experience hell eternally. However, there is no greater hope than to know we do not have to experience this because Christ not only knows the isolation of hell but has emerged from it victorious.

» Darrin Matter // Blaine, Wash.

### Flippant Greetings

I just read with great amusement the article by Ken Nydam, with whom I attended Calvin centuries ago, about "flippant greeting disorder" (May 2024). Since the pandemic, during which many people were somewhat afraid to hear the answer to "How are you?", I've almost always responded, "Moderately functional." That usually generates at least a smile.

» Jim Shade // Grand Rapids, Mich.

The article "Flippant Greeting Disorder" was a very trivial article, not even worthy of space. With all the mountainous problems in this world, you write a five-paragraph article on this? Tackle a worthwhile topic. This article was not.

» Jean Oosterheert // Grandville, Mich.

### Vaccines

I am disappointed that you allowed the article about the mRNA COVID vaccine ("Big Questions," April 2024). By including it, you seem to support the point that the COVID mRNA inoculation is an excellent vaccine choice, a "blessing from God and a way to obey Jesus' command to care for the sick." I humbly suggest that it would have been wiser to print nothing.

» John A. Versfelt // Port Coquitlam, B.C.

### Selective Reading

Shiao Chong's editorial in the May 2024 *Banner* ("Jesus' Selective Reading") gave me a lot of insight into the comments Jesus made in the synagogue in Nazareth, mentioned in Luke 4:16-30. In the *Complete Jewish Bible*, a translation by the Messianic Jewish theologian David H. Stern, a footnote on this passage says that Isaiah 61:1-3 is a *haftara* (conclusion), a regular reading on Shabbat. The reading of the *haftara* was an honor given to a special guest. Thus Jesus was more or less obliged by tradition to read the second half of Isaiah 61:2 as a part of this particular *haftara*. But he omitted the second portion, and then he said the passage had been fulfilled as he was speaking it! This was the first time I realized it might have been the omission of the vengeance phrase that had triggered the anger of the worshipers. Many thanks for clarifying the meaning of this passage for us!

» Dave Learned // Ann Arbor, Mich.



## God Nurtures Through Nature

### Tell Your Story

I appreciated Michelle VanderMeer's column about telling our stories ("Would You Share Your Story?", May 2024)—telling the generations who follow us the wonderful things God has done in our own past! About three years ago, my children gifted me with Storyworth. The program invites children to ask a question each week. At the end of a year, responses are bound into a book. But I already had a lot of stories and photos collected in a scrapbook, plus genealogy back to the 1700s and more. I could have it all bound together! I could tell our story and weave in God's story as a testimony to generations to come! I included Psalm 126:3 and Psalm 78:1-7 in my introduction. And when all was said and done, I had a beautiful hardcover book with over 240 photos and 480 pages to pass along!

» Philip Stel // Grand Rapids, Mich.


**ARE YOU FEELING** down, stressed, or overwhelmed? Are you struggling to find peace or slow down your thoughts? I often find myself getting caught up in the business of work, the distractions of technology, and the responsibilities of daily life. Then I notice I'm disconnected not only from myself, but from God and others as well.

One way I can find peace is by connecting with nature. Nature can help us manage our emotions, and it reminds me of God's perfect timing. Job 12:7-10 says, "But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind." Creation teaches me that God cares about me—especially so when I see the detail and beauty God has put into nature. It also helps me to reflect on how much God cares for me to share the beauty and the detail God has put into me, both in my appearance and talents.

When I am out on a hike or swimming in the lake, I sense a peace and quiet that allows me to hear God and hear my true self. I use nature-based mindful activities to strengthen those peaceful connections. For example, whatever outdoor activity I might be doing, from walking to swimming, I pay attention to creation using my senses. I might ask myself what I can see, hear, smell, feel, and taste. To sit by the water and hear the waves, feel the breeze brush against my face, and

I use nature-based mindful activities to strengthen those peaceful connections.

notice the sun warming up my body is where I most appreciate God's work. Near the water I find I have a clearer mind to reflect on my life and listen for God's gentle nudges. When I am struggling with worries, I go to the water and give my worries to God, then watch them drift away on the waves.

I hope that you too can find a place of peace. Life gets busy and can feel overwhelming. Remember that there are free tools at your disposal. Go outside. Slow down. Experience the beauty and peace God has made for you. 



Rebecca Bates is from Ontario. She holds a master's degree in social work and works as a therapist, social worker, and professor at a local college. She specializes in trauma and emotional management.

### As I Was Saying

Find the latest posts from our award-winning blog online at [TheBanner.org](https://TheBanner.org).

- » Creation's Voice: Do You Hear What I Hear?
- » Prayer is Not About Winning God Over
- » Let All Voices Be Heard



# Who Qualifies as ‘Young’?

By David Koll

**T**he question came up over coffee with a friend, a Korean pastor who, like me, is retired. He shared a South Korean social media post from April 2021 that claimed the United Nations was introducing startling new age classifications:

- 0-17 Underage
- 18-65 Youth/Young People
- 66-79 Middle Aged
- 80-99 Elderly/Senior
- 100+ Long-lived elderly

Are “youth” really people all the way to age 65? Does “middle age” really include persons as old as 79? Do we not become “elderly” until we attain the age of 80? This post was later debunked—the UN did not issue such a list—but it provoked plenty of discussion online and with my friend over coffee.

How long do people remain “young”? When do we become “old”? How long does “middle age” last? When do we really become an adult? When do we become a senior citizen? What do all these categories say about us and to us?

Long ago, when I was in my early 40s, I had a moment when I was privately impressed by my advancing wisdom and my contributions to society. I recognized that I had been in school until the age of 26, and that for over 15 years I had been “contributing to society” as a fully recognized adult. No matter that my boyish face still made many people assume I was a youth pastor instead of a “real” pastor. No matter that in the next 25 years I would develop a deepening recognition of what I did not know instead of being enthralled by what I thought I did know.

I remember coming up with a clever categorization of three stages of life: The “learning years” (all the years until I finished seminary), the “earning years” (those years until retirement when I was supposedly contributing to society), and the “yearning years” (those years following retirement when I anticipated spending much time longing for the second coming of Jesus and for release from the world of suffering and aging).

I’ve grown so much in the past 25 years (I’m now 68), and I regularly recognize how flawed my perspective was when I came up with my ditty of three stages of life. Thankfully, I never shared it with anyone until now. Perhaps God graciously used the intervening years to challenge my assumptions.

The truth is, healthy people are always learning, no matter their age. And true disciples are called to be always

yearning. Productivity and earning are as much or more an act of God's grace than a result of our gifted effort. And retirement, for those fortunate enough to experience it, doesn't mean sitting in a great waiting room. It is a time of learning, yearning, and contributing to the good of God's kingdom.

Apparently many people as they age see being "youthful" as something to be cherished. They fear it is bound to expire. Our culture adores youth and disdains aging. Perhaps I'm especially aware of this because I live in California, with its abundance of plastic surgeons and billboards filled with youth-oriented images. I suspect people across the western world are bombarded with these emphases. Perhaps that is why the erroneous Korean social media post sparked a global conversation.

I'd like to share an alternate perspective on aging:

- » If you ever feel as if you're getting old, recognize that God is a God who offers vigor for as long as we have life. Psalm 103:5 speaks of our youth being renewed like the eagle's. Isaiah 40:31 observes, "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles." We might need to accept the gift of a good nap or endure the challenge of a poor night's sleep,

#### When asked for common categories of aging, ChatGPT offers the following:

The most general age grouping commonly accepted worldwide is as follows:

- » Infants: 0-2 years old
- » Children: 3-12 years old
- » Teenagers: 13-19 years old
- » Adults: 20-64 years old
- » Seniors/Elderly: 65 years and older

In the United States, the age grouping is generally similar, with some variations. However, it's important to note that age groupings can vary in different contexts and may not be universally standardized.


I'm more appreciative of those over 80 than I have ever been.

but God's grace is always renewing, always pointing toward hope.

- » If you sense yourself becoming crankier as you age, accept the invitation to dwell on those verses above and ask what God might be trying to teach you. In other words, keep learning! Ecclesiastes 4:13 says, "Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning."
- » If you're enthralled with having a youthful spirit, be sure to keep learning from those who have more experience and especially from the God who made us. Ecclesiastes 12:1 says, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth." Beware of the tendency to believe we have a complete and pure understanding of the mind of God.

- » Toward that end, recognize the temptations that come in this world that must be challenged if we are to be mature, effective, and truly useful. 2 Timothy 2:22-23 is a good passage for all of us who are assaulted with the cultural tendencies toward pride and argumentativeness.

I do believe it is a blessing to grow old. I also am learning that limits come with the aging process. And I'm recognizing that there is a sad tendency for those in middle age to disregard the perspective and experience that comes only with age. I'm more appreciative of those over 80 than I have ever been.

Whatever our age, and no matter how many years God gives us, perhaps we can learn to focus on the reality C.S. Lewis describes in the final paragraphs of *The Last Battle*. He speaks of the period when we begin "Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before." Let us thank God for each of those who have been called to that reality, and let us all prepare for the day when we will join them! 



David R. Koll is a retired Christian Reformed pastor. He lives in Huntington Beach, Calif., and is a member of Anaheim CRC. He was the director of Candidacy for the CRCNA from 2008 to 2021.

1. When do you think a person becomes old?

2. When does adulthood begin, and why?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)



## BIG QUESTIONS

### Missional Living

#### How can I get to know my neighbors when we live miles apart in a rural area?

I have frequently been asked this question in Resonate's "Joining God in the Neighborhood" workshops and learning communities. The rural context has unique challenges (as do other types of neighborhoods), yet God is at work wherever the Spirit has placed us or sent us (Jer. 29:4-7; Luke 10:7). But if we aren't bumping into neighbors on the sidewalk or in our front yards, how are we meeting and getting to know them? How are we learning to love and bear witness?

I have heard great stories about barn raisings and harvest times in farming communities when rural neighbors move from one field to the next to bring in everyone's crops together. These practices are not only about helping a neighbor but about nurturing communities of care and connection.

But where to begin in rural settings that don't have those built-in practices? We can meet our neighbors in places we already frequent, such as local cooperatives, shops, parks, and libraries, as well as through activities and organizations such as a community soccer program, baseball league, business association, or book club. All of these create opportunities for us to pay attention to what God might be doing, to introduce ourselves as a neighbor, to listen well, and to have conversations.

That's the key: paying attention and being intentional about moving from strangers to acquaintances and eventually into relationships. We might ask ourselves: Where and how might I practice presence? "Presence" is not so much an extra item on our already



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

long to-do list, but an attentiveness to the Spirit and the "nearby other" in our ordinary, everyday lives.

This can start with our own interests. For example, a rural resident who wanted to meet their neighbors and enjoyed playing horseshoes got several horseshoe pits set up in a communal green space. It wasn't long before more neighbors were gathering to give it a try and meet each other, some for the first time. They even started organizing tournaments!

As we practice presence and participate more fully in our communities—no matter what kind of neighborhood we live in—we discover God at work and join the Spirit by seeking and contributing to the peace and well-being of our neighborhoods and pointing to the kingdom of God come near.

Karen Wilk is a Go Local catalyzer with Resonate Global Mission and Forge Canada. She is a pastor of Neighborhood Life (a home church movement) in Edmonton, Alta., where she also enjoys being a wife, mom, and neighbor.

### Ethics

#### Is cynicism a sin, and if so, how do I avoid it?

People constantly let us down. Sooner or later, almost everyone suffers the pain of betrayal, whether by a spouse, friend, co-worker, or boss. We discover that institutions we respect are not all they seem. Our heroes turn out to be deeply flawed. We learn to take everything with a grain of salt. We become cynical, or "contemptuously

distrustful of human nature and motives" (*Merriam-Webster*).

Skepticism regarding human nature is certainly warranted, and even wise. As Romans 3:12 puts it, quoting Psalm 14:3, "There is no one who does good, not even one." The Heidelberg Catechism summarizes this teaching as "I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbor. ... We are all conceived and born in a sinful condition" (Q&A 5; 7).

The problem with cynicism is the "contemptuous" part. All too often cynicism betrays a thinly disguised disdain for our neighbors, as if sin makes them even worse than they really are. Yet as Scripture also teaches, God works not only to sanctify believers, but to display common grace toward all human beings, enabling them to practice what John Calvin called "civil righteousness."

Consider Genesis 20, in which the pagan king Abimelek rebukes Abraham for lying to him about his wife's identity. Abraham's lie was motivated by his cynicism, having reasoned, "There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife" (20:11). Yet, as the narrative reveals, Abimelek had acted with a "clear conscience," and God kept him from sinning (20:6). It was Abraham who fell into sin because of his cynicism.

Because it fails to recognize God's grace in others, cynicism is actually directed toward God, and therein lies the problem. How might we avoid it? We can



start by meditating on God's work in sinful humanity, trusting in his promises to continue that work, and praying that God might enable us to love our neighbors. Such love is incompatible with cynicism, for, as the apostle Paul says, love "always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Cor. 13:7).

Matthew J. Tuininga is associate professor of Christian ethics and the history of Christianity at Calvin Theological Seminary. He is a member of Grace Christian Reformed Church and lives in Wyoming, Mich. He is the author of *The Wars of the Lord: The Puritan Conquest of America's First People*.

### Faith Formation

## Does it matter how the elements are distributed for the Lord's Supper? Do some methods cause us to multitask too many things or make it hard to meditate?

It is important to differentiate between the sacrament and our traditions around the sacrament. The way churches distribute the bread and the wine (or juice) to the congregation in the past is not necessarily the "best" way or even the only way. We have no direct scriptural basis to prefer one practice over another. In the Lord's Supper, we commune not only with Christ, but with each other. The sacraments are not individual rites; they belong to the church, and we celebrate them as a community. That is one reason why we do it together.

You mention that multitasking makes it hard to meditate. Multitasking can be a problem at times, but the fact is that we multitask in positive ways all the time, such as when we talk to family members or pray while doing dishes. Coming forward or having music playing during communion can help focus our attention rather than distract us.

The congregation we attend varies how it celebrates the Lord's Supper. Sometimes we sit in the pew and the elements are passed to us; other times we come forward and dip the bread into the cup (a method called intinction). Personally, we enjoy seeing all our brothers and sisters in Christ coming forward to receive the elements. It reminds us that we are all part of the body of Christ. We see people we've known for decades and people who have only recently begun attending, old and young, male and female. But we all share in the same loaf and cup. That's a powerful reminder that we, the church, are also the body of Christ.

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.

### Relationships

## I am concerned that by preserving my marriage I am risking my emotional, mental, and physical health. How much should I compromise to save my marriage?

Preserving your marriage is work and certainly requires sacrifices.

Jesus reminded his peers that spouses are to cling to one another (Matt. 19), but he acknowledged, as did Moses and Paul, that it's not always possible.

There are many good reasons to sacrifice for your marriage, including helping a spouse get through a challenging season and creating a stable environment for your kids. In some seasons one person contributes more than the other to the relationship. But when this becomes chronic and only one party puts effort into keeping a relationship healthy, that behavior is

abusive. Jesus gave instructions for calling out bad behavior and setting limits around it (Matt 18:15-20). We put boundaries in place to hold others accountable for their actions and to protect all those who are at risk.

God's word instructs us to go the extra mile and give generously (Matt. 5:38-40). Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan was filled with sacrificial acts. However, even the Samaritan was not expected to sacrifice everything to care for someone else. The innkeeper lent a hand so the Samaritan was able to attend to his own concerns. The Samaritan gave a lot of his time and energy, but he did not sacrifice everything. His personhood and autonomy were still intact. Carrying the whole load without support is unrealistic for an extended period of time. We are fragile human beings who need care and connection to survive.

A Christian counselor can be a wise guide in helping you practice good self-care and set wise boundaries to care for everyone involved. Pursuing marriage counseling is wise.

Compromises are necessary in relationships, but they should not erode our emotional, mental, and physical health. We need healthy boundaries to preserve our safety. Everyone should give generously in relationships, but as image bearers of God, we are in no way expected to submit ourselves to abuse.

Rev. Deb Koster leads the Christian Reformed Church's family and marriage ministry, *FamilyFire.com*, through ReFrame Ministries. She and her husband, Steven, worship at Grace CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Got a Big Question for any of our panelists? Email it to [editorial@thebanner.org](mailto:editorial@thebanner.org) with "Big Questions" in the subject line.

# Iowa Churches Join for Worship in Back-to-School Service

## NEWS

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Photo from Aug. 20, 2023, video capture.

**In the 2023 back-to-school service, students from Sheldon (Iowa) Christian School read theme Bible verses for each month of the upcoming school year.**

Three Christian Reformed congregations in Sheldon, Iowa, scheduled their yearly back-to-school blessing service for Aug. 18. First, Immanuel, and Living Water CRCs have kept the tradition for students and teachers of Sheldon (Iowa) Christian School since 2009. The whole school community, which includes attendees of these three churches and of CRCs in Ocheyedan, Sanborn, Sioux Center, and Orange City, Iowa, as well as Reformed, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches in these and neighboring communities, is invited to the service.

Pete Van Velzen, a former principal at the school, said the Sunday-evening service makes it easy for parents, grandparents, and supporters to attend and is a way to “enhance the relationship between the school and area churches.”

The churches’ pastors also appreciate the yearly connection. “It is truly a blessing to be part of this community and specifically this event,” said Jesse Walhof, pastor of Living Water CRC in Sheldon. He prayed a blessing for the school year at the 2023 service. “There are many communities whose churches do not associate with one another, but we have the blessing of not only associating with, but worshipping and partnering with one another for the proclamation of the gospel to our students,” Walhof said.

Brian Dunn, lead pastor at First CRC who preached at the 2023 service, said, “This service does a good job of allowing families that attend the school to reconnect after a long, good summer and support our kids and our community as we move forward into the fall.”

The theme for the 2024 service, which introduced the 2024-25 school year chapel theme, was “Heroes of the Faith,” with Hebrews 11:13 as the theme verse.

—Kyle Hoogendoorn

## Floodwaters Affect Iowa CRCs



**Despite floodwaters reaching its outside roofline, portions of the sanctuary of First CRC of Rock Valley, Iowa, remained dry. The church is in the lower right quarter of this picture.**

June flooding in northwest Iowa along the Little Sioux, Big Sioux, and Rock rivers affected three Christian Reformed churches and their community of Rock Valley.

Evan Vanden Bosch, council president at First CRC, was one of the first to assess the building's damage after the water receded. He said the church was left with about two inches of sludge throughout the building and standing water in the basement, which houses the boiler and air exchanges. Matt Haan, First's pastor, believes the sanctuary was protected by God's hand sealing up doors against further devastation. The building had "nearly 30 inches (of water) around it for nearly 30 hours. Yet on June 23, when we opened the door, there were three inches or less of mud in the narthex and only one inch of water in three-quarters of our sanctuary," Haan said. "We had planned a baptism for the morning of the 23rd, and around the font was dry, the stage dry, under the piano dry."

First CRC removed all of the carpet and reset the sanctuary benches. The congregation was able to worship and have the baptism in the sanctuary June 30, a week after the flood. Yet "nearly

a quarter of our members, nearly 100 people, have damage or have lost their home or business," Haan said.

Calvin CRC also dealt with standing water and silt, according to elders' board president Dan Ver Burg. Twenty of that church's families were affected, and half were displaced from their homes. This included Pastor Gideon Wamala. Calvin CRC had to remove its carpet, repair the sound system, and paint. The congregation was also able to worship June 30 with the help of "many people over many hours," said church secretary Becky Statema.

"In the chaos, I noticed people talking to people, relationships building, fellowship during lunch covered in mud. That won't be forgotten," Statema said. "I think that if you talk to any victims of the flood, they will say that people went over and beyond to help. One person told me that she was so humbled by the people in her house helping."

Trinity CRC's building was not affected by flooding but served as a secondary shelter for about 175 people, providing three meals a day between June 22 and 26, church secretary Kim DeJong said.

—Kyle Hoogendoorn

## Noteworthy



**Reuben DeBoer, a member of Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Dunnville, Ont., is a 2024 recipient of the nationally awarded Schulich Leader**

**Scholarship.** Given to 100 Canadian students each year in the science, technology, engineering, and math fields, the scholarships are awarded in connection with partner universities and are valued at \$100,000 or \$120,000 depending on the degree sought. DeBoer received a \$120,000 engineering scholarship. Schulich calls the program Canada's largest, most prestigious STEM scholarship.



**Sandra Pronteau, a Cree-Metis woman and a member of the Burnaby, B.C., Christian Reformed congregation of Nelson Avenue Community**

**Church, was honored with the Disabled Women's Network (DAWN) Canada's National Hummingbird Award** in recognition of her contributions to disability and Indigenous rights advocacy. Established in 1985, DAWN Canada works to end the poverty, isolation, discrimination, and violence experienced by women with disabilities. Pronteau is continuing her accessibility advocacy work as part of Nelson Avenue's team in the Thrive-sponsored Accessibility and Belonging Cohort, open to churches in British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon.

Photo by Inclusion BC



# CRCs Get Creative With Sharing Food

## Feeding the Hungry with 'Fishes and Loaves'



**Hans and Oderay Peters prepare stuffed peppers for the Fishes and Loaves meal program in Trinity CRC's commercial kitchen.**

As Jesus fed a multitude with the little a young boy had to share (John 6:3-13), Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Goderich, Ont., shares contributions from several community partners in a weekly to-go meal program called Fishes and Loaves. Begun 17 years ago as a monthly community meal sponsored in part by Classis Huron, the program attracted more church partners, transitioned to to-go style during COVID-19, and is now an inter-denominational initiative that runs every week with a different congregation hosting. Trinity, Lakeshore United Church, Salvation Army Suncoast Citadel, St. George's Anglican Church, and St. Peter's Catholic Church all take part.

Kim Burgsma coordinates the program that feeds over 100 people with three-course packed meals. Area restaurants, local bakers, and a small farm all contribute goods and produce to the effort, which has an annual budget of about \$25,000.

—Kimberly Simpson

## Carting Veggies to Illinois Neighborhoods



**Grace Valley CRC's veggie cart (pictured here in 2022) is stacked with surplus produce from the gardens of members and other generous donors.**

Grace Valley Christian Reformed Church in German Valley, Ill., has been carting around fresh veggies to share with its community since 2020.

Pastor Eric Schlukebir said the "very rural" church building is nearly surrounded by corn fields, so when the congregation was looking for ways to help its community at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, produce seemed like something they had plenty of to share. They built a traveling vegetable trailer to distribute fresh food around German Valley, Pecatonica, and other small towns in the vicinity.

Four years in, Schlukebir says sharing vegetables seemed a worthy pandemic effort to keep up. Church members bring their extra produce to worship on Sundays.

Until 2023, Schlukebir helped organize two cart locations per week, including in front of a library, in the parking lot of a coffee shop, at the fire station, or at a church in Freeport, Ill.

Last summer, church member Doug Wilken took over managing the

vegetable distribution and contacted other businesses and churches to find places willing to host the cart at different locations four days a week.

Wilken also arranged support from four congregations in Byron, Ill., a town about 20 minutes southeast of German Valley where Wilken and his wife, Cindy, live. Those churches take turns hosting the cart in their parking lots one Tuesday each month. "It's been pretty well attended with people bringing (vegetables) to it and using it," Wilken said.

"Most of the time people are just thrilled with the idea of being able to have fresh vegetables for themselves and their families," Wilken said, adding that sharing excess produce for free is a new idea for some.

The cart program starts in late July or as soon as there is enough produce available to distribute. It runs until the first frost in early October or as long as there are still vegetables to harvest.

—Alissa Vernon



## Garden of Hope in Winnipeg



**Volunteers transplant vegetable seedlings in Covenant CRC's Garden of Hope.**

Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Winnipeg, Man., has dedicated a half-acre of its property to grow food for its community, planting vegetables, apple trees, and berries in a Garden of Hope. Congregants were motivated in part by a high rate of food insecurity in their province. In 2023, Food Banks Canada gave a grade of D- to Manitoba's food security, noting that 19.6% of residents did not regularly have enough to eat. Covenant CRC wanted to be part of the solution.

Local farmer Roland Reenders, along with other congregants with agricultural backgrounds, began work on the garden in 2022, tilling the half-acre behind the church building to prepare it for planting. Pastor Ben Verkerk applied for funding, including a \$5,000 grant from the Christian Reformed Church of North America Church Revitalization Grant and Loan Fund. Covenant CRC dedicated church funds to finance the project, and individual church members also contributed.

With funding secured, a small portion of the plot was planted with winter squash in 2023. The church donated more than 3,000 pounds of squash from the harvest that year, distributing it to agencies including The Riverton & District Friendship Center and the Indigenous Family Center.

In 2024 the church added beets, bell peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage to the garden, which lies on a south-facing slope with a row of trees as a windbreak and 12 dwarf apple trees forming a small orchard.

"The Garden of Hope is a stewardly use of our property and acts as a clear and tangible way in which the church is serving the world," said Joanna Wassenaar, one of the church garden volunteers. "We hope through volunteerism and a shared vision, we will build community within the church."

—Sarah DeGraff

## Food Recovery Project in Niagara Falls



**Pastor Steven deBoer is leading a food recovery program in Niagara Falls, Ont.**

After two years of working with a local convention center to recover meals that otherwise might have gone to waste, The Bridge Church in Niagara Falls, Ont., is expanding its project to more partners.

Steve deBoer, mission pastor for The Bridge, talked about the project at a city council meeting in January and is encouraged by the city's interest. "I think when we concern ourselves with things that the cities are concerned about, and we look to be solution focused and work to network with other people, no matter who they are ... I think it transcends a lot that divides us."

The Bridge provides a community for people living in poverty and often experiencing homelessness. Part of that work is a daily breakfast program that served more than 20,000 meals last year, some of the time using recovered food.

"Food recovery is all about establishing relationships with hotels, restaurants, banquet centers, convention centers, long-term care homes—any food-serving organization or business in our city—and having a relationship with them by which we recover the food that would have otherwise been thrown out," deBoer said.

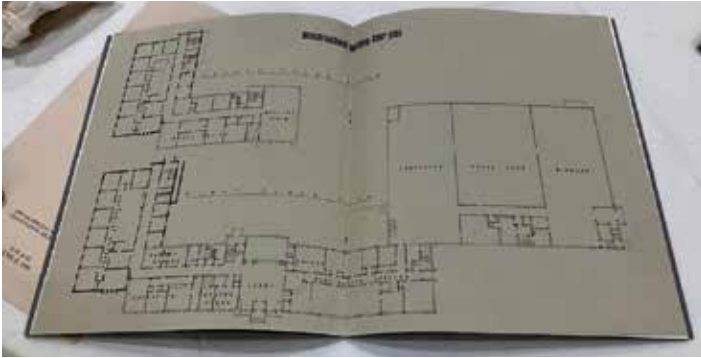
Bridge volunteers pick up the food and process it. "It's always in a temperature-controlled environment, always (documented) in a dated way" to ensure the food remains safe, deBoer said.

The recovered food that is not used for the breakfast program is redistributed to other organizations supporting individuals in the city.

The Bridge's focus is to "serve all of the missions of our city on a wider scale, to respond to food insecurity in all the corners of the city," deBoer said.

—Kristen Parker

## CRCNA Hosts Open House in Former Ministry Building



**Once a drawing on paper and then a realized building that housed denominational ministries for 70 years, the CRCNA property at 1700 28th St. SE in Grand Rapids, Mich., has been decommissioned in preparation for its sale.**

After nearly 70 years of serving the ministries of Christian Reformed Church in North America, the denominational building at the corner of 28th Street and Kalamazoo Avenue SE in Grand Rapids, Mich., is closed. Staff hosted an open house and farewell service attended by about 100 people June 27.

Dean Heetderks, co-director of ministry services for the CRC, shared a history of the building, which was first proposed at Synod 1945 by what was then known as the Board of Indian and Foreign Missions. It took eight years for approval. Several sites around Grand Rapids and even Chicago were considered, including a site already owned by the CRCNA where *The Banner* was then printed.

The denomination broke ground on the site in southeast Grand Rapids in 1955 and moved into it the following year “by the good hand of God ... (and) without any serious mishaps,” according to an introductory guide prepared for guests at the building. The two-story building was built for \$666,500.

At one time the denomination received so much mail that the United States Postal Service gave the building its own ZIP code, which it held until 2013.

CRCNA general secretary Zachary King, in a reflection based on Psalm 126, said that amid the challenges of change he wanted to focus on “all of the good work that God has done through the people that have been part of this building and all the good work that is yet to come.”

A smaller office space purchased by the CRCNA at 300 East Beltline Ave. NE in Grand Rapids will become the new ministry support center. Until it’s ready for occupancy, the denomination is leasing space from the Reformed Church in America. The Grand Rapids-based grocery store chain Meijer intends to purchase the former denomination property, which was put on the market last September.

—Greg Chandler

## 40 Years of Serving Through Crossroads Prison Ministries



Courtesy of Crossroads Prison Ministries

**Crossroads Prison Ministries volunteer Terry VerHage speaks of the students she mentors as if they are family.**

As Crossroads Prison Ministries (U.S.) celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, hundreds of Christian Reformed Church members representing about 224 congregations from across the U.S. continue their commitments to the Bible study correspondence ministry.

Founded in 1984, Crossroads disciples incarcerated men and women through correspondence Bible study. Volunteer mentors on the outside read the lessons mailed by students inside. Mentors from a wide variety of denominations serve almost 30,000 Crossroads correspondence students.

Terry VerHage, 92, a member of Hillcrest CRC in Hudsonville, Mich., has been a mentor since 1991. She has read more than 1,300 lessons and written as many encouraging letters to the participating students. She sees them as family and refers to her experiences with Crossroads as part of being a disciple of Jesus.

Crossroads students study the Bible in tiers, with the first level covering topics such as “Who Is Jesus?” and “Great Truths of the Bible.” Students who reach Tier 2 are assigned a mentor who shepherds them through that tier and beyond. Continuing with the same mentor allows a relationship to develop between mentor and inmate.

Alice Parker, now a Crossroads ambassador throughout South Dakota, became a Crossroads mentor 21 years ago while a member of the former Hope CRC in Rapid City, S.D. Parker currently mentors nine students.

In 1998, Crossroads began a Canadian ministry, known since 2021 as Crossroads for Prisoners Canada. There are Crossroads ministries in 30 countries worldwide.

—Anita Ensing Beem

## Beauty for Ashes in Florida



**The women's ministry of Spanish-speaking Sunlight Community CRC in Miami used some of its grant money to host a conference with author Wendy Bello.**

New life is sprouting from the remnants of long-closed churches in Classis Southeast U.S., bringing to mind God's words of promise to "bestow ... a crown of beauty instead of ashes" (Isa. 61:3).

Decades ago, two Christian Reformed churches in Florida—one in Boca Raton and another in Jacksonville—closed due to dwindling attendance. The buildings were sold and the money invested. Now a remaining fund of about \$400,000 is being used to inspire young churches to start something new.

In January, the classis (a regional group of CRC churches) awarded its third round of grants between \$500 and \$3,000 to some of its member congregations.

"We give the mini-grants to encourage the churches that we are behind them," said Stan Workman, a retired pastor who coordinates the grants. "Most churches talk about what they would do if they had the money. We're saying, 'Here's the money; now show us some action!'"

Sunlight Community CRC in Miami received \$1,500 toward its Spanish-speaking women's ministry. "We're very grateful for the classis support," Sunlight's ministry leader Lourdes Garcia said.

Grants also went to Haitian CRC and Sunlight Grace Church in Orlando, South Kendall CRC in Miami, Sunlight Community Church Lake Worth (Fla.), and Terra Ceia CRC in Pantego, N.C.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

### IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Arnold Rumph*

1929-2024

A couple of days before Arnold Rumph's death, when everyone thought he could no longer communicate, he recited, along with a loved one who was reading aloud Psalm 23, "And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Arnold, 94, died June 19.

He was ordained in 1957 after graduating from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary. He served Grace Christian Reformed Church in Coburg, Ont., and Fruitland CRC in Stoney Creek, Ont., and after receiving a Master of Theology degree from Princeton Theological Seminary he pastored Mount Hope (Ont.) Community Church.

He studied Spanish in Costa Rica and served with what was then Christian Reformed World Missions in Argentina, Puerto Rico, and Guatemala. He returned to the U.S. in 1981 and after more studies taught at the Juan Calvino Seminary in Mexico City and at the International Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., before pastoring Trinity CRC in Chula Vista, Calif., and Trinity Fellowship CRC in San Diego, Calif. He retired to Bradenton, Fla., in 1994 and continued to preach in area churches.

Predeceased in 2006 by his first wife, Ann Marie, Arnold is survived by their six children, 16 grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren and by his second wife, Cathy, and her two children, seven grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

### IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. John Boonstra*

1930-2024

A disciplined man who was a hard worker and meticulous record keeper, John Boonstra also had a dry sense of humor and a reputation as a fast talker. He died June 20 after several years of gradually declining health following two strokes. He was 93. Three days before his death, John and his wife, Carolyn, celebrated their 66th wedding anniversary.

At 18, in 1949, John immigrated with his family to Canada from the Netherlands. After initially working on a sugar beet farm and a dairy farm, he felt called to ministry, upgrading his education to apply for and graduate from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary. He was ordained in 1962 and served First Christian Reformed Church in Brandon, Man.; Duncan (B.C.) CRC; Ottewell CRC in Edmonton, Alta.; Maple Ridge (B.C.) CRC; and Kelowna (B.C.) CRC. He retired in 1998, going on to serve six other congregations as an interim pastor.

John enjoyed reading, teaching, preaching, visiting, gardening, photography, music, and participating in the lives of his family members. He also "absolutely loved orchards," his family said.

Predeceased by a son-in-law and a daughter, John is survived by his wife, Carolyn; five children and their spouses; 13 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

# Classis Watch: Spring/Summer 2024

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, or regional assembly. The following are actions taken by classes, guided by articles of Church Order, since March 2024.

**Ministers welcomed to CRC ministry from other denominations** (Art. 8): Revs. Mark Park, Lloyd Hong, and Michael Johnson.

Ministers loaned (Art. 13-c): Revs. Zhengfei “Stone” Wang to the Chinese Christian Church of Rochester, N.Y., and Tim Holwerda to the Heliopolis Community Church in Cairo, Egypt.

**Ministers released from ministry in a congregation** (Art. 17-a): Revs. Petr Kornilov from Ocean View CRC in Norfolk, Va. (due to disbandment); Richard Britton III from Trinity CRC in Fremont, Mich. (due to closure); Nicholas Bierma from Kelowna (B.C.) CRC; Derek Zeyl from Third CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich.; Kevin Heeres from Oakwood CRC in Belding, Mich.; Mark Van Drunen from Calvary CRC in Wyoming, Mich.; and Kyle DeYoung (a Reformed Church in America pastor) from Shalom CRC in Sioux Falls, S.D.

CRC pastor Mike Westerveld was released from ministry at Christ Memorial Church, a Reformed Church in America congregation in Holland, Mich.

**Eligible for call:** Revs. Petr Kornilov, Derek Zeyl, and Cedric Parsels. **Eligibility extended:** Revs. Robert Byker, Nate Bradford, Aminah Al-Attas Bradford, Marc Nelesen, and Jeffrey Janssen.

## Leaving Ministry in the CRC

*Classes may end a pastor’s ordained ministry status guided by Church Order articles 14 and 17 and indicating a designation reflecting the manner and spirit in which the minister acted during the time leading up to and including resignation from office.*

**Honorably released:** Mark Knetsch, Mary Stegink, and Sam Sutter.

**Ministers retiring** (Art. 18): Revs. Heung Rok (James) Lee, Won Chol (Joshua) Ma, Douglas Bratt, Jane Porter, Sam Cooper, Charles Geschiere, Randy Buursma, Jon Huizenga, and David Cheung (effective Nov. 30).

## Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors with specific roles in their classes** (Art. 23): Jeff Huntley and Dylan Kern (Southeast U.S.), Sergio Paz (Greater Los Angeles), Amie Spriensma (Zeeland), Bethany Besteman (Hackensack), and Uri Alcivar (Thornapple Valley).

Ron Boersema (Zeeland) and Justin Ruddy (Atlantic Northeast) were **honorably released**, and David Murray (Grandville) was dismissed from ministry as a commissioned pastor (Art. 24-d).

**Commissioned pastor emeritus status** (Art. 24-e) was granted to John Aasmen (Thornapple Valley).

## New Ministries and Ministry Changes

*An emerging (unorganized) church does not have its own council and is under the care of the council of a neighboring CRC. An organized church has its own council (Art. 38).*

Victory Fellowship in Grand Rapids, Mich., received **organized status**.

Recognized as **emerging**: Joy Love Church in Oakland Gardens, N.Y.; The Source Church in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Sunlight Winter Garden and Sunlight Winter Garden Brazil in Winter Garden, Fla.; and Haitian CRC-Salem.

**Disbanded or closed:** Crossroads CRC in Ajax, Ont.; Trinity CRC in Fremont, Mich.; Maranatha CRC in Woodbridge, Ont.; Ocean View CRC in Norfolk, Va.; and Overisel (Mich.) CRC (memberships transferred to Overisel Reformed Church-Alliance of Reformed Churches).

**Amalgamated:** Friendship Community Church (now disbanded) in Toronto, Ont.,

and All Nations Christian Fellowship in North York, Ont.

**Disaffiliated:** Emerging congregation Resurrection Life Church in Apex, N.C.

## Other Matters

Beginning at its March 2024 meeting, **Classis Rocky Mountain now includes English-to-Spanish interpretation at all of its meetings**. Stated clerk Kelly Vander Woude said the move is to help participants not fluent in English. “We are blessed with having a multilingual classis,” he said.

At the May 2024 meeting of **Classis Toronto, delegates voted to “send classical delegated visitors to discern the current convictions of Meadowvale council regarding their ongoing relationship with the Christian Reformed Church.”** This vote came after discussion of Meadowvale CRC’s communication to classis identifying Meadowvale as a “church in protest” over Synod 2022’s confessional decision declaring homosexual sex to be among behaviors prohibited by the seventh commandment.

**Christ Community Church in Nanaimo, B.C.**, whose council had previously reported to Classis B.C. North-West its intention to begin a process of disaffiliation from the CRCNA, has come to the end of that process. **It did not receive the two-thirds majority congregational vote needed to disaffiliate.** Classis B.C. North-West appointed Rev. Curtis Korver as counselor for Christ Community’s remaining congregation while it is without a pastor.

At its May 2024 meeting, **Classis Grand Rapids North discussed its status and “the reality of the weakness of Classis without many positions filled or active.”** The classis interim committee is expected to “return to Classis at (a) subsequent meeting with recommendations.”

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor



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**Hearts Exchanged:** Hearts Exchanged is all about going beyond the headlines into deep work that wrestles with how our churches can become places of belonging and embrace God’s call to reconciliation with Indigenous neighbors. Over 600 people across Canada have participated.



**Edmonton (Alta.) Native Healing Centre:** One unique program of the Edmonton Native Healing Centre is nurse-led foot care. Some people who visit the center can be on their feet for up to 20 hours a day. Free access to a nurse who can help with toenails, calluses, and general foot care can be life-changing.



**Indigenous Christian Fellowship (Regina, Sask.):** Indigenous Christian Fellowship has had a food support ministry for many years. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, food needs increased. Today, anywhere from 70 to 200 people participate in the weekly community meals.



**Walk for Reconciliation (Langley, B.C.):** For more than nine years, members of Willoughby CRC have partnered with others to participate in a 40-kilometer walk to the former St. Mary’s Indian Residential School in Mission, B.C. The learning and the relationship building is meaningful to everyone involved.





# Reconciliation from Coast to Coast

By Victoria Veenstra, CRC Communications

Across Canada, the Christian Reformed Church is taking steps toward repairing broken relationships between Indigenous people and settlers. Long-established urban Indigenous ministries help the CRCNA serve local communities by meeting acute needs and helping to bring healing. Churches across Canada are also taking advantage of a variety of learning opportunities offered by the CRCNA to help them begin reconciliation in their own neighborhoods.



**KAIROS Blanket Exercise:** This workshop walks participants through the history of Indigenous people in Canada. It's a great introduction to reconciliation, and the Indigenous Ministry team has delivered these across the country.



**Spark! (Truro, N.S.):** Adrian Jacobs, the CRC's senior leader for Indigenous justice and reconciliation, has been leading talks and workshops across the country, including at the Spark! Conference in Truro, N.S.

**Indigenous Family Centre (Winnipeg, Man.):** In the heart of Winnipeg's North End, this center equips parents and families to deal with trauma and create healthy homes. This includes horse-based training called "Parenting with Presence."

## From Far and Wide in Canada

**IN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES** in Canada there is growing interest in becoming a healthy, intercultural church. This reflects the country's increasing ethnic and racial diversity. According to Statistics Canada (2022), by 2041 half of Canadians will be Black, Indigenous, or another person of color. This change will bless and affect churches as well.

The CRC offers several ministries specific to the Canadian context designed to help the church respond to this evolving demographic landscape.

Intercultural Ministry is one component of this work. Committee members from a variety of cultural, ethnic, racial, generational, and geographical backgrounds work closely with the senior leader for intercultural ministry to advise on and assist in promoting diversity and inclusion within the church.

Earlier this year, 40 people representing 13 churches from across Canada gathered at the Crieff Hills Retreat Centre outside of Cambridge, Ont., to discuss what it means to be a healthy, multicultural church. Supported by a Thriving Practices grant, this multicultural cohort agreed to embark on a 10-month learning journey together to become more informed about multicultural wisdom, share insights from various experiments, and develop new practices to encourage multicultural hospitality and community.

The CRC's Indigenous Ministry office supports healing and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. This ministry is also advised by a committee that provides leadership and support for learning about Indigenous justice and reconciliation and developing steps to promote healing and justice.

Together, the Canadian Justice Ministries are committed to fostering unity and equity within the Canadian church. They not only respond to present demographic realities but are paving the way for a more inclusive future based on reconciliation, mutual respect, and shared growth. **B**

—Victoria Veenstra,  
CRC Communications

## Strawberry Thanksgiving and Communion



Senior Leader for Indigenous Justice, Adrian Jacobs, speaks to participants at a special Strawberry Thanksgiving and Communion event.

**ON JULY 6**, church members who live and worship on the Six Nations Haldimand Tract treaty territory gathered together for a "Strawberry Thanksgiving and Communion" event to mark the establishment of a sacred covenant between churches and Six Nations of the Grand River.

The event was initially conceived in 2007 in a conversation among Haudenosaunee leaders Rick Hill and Adrian Jacobs and the Mennonite Central Committee. They suggested that churches who don't pay property taxes could make a token lease payment to Six Nations for use of land within their treaty territory. This would recognize that historic land lease agreements along the Haldimand Tract have not been honored and that monies that should have been held in trust for Six Nations have not been used for the benefit of Six Nations people. They also suggested that churches that establish this Sacred Covenant would, if they ever disband, transfer ownership of their property to Six Nations.

During the Strawberry Thanksgiving event, Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church (Kitchener, Ont.) presented a check to Six Nations Polytechnic representing 1% of the church's budget.

Jacobs, the Christian Reformed Church's senior leader for Indigenous justice and reconciliation, invited local participants in Hearts Exchanged, the CRC's training program for Indigenous reconciliation. Seven different CRC congregations were represented at the event, where they were encouraged to consider how they might establish sacred covenant relationships with local Indigenous communities. **B**



## The View From Here

## Standing in the Gap

**AS CHRISTIANS**, our journey of faith always happens within a specific place and context. In Canada, this journey involves recognizing the painful legacy of Indigenous relations and embracing the call to reconciliation. This call is not about assigning blame, but rather about acknowledging our shared responsibility to heal and restore.

One of my first main engagements in Indigenous reconciliation happened when I was pastoring in Thunder Bay, Ont., Christian Reformed churches had been invited to participate in an Indigenous art tour called “*Kisemanito Pakitinasuwin / Creator’s Sacrifice*.” I had the chance to be part of an organizing committee to prepare for our congregation’s participation in the event. We intentionally formed a committee that included CRC leaders and local Christian Indigenous leaders, sparking important conversations about fault, responsibility, and reconciliation.

These conversations often centered around the question of whether it is necessary to apologize for actions we did not personally commit. We found that this question, while valid, was not the most helpful in discerning our role as the church in Canada today.

It is similar to experiences within a family. We bear each other’s burdens all the time; just because I have not caused harm personally doesn’t mean I tell members of my family that I want nothing to do with their grief, brokenness, hurt, or healing. As a member of our family, I have a responsibility to be present with them in their pain, and I have a responsibility to seek out justice and wholeness with them.

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and healing.

Fault and blame are somewhat beside the point when it comes to discerning who has responsibility to bring reconciliation and healing. The gospel of Jesus Christ points to how responsibility for reconciliation is different from admitting personal guilt. Jesus was guiltless and yet took reconciliation upon himself.

Similarly, our churches have a responsibility in Canada (and around the world) that crosses denominational lines. To be a church that is part of the fabric of our Canadian society means to bear the collective harm that our brothers and sisters in Christ caused and to bear the collective responsibility for healing and reconciliation. This is not just about being the Christian Reformed Church; this is about being part of the church universal.

All of us also have a responsibility as individuals to be agents of reconciliation—encouraging people who are

far from God to be reconciled to God through Christ, and bringing reconciliation and healing to relationships in a way that reflects our own reconciliation to God in Christ.

I’m grateful for all the ways that the CRC is living into this reconciliation journey, taking up the responsibility to seek the wholeness of all those in our local, regional, and national communities. I’m thankful for all the ways that we can continue to live into this kind of reconciliation.

On the other pages of Our Shared Ministry in this issue of *The Banner*, you’ll see some of the ways we’ve been living into this commitment. They are all key to our public witness as a church. In particular, I’d like to highlight Hearts Exchanged, a learning opportunity that many members of the CRC across Canada have participated in. It is well regarded not just within our congregations, but in wider circles as well. A version of it is even being used as a for-credit course at Calvin Theological Seminary. If you are Canadian and haven’t heard of Hearts Exchanged yet, now is a great time to jump in! I’ve seen churches transformed as they wonder what reconciliation looks like for them as a community.

The CRC has a reputation for taking responsibility for growing justice and wholeness not just within our churches, but within our larger communities. My hope is that this reputation paired with action continues to bear fruit. **B**



Rev. Al Postma is the executive director (Canada) of the CRCNA. He is a member of Hope CRC in Brantford, Ont.

## Seminary's Latino Ministries Program Equips Global Leaders

**IN 2013, CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY** recognized a significant need for accredited, graduate-level, Reformed education for Spanish-speaking students. For the next 10 years, CTS professor of New Testament Mariano Avila, Ph.D., worked with more than 130 students across five cohorts. These men and women earned master's degrees in family care, certificates in Hispanic/Latino ministry, and/or certificates in family care.

With Avila's retirement in 2023, leaders at Calvin Seminary began praying and searching for a new leader for its Latino/a Ministry Program. They also wondered how they could bring this program to Spanish-speaking students outside of West Michigan and North America.

In 2023, God answered this prayer by bringing the search team to Gabriela Tijerina-Pike, Ph.D., who was subsequently appointed as the seminary's director of Latino/a ministries. Tijerina-Pike is from Monterrey, Mexico, and has served Christ through writing, teaching, and leading in a variety of ministry organizations. This included work as a seminary professor, a missionary in Nicaragua, and the president of Seminario Todos Las Naciones in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

Tijerina-Pike brings her passion for equipping young leaders to Calvin Seminary, where she guides students seeking a Maestría de Artes en formación de liderazgo (M.A. in leadership formation).

Since assuming leadership of the Latino/a Ministry Program, Tijerina-Pike has concentrated on providing a flexible format, contextualizing Reformed theology for diverse ministry contexts, and developing local and global partnerships.

The online master's program allows students to maintain their current employment and ministries. Fernando Valenzuela Viale lives in Chile and is pleased to study online in a master's program that promotes the integration of his learning on Christian leadership with his work as an ecosystem manager.

Tijerina-Pike supports remote students with virtual office hours and other online gatherings to foster engagement and enrich the students' learning experience.

The program's curriculum mirrors Calvin Seminary's traditional degree programs with a focus on Reformed theology and confessions, but it also helps students contextualize Reformed theology in their own ministries and vocations. Those currently enrolled in the program include leaders of multinational ecumenical organizations, accountants, engineers, church planters, and missionaries. Tijerina-Pike looks forward to opportunities to help Calvin Seminary



Gabriela Tijerina-Pike serves as Calvin Theological Seminary's director of Latino/a ministries.

develop partnerships that can equip church leaders around the globe through Reformed theology. She is developing workshops on academic writing to help students to write publishable papers or conference presentations, and she is partnering with Calvin University's Hekman Library to provide Spanish-language resources. She also hopes to develop additional partnerships with Resonate Global Mission's missionaries and partners across Latin America to train local ministry leaders in their contexts. That work has already begun in Nicaragua and Guatemala.

Calvin Seminary invites you to pray that God will bless and equip a new generation of pastors and ministry leaders, that the Latino/a Ministry Program will stay faithful to its Reformed identity while addressing contemporary ministry needs, and that God will bring new students from North America to the program. [B](#)

—Leah Jolly,  
Calvin Theological Seminary

## Loving Neighbors as an Indigenous Leader

**IN GUATEMALA**, 25 languages are spoken—and 22 of them are Indigenous Mayan languages. But while nearly 44% of the population of Guatemala is Indigenous, the voices of these people groups are not often heard.

“Mayans make up almost half of the population,” said Francisco Enriquez, the country director for World Renew in Guatemala, “yet they have poor access to schools and health services.”

This ongoing lack of support and resources leads to high rates of child marriage, school dropouts, and even health problems. “Mayan traditions follow the seasons, but when there’s too little or too much rain, it leads to tremendous crop loss,” Enriquez said, and that in turn leads to high incidences of malnutrition.

Despite a pervasive sense of hopelessness in his community, Diego Alberto Catinac Guarchaj is full of hope for a better future—and not just for himself. This 32-year-old Mayan community leader—the secretary of his local board of directors—lives in a mountainous region in rural Guatemala. He graduated as a schoolteacher, but due to a lack of job opportunities, he now works as a day laborer in the fields.

When Guarchaj learned about initiatives by World Renew’s local partners to strengthen the leadership in his community, he was excited to contribute to the process through his role with the board.

“When I heard how they related the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples with leadership and the importance of service, I realized that being part of the board is an opportunity to serve my community,” he said. “I was happy to be a part of addressing leadership challenges and goals.”



Diego Alberto Catinac Guarchaj sees that God is at work in his mountainous community in Guatemala.

Together with other leaders, he looked at some of the patterns of leadership that might have held the community back from reaching some of their shared goals.

Guarchaj, for instance, admits that he used to believe being a leader was only about asking for projects and attending meetings. Then he elected to participate in training offered through World Renew partners, and he saw that his position of leadership—which comes with social power protected by law—can help shape community life in much more collaborative and relevant ways.

“It’s not easy to be a community leader!” he said. “The responsibilities we have are great because there may be people who are in conflict with us. I always go to church and hold responsibilities there. But when I learned about the Good Samaritan, I realized that I was not doing things the right way. I was like the Levite or the priest who didn’t

love my neighbor. I just said I loved God, but not the people.”

For Guarchaj, spending time looking at leadership through the lens of Scripture has helped him recognize and prioritize his neighbors.

“The process strengthened me not only as a leader, but spiritually,” he said, “and now I try to talk to people, even if they don’t talk to me. That doesn’t matter. What matters is to truly love my neighbor and work with them for a better future.”

“God is working in our community,” Guarchaj said, “and I want to be a good leader so I can do better. I pray that this work will continue to motivate us to improve ourselves and work together to reach our goals within our community.”

—Naomi Bula,  
World Renew



## 30 Years of Abuse Prevention

“**THE LEADERS GOD** is bringing into the CRC are drawn to some of our core values,” said Susan LaClear, director of Candidacy for the Christian Reformed Church in North America. “They rave about our abuse-of-power training and our code of conduct. It makes them feel safe to hear us addressing abuse in the church together and trying very hard to prevent it.”

LaClear shared these words at Synod 2024 in celebration of the new candidates for ministry being welcomed into the denomination, which is also marking 30 years of abuse prevention and response work in the CRCNA.

In 1989, synod convened a committee to study abuse among the membership of the CRC. The results were published in *Agenda for Synod 1992*, and on June 17, 1994, synod voted to begin the Office of Abuse Prevention to equip congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response. In 2009, the Office of Abuse Prevention became Safe Church Ministry, and in 2023 it was folded into Thrive, the congregational ministry arm of the CRC.

Thrive’s abuse prevention and response work helps to build communities where the value of each person is honored, where people are free to worship and grow in faith free from abuse, and where the responses to abuse are compassion and justice to foster healing. Today, Thrive supports more than 200 ministry leaders or churches each year in matters related to abuse awareness, prevention, and response.

There is much to be celebrated about the work of the past 30 years. As abuse continues to be a dark reality of our society, we can be grateful for the work done to create places of worship that are free from harm. Currently, 88 percent of churches in the CRCNA have a safe church policy, and 69 percent of CRCNA classes have a safe-church coordinator. All candidates for ministry are required to take abuse-of-power training, and synod has approved a Code of Conduct for ministry leaders. These are significant advances in the area of abuse prevention and response.

Find the full story at [crcna.org/news-and-events/news/30-years-abuse-prevention](https://crcna.org/news-and-events/news/30-years-abuse-prevention).

—Kristyn DeNooyer,  
Thrive

## A Joyful Tune for Prince Edward Island Congregation

**IN A DISPLAY OF** young and growing faith, 9-year-old Chandler brought a song from one of his favorite podcasts, *Liz and Friends*, to his church service at Island Wesleyan Church in Hampton, Prince Edward Island.

A dedicated listener to *Liz and Friends* podcast for about a year, Chandler surprised the worship team by asking to sing “Who You Are,” a song from the podcast about being created in God’s image.

“Chandler really likes music, so the fact that there are songs incorporated into the podcast has given Chandler even more reason to share the podcast with others,” Chandler’s father, Jonathan, said. *Liz and Friends* is a staple in the family’s routine, entertaining Chandler and nurturing his growing faith with its engaging stories and music.

The podcast is part of *Kids Corner*, the children’s ministry of ReFrame Ministries. ReFrame produces faith formation media for the Christian Reformed Church. After Chandler’s request to the church, Jonathan sought permission from ReFrame to use the song.

“We are happy to accommodate these requests,” said Ron VandenBurg, *Kids Corner*’s producer. “It’s just one way that we are helping young people share their faith in a way that’s meaningful to them.”

ReFrame even produced a lyrics video with music for Chandler’s church to use in its Father’s Day service, when Chandler introduced the song before the congregation sang it together.

Through simple gestures like sharing a favorite song, Chandler can inspire others in the Island Wesleyan Church community to embrace faith with joy and creativity.

“As Chandler continues to grow in his faith and explore his interests,” VandenBurg said, “his story serves as a reminder of the power of *Kids Corner* in shaping young minds and nurturing spiritual growth in unexpected, delightful ways.”

—Brian Clark,  
ReFrame Ministries



Chandler shared one of his favorite podcast songs with fellow members of Island Wesleyan Church.



## Walking on Holy Ground

**“I CAME TO THE MIDDLE EAST** having experienced quite a lot of loss. ... I had a lot of healing to do—spiritually, emotionally, physically,” said Elena,\* a Resonate Global Mission volunteer. “God answered my prayers.”

Elena had been discerning a call to ministry for years, but as she was finishing her undergraduate studies, she didn’t feel ready to go straight to seminary.

“I felt I needed further spiritual formation ... and wanted to find it in a diverse community where I could ask new questions about the way that God is at work in the world and be challenged by the perspectives of those whose culture, language, and way of being the church was different from my own,” she said.

That’s when she learned about Cohort, a Resonate program for young adults to live in community, serve in a grassroots ministry, and engage in deep spiritual formation. With opportunities to serve in Central America, Europe, the Middle East, and Detroit, Mich., Resonate’s Cohort is an opportunity for young adults to get a better understanding of what it’s like to be a missionary or to work in cross-cultural ministry.

When Elena met with the Resonate missionary\* who leads Cohort in the Middle East, she felt an instant connection to the ministry. It seemed like a good fit for what she sensed God was calling her to focus on.

“I had never done any international travel before in my life, ... so deciding to do a year-long experience like Cohort in a completely different culture, time zone, and community on my own was definitely a baptism of fire,” said Elena.

She found the transition was overwhelming. Not only was she grieving

the death of a friend back home, but she was plunged into new sights, sounds, and smells. The daily Islamic calls to prayer reverberated throughout the city where she was now living, and crowds of people swarmed around her speaking Arabic.

Elena also struggled to understand what some of her fellow Cohort volunteers were saying. Cohort Middle East is intentionally diverse, with volunteers from the Middle East, North America, and other regions throughout the world. But that was something Elena had been looking for, and the Resonate missionary helped guide the group as they worked to navigate barriers of language and culture.

“In spite of ongoing grief, homesickness, and culture shock,” Elena said, “it didn’t take long before I felt like I had a second family here.”

Elena met with the Cohort group every week to engage in topics of spiritual formation. They ate together, read the Bible together, worshiped together, and asked tough questions together. They also visited various ministries and biblical sites.

“The events of Scripture took place in this region,” Elena said. “It really is like walking on holy ground in some sense.”

But even with all of the travel, Elena’s favorite memories center around gathering with her Cohort group in the living room of the missionary’s home. The Cohort group was Elena’s rock as she navigated a new culture and worked with street-involved youth and their families, mentored third-culture kids, led a healing-through-storytelling program, and served with a local church that ministers with expatriates.

“Elena came with open hands and heart to experience all that God had for her,” said the Resonate missionary leading the Cohort group. “I appreciated



Worship, Bible reading, and meals are a weekly part of Cohort, a Resonate program for young adults to live in community, serve in a grassroots ministry, and engage in deep spiritual formation.

that she came wanting to know God, others, and herself on a new level. ... Elena loves people with openness and abandon.”

After Elena’s year of service was finished, she stayed on to co-lead the next Cohort group. Through her experience, God answered her prayers for healing and spiritual formation in a way she might never have experienced at home.

“Not only can I locate my story within the story of this region, but Cohort teaches us to locate ourselves within the story of what God has done and is doing across the global church. We belong to Christ, and because of that, we belong to each other,” Elena said.

“Knowing that—and not just abstractly, but experientially and incarnationally through Cohort—has changed how I understand myself, my faith, and my vocation in ministry, but also what the body of Christ is and what it means that each believer is called to bring the fullness of Christ’s kingdom on earth.”

*\*Names changed for security.*

—Cassie Marcionetti,  
Resonate Global Mission



PHOTO: RESONATE GLOBAL MISSION

Sawubona is a South African greeting that roughly translates to “We see you.” It conveys the importance of recognizing dignity and worth.

The ministries of the Christian Reformed Church extend that greeting to you. Through your prayers, gifts, and ministry shares, you are extending God’s kingdom around the world and supporting congregations here at home. We see you!

The 4 agencies, 2 educational institutions, and 3 uniquely Canadian ministries of the Christian Reformed Church thank you for your support.

[crcna.org/Ministries](http://crcna.org/Ministries)



**Christian Reformed Church**



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# Butterflies

**THE BUTTERFLY LIFE** cycle is familiar: an egg hatches a caterpillar, which turns into a chrysalis from which a beautiful butterfly emerges. If you want a yard that attracts butterflies, you have to know what the needs of each stage are.

## Eggs

Butterflies lay their eggs on the plants that are the best food for their offspring. Some butterflies will only lay their eggs on a single plant species; others are less choosy. But a butterfly-friendly yard must have plants that fit those needs. Once a caterpillar hatches, the first thing it eats is its egg, but then it moves on to the leaf of whatever plant it's on.

## Caterpillars

The job of the caterpillar is to eat, grow, shed its skin, and grow some more. It will do this up to five times before it sheds its skin for the last time to reveal the chrysalis. A space for butterflies will have just the right host plants available for the caterpillars. This also means the owners of the yard must tolerate holes in the leaves of their plants!


## Chrysalises

Once the caterpillar has had its fill, it is ready to become a chrysalis, during which time the mysterious and beautiful transformation from caterpillar to butterfly occurs. Not to be confused with a cocoon (the silky encasing that moth larvae make around themselves), a chrysalis is itself the developing butterfly and needs to hang freely to develop properly. Caterpillars will climb up and under protected areas, so it's helpful to have structures such as statues, a fence, trees, or woody shrubs in the yard.

## Adult Butterflies

Adult butterflies have two things on their minds: mating and finding food. With a long proboscis (a straw-like mouth), they suck nectar from flowers for energy. Some butterflies, such as the great spangled fritillary and the meadow fritillary, will feed only on violet nectar, while the mourning cloak will feed on tree sap from willows, cottonwoods, birches, elms, white ashes, and basswoods. To increase the diversity of butterfly species in one's yard, it's important to have lots of plant species for them to choose from.

## Winter

Butterflies need a place to overwinter. In northern Canada, where I live, we get lots of snow and very cold temperatures. Fallen leaves, loose bark, and sometimes even my shed are perfect places for these creatures to tuck in and survive the winter winds. If I clean up all the leaves and throw them away, I am removing next year's butterfly crop, which is why I rake leaves only in the late spring—if at all—and always leave messy sections in my garden. 



Cindy Verbeek lives in Houston, B.C., where she works for A Rocha Canada. She has been working on creation care issues since 1993 and is a member of Telkwa Community Church.





# Face to Face

By Madelyn Vandermeer

*Editor's note: With sponsorship from Talking Bibles International, The Banner's 2024 Young Adults Writing Contest took place this summer, with 14 young adults submitting essays on the topic of peacemaking. This article and the one following are the first- and second-place winners, respectively. Read the essays of third-place winner Erin Buursma and honorable mention Jaelyn Dragt online at TheBanner.org.*

I knew Liz only briefly.

When I first met her, she was crumpled over a worn-out walker, leaning up against the outer stone wall of the church drop-in center where I work.

Her back was arched in a way that made it impossible to see her face. It was only when I knelt that I was able to see her eyes. I can't remember our conversation or what I said, but somehow our brief interaction turned into a moment of prayer, her hands in mine, accepting any hope I had to offer.

I went to Liz's memorial today. In the days since our first prayer together, I've come to understand that Liz was deeply known and loved in our community. She had been living on the streets for decades and had been battling cancer a good part of that time. If anything, the service was a celebration of her final homegoing to Christ. One might say it was a family reunion for Christ's peacemakers, all gathered in the upstairs sanctuary of the same drop-in center where I first met Liz. It was a place where, in her honor, we could laugh and weep together. It was a gathering for people who feel and understand the weight of mourning, yet choose to cling to hope and justice regardless.

The service was led by one of the church's pastors, a weathered man with piercings, tattoos, and an uncanny knack for singing the blues.

There is no better  
example of a  
peacemaker than  
Christ himself, the  
Prince of Peace.

He's been walking alongside our downtown community for more than a decade. I'm certain he's seen more than a lifetime's worth of death and suffering in that time. Yet there he was, talking about Liz finally meeting God face to face and finally finding home, and acting as Christ's peacemaker from the stage.

An outreach worker was sitting in the pew in front of me. I recognized her from a video I'd shared on social media a few months prior. She had called for protest when city leaders attempted to pass a bill prohibiting encampments in our downtown square. It had been the middle of winter, with harsh Canadian temperatures at their coldest. I remember weeping as she pleaded for understanding, for empathy, acting as Christ's peacemaker in the midst of injustice.

A coworker was sitting next to me, tears dropping down her cheeks, falling onto her lap into soft puddles. She had just recently stepped away after working at the church for a number of years. She was one of those people who knew Liz intimately. There are few people I know who feel as deeply as her, even fewer who have

the courage to keep loving so deeply despite the loss they have witnessed. Oh, if anyone is a picture of Christ's peacemaking, it is her.

In the basement of the church, below the sanctuary where we remembered Liz, was a collection of Christ's peacemakers in action: volunteers and staff operating our drop-in center, just as they do every other day. People who know that we can't survive without one another. They know that our community needs us, just as we need them.

And the people in our community, spread throughout upstairs pews and downstairs tables, are Christ's peacemakers too. They share meals with one another and bring in flowers and notes and smiles. They share their joys and burdens, things that feel far too heavy for one person to ever bear, yet they push through and offer their stories. They'll accept prayer when it's offered, placing their hands in mine, just as Liz did long ago.

Liz certainly wasn't the first of our community to die. She won't be the last either. There is an ever-growing memory tree on the wall in our drop-in center. Painted on the branch and trunk are hundreds of leaves with the names of people who have passed away. Occasionally, people stop and add a name or two. Sometimes four or five names go up at once. Our long-time staff know almost every name on that wall. They've shared coffee with people and celebrated birthdays and baptisms. They've heard their stories, sought justice with them. To me, this is what it means to make peace, to be Christ's peacemakers in today's fractured world.

There is no better example of a peacemaker than Christ himself, the Prince of Peace. Jesus Christ, who came into our broken world as an infant,

# Kindness Toward Strangers

By Ethan Meyers

embodying the full fragility of humanity. Jesus, who sought out the lame and the blind and the hurting. Jesus Christ, who went out of his way to meet the woman at the well. Jesus, who wept at the tomb of his good friend.

No, Jesus did not come into this world to set himself apart in such a way as not to feel the pain that comes with humanity, to not witness every way in which sin has fractured our world. He chose relationship. He chose to live among us, to eat and walk and breathe with us. He chose to commune with us in the midst of our pride and sin and heartbreak. In making peace, he rejected indifference. He pursued love endlessly, ensuring that this broken world is not our forever home.

Who greater to celebrate this than Liz, who was resilient in her life, full of courage and selfless faith, even in what seemed like an endless pursuit of home? Liz chose kindness and goodness and refused to let hope die, all in the name of the Jesus who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” calling them “children of God.”

I have a picture in my mind of another family reunion, this one far away from all the sin and pain and mourning of our fractured world. In it is Liz, cancer gone, back no longer bent, finally meeting God face to face. His arms are stretched open wide in anticipation, but his words come out in a soft whisper:

“Daughter, welcome home.” **B**



Madelyn Vandermeer, 19, is a student at the University of British Columbia, where she studies addiction science. She has spent her past two summers working in downtown Guelph, Ont., particularly with Royal City Mission. She is a member of Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Acton, Ont.

**A** desire for peace has always been part of who I am. Among my family and friends, I aim to be a listener and a problem solver. When

I came to college, I chose to major in international relations, with grand dreams of being a diplomat and working for mutual understanding on the world stage. During my time in college, my understanding of what it means to bring peace has shifted away from these sorts of textbook peacemaking efforts toward a more local, intimate, and relational conception. In large part, this has been thanks to the friendships I’ve built during this time. Throughout our time together, it has been a joy to listen, share, and grow closer to each other and God’s Word.

I’ve also learned that working for the cause of peace is meaningless without first knowing the comfort and peace of living in God’s love. For me, a large part of the process of making peace with myself has been growing into acceptance of my disability. I have cerebral palsy, a disability that affects my balance, my muscle coordination, and the way I move. For many years, I only thought of my diagnosis as an extra challenge I had to overcome. However, thanks to conversations I’ve had with many people wiser than myself, I’ve learned to see things differently. In this journey, I’ve also broadened my theology, and I now believe that God chose me to bear his image in my particular body for a reason and that I am not “less than.”

A richer understanding of my whole self has helped me move closer to God and to other people in recent years.

The personal peace I’ve worked hard to build has made me more thoughtful and accepting of others who are different in other ways. It has allowed me to build deeper relationships and given me the confidence to share this facet of my story.

This place of peace was challenged during a recent family trip to Puerto Rico. My family was buying groceries for the next several days when I was suddenly stopped by a woman clutching a Bible. “¿Qué te pasó, chico?” she asked. Whether in a rude or a concerned tone, it’s the same question I’ve gotten from strangers my whole life: “What happened to you?” I never quite know how to respond.

My memory of this incident is a confused blur; before I knew it, I was being prayed for by a complete stranger in the middle of a Walmart aisle. After writing down some Bible verses, she let me leave, telling my parents to “just declare your son healed” as she walked away. The entire experience was very uncomfortable, and I felt tears well up as we walked to the parking lot.

Disability scholar Amy Kenny calls people like these “prayerful perpetrators” for the ways they unknowingly hurt disabled people. In her conviction that I was “less than,” the woman’s “kindness” spoke loud and clear: You are not welcome. Despite intending to bring me comfort, her actions worked to destroy the peace I’ve made with how I live and move throughout the

world. I left the encounter feeling shaken and very much not at peace.

Only days later, I had a second experience that was markedly different. I was standing waist-deep in the ocean outside our rented condo, soaking in the sunshine for a few more precious hours on one of the last days of our vacation. An older man came down the beach and waded out to join me. He introduced himself as José, and we struck up a friendly conversation.

Less than 30 seconds into our meeting came the dreaded question again: “¿Qué te pasó, chico?” I took a deep breath, bracing myself to relive the horrible events of a few days prior. However, as I launched into my usual explanation that I was born this way, José simply nodded and shrugged. “Entonces, ya estás acostumbrado,” he said. “So, you’re used to it by now.” This simple acknowledgement shocked me. We then quickly moved on to other topics, chatting casually for about an hour while enjoying the coolness of the waves.


I’ve rarely felt so  
seen and accepted  
by a stranger.

José’s act, though small and certainly long-forgotten by him, will live with me forever. I’ve rarely felt so seen and accepted by a stranger. After what had happened just a few days before, the contrast was especially striking. As I’ve reflected on these mirror-image encounters in the time since, I’ve realized that José’s sort of hospitality is necessary for those who want to promote Christ-like peace.

It’s this same peacemaking that I see in the story of Abraham and Sarah, who unknowingly welcome angels in Genesis 18. They offer their guests shelter and respite from the desert heat. Abraham orders a calf to be roasted, and Sarah makes more than enough bread to feed them all. I believe this sort of hospitality toward a stranger is a Christian peacemaker’s best tool.

Jesus seems to think so too, referencing Sarah’s act of feeding her unknown guests in Luke 13:20 when he describes the kingdom of heaven. That kingdom,

he says, is like yeast that a woman worked through a large amount of dough. The hospitality and acceptance shown by Abraham, Sarah, Jesus, and José are the key elements of Christian peacemaking. Rather than the kind of peace diplomats work for that involves handshakes in front of cameras and medals given out on stage, this interpersonal peacemaking-via-hospitality is something all Christians are called to practice.

As I move forward from these opposing moments of othering and welcome, I hope to live in a way that welcomes those I meet into a place of shared peace. Like a Puerto Rican Good Samaritan, José with his small kindness showed me that anyone can act to share Christ-like peace—no prayers in a Walmart required. 



Ethan Meyers, 21, is a senior at Calvin University and is editor of *Chimes*, Calvin’s student newspaper. He attends Madison Square Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



## Circles and Rows

These groups offer a unique opportunity to explore and apply the deeper themes of Scripture in a community setting.



Dan Veeneman works in the dairy industry as a ventilation specialist. He lives in Abbotsford, B.C., with his wife and three children. He is a member of Gateway Community Church.

**“DAD, WHY DO YOU** have to go to Life Group again? Didn’t you go last week? Why do you have to go every Monday?”

“I have to go because it’s important,” I said, hoping that would put an end to my 8-year-old son’s barrage of questions. It didn’t. “Well, it’s not important for me,” was his quick response.

“We can talk more about this later,” I replied while tying my shoes and heading out the door.

I replayed this conversation in my head a few times as I drove to my Life Group wondering whether the reason my son didn’t understand why gathering with fellow believers is important is because I didn’t truly understand it either.

Many of our churches will have some form of communal study group. While they go by a myriad of names, the purpose and operation of these groups is about the same. We gather at someone’s house, share in a fine assortment of baked goods, and sip on some coffee as we discuss the assigned topic.

I arrived at my Life Group early and had a few minutes to continue pondering what made small groups so important, and I soon began to realize something: They are not important.

You see, it’s not the fancy name, special snacks, comfy seats, and perfectly brewed coffee that make small groups important. While these things are nice bonuses, it is what happens in these groups that makes them important. These groups offer a unique opportunity to explore and apply the deeper themes of Scripture in a community setting. Unlike corporate worship on Sunday mornings, these groups allow for questions, connections, and learning on an interpersonal level.

I’ve heard it said that community and discipleship don’t happen in rows; they can only happen in circles. Compare

the seating arrangement of your sanctuary to that of your last small-group meeting. Gathering as a large body of believers is essential, but we also need time in a smaller group with like-minded Christians to wrestle with and explore the deeper truths of the gospel and how they apply to and change our life. We can turn to the early church of Acts 2 as an example of what happens when the church spends more time in circles than rows.

I’ve often found myself weighing participating in a small group against the other commitments I have made, trying to keep the number of week-night engagements manageable. Yet by making myself choose between a small group and other activities, I was missing the point. Despite the efforts of the church leadership, I did not fully grasp the importance of small groups, yet my participation has been a transformative experience for me. Exploring Scripture with others, sharing insights, and connecting with fellow Christians has deepened my faith and provided a supportive environment for personal reflection and spiritual growth.

So don’t get hung up on the name that your church has for these groups. That’s not the important part. These groups are the place where real ministry of the church takes place as we study God’s Word while supporting each other and sharing our lives with one another. **B**

1. Have you been involved in a small discipleship or Bible study group before? What was your experience like?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

## Church Shopping in a Wheelchair

Clearly we had stirred the pot with our entrance the previous Sunday.



Ken Nydam is a retired Christian Reformed minister now working as a licensed mental health/marriage counselor at Hope Way Counseling Services ([hopewaycounselingservices.com](http://hopewaycounselingservices.com)) in Byron Center and Allegan, Mich. He attends The River CRC in Allegan.

**MY WIFE, JUDY,** and I recently moved our residence. Soon we were ready to do some church shopping. Some new friends in our new location invited us to their church, so we decided to give it a try. It is a small congregation of a different denomination than ours. But we were open to a new experience in church life, so we planned our first visit with eagerness.

My wife uses a wheelchair, so one of the most important features we would need in a church was barrier-free access. We found an additional portable power chair on Amazon that I was able to lift into our car by myself. We were now equipped!

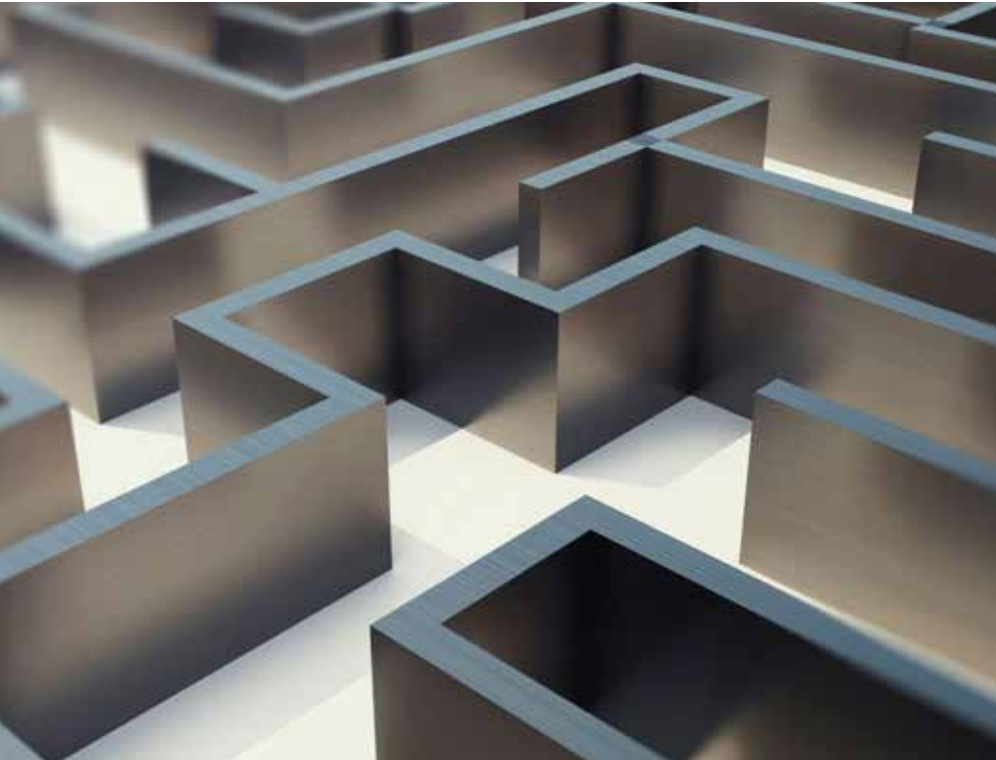
Needing to scope out our friends' church building for my wife's sake, I attended first without her. I was very curious about the access issues she would encounter. I was warmly greeted by the congregants, and attending with our friends made it easier and more pleasant. When I got home, I gave my wife a positive report on the friendliness, but the access factor was not as optimistic. Since it was an old church building, the entrance to the rear of the sanctuary butted right up to the street, connected by numerous steps. The only way my wife could enter the sanctuary in her wheelchair was through a door behind the pulpit coming from the fellowship hall. Then two rather tight turns would bring her to a ramp, which we soon discovered had a slope that was not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. At the bottom of the ramp was a sharp left turn that would put us in the front row of the seating area, where one pew had been shortened in length to make space for people who use wheelchairs. My wife would then have a choice of remaining in her wheelchair or shifting over to a pew seat on a traditional pew—the uncomfortable kind. Despite these challenges, my wife agreed

to give it a try since our new friends would be happily accompanying us.

We attempted to arrive early that next Sunday morning, but because there is so much preparation just to go anywhere for a person with a disability, we arrived just as the service began. Nervously, Judy made her way through the turns right behind the occupied pulpit, but her chair hit the wall of dark-stained walnut that decorated the antique-looking chancel. When we reached the ramp, she forgot to change the speed of the chair, zoomed down the ramp too fast, and fell halfway out. We regrouped at the bottom of the ramp and made the sharp left turn to the seating area. I could see the panic in her eyes as she finally reached her spot. She didn't dare try to change seats from the wheelchair to the pew. It took her most of the service to calm down enough to be able to worship. However, at the end of the service many people kindly welcomed us, which soothed our frustration.

The pastor called on us the following week at our barrier-free home. He reported that the building committee had already started to replace the aging church's outdoor ramp with new boards, and they sawed another pew in half to increase the "handicapped seating area" at the bottom of the ramp. Clearly we had stirred the pot with our entrance the previous Sunday, and it was heartwarming to see them trying to be responsive to Judy's needs.

We decided we needed a different portable power chair if we were to continue our attempts to worship at this church. So we returned the one we had bought to get another that had a much better turning radius to navigate those sharp turns and steep ramps. We did not attend worship until it arrived, but while we waited,



we were added to the mailing list of the church and invited to other church events. It seemed that we might have found our new church home.

The new power chair arrived, and we headed out the next Sunday for another attempt at regaining a church life. We even arrived a little early. Judy navigated the turns into the sanctuary better this time, without bangs or bumps against the beautiful woodwork. But again, even at a slower speed, the ramp was too steep, and Judy almost repeated the premature exit from her chair on the way down. Thankfully, I was behind her, and with all my strength I pulled the chair to a stop.

Soon we were safe in the now-bigger disability area. But our calm was short-lived. As Judy put her new chair in reverse, we were embarrassingly reminded that it came equipped with a loud alarm when in reverse, just like garbage trucks. Everything in worship


stopped dead, and I heard chuckles from the congregation. But once more Judy's disability had robbed her of dignity, and she teared up.

The rest of the service was a blur. After an hour we were more than ready to go home. But to our surprise, it was then announced that a missionary whom this church supports was going to give a presentation about his ministry for the next half hour, and all were respectfully asked to remain seated. After 10 more minutes, it was clear to Judy that she would have to exit for personal reasons. The missionary was mid-message, and we reluctantly began our exit with all eyes on us. Judy had to shift to her chair, move forward to clear the pew, and then back up with BEEP-BEEP-BEEP proclamations ringing through the sanctuary. She accelerated up the ramp and navigated the right turns behind the pulpit like a racecar driver. Tears were running down her cheeks as I embarrassedly

waved goodbye to the congregation. We fled to the safety of our home.

We never went back. The pastor never called us to find out why. But no explanation was necessary for either of us. We all knew what happened, and we all knew that it was nobody's fault and that nobody could fix it. They tried to love us, but brick and mortar blocked love from being exchanged. Everyone was sad because everyone had tried so hard to create a good outcome for Judy.

The good news is that we can now laugh about it, and it didn't stop us from church shopping. We now attend a different small church in our town that is all one level from parking lot to sanctuary. All of Judy's personal needs can be met discreetly, the seats are more comfy than her wheelchair, and there is plenty of room for her to be just another person where all the people gather. Most importantly, there's no need for the BEEP-BEEP-BEEP. This church has the ideal brick and mortar for people who church shop in a wheelchair.

If you can't get into a church building, it's pretty difficult to get into a church fellowship. 



# Godzilla Teaches Us to Lay Down Our Lives

## IF YOU SEE RIDGED

spikes breaking through the water and you hear a deafening roar that sends shivers down your spine, there can only be one logical conclusion: Godzilla is coming!

Godzilla debuted in a 1954 Japanese film directed and co-written by Ishiro Honda. Since then, 38 Godzilla films have been produced—33 in Japanese by Toho Co. Ltd., one by TriStar Pictures, and four by Legendary Pictures, which is currently releasing films and TV shows about Toho creatures through its Monsterverse franchise.

Godzilla is a prehistoric lizard awakened and empowered by nuclear radiation. It emerges from the sea and brings destruction to the nearest city, crushing buildings and setting structures on fire with glowing atomic breath. The original film was created a mere 10 years after atomic bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. To this day, Godzilla is often understood and presented as a metaphor to aid Japanese citizens as they grapple with the destruction of World War II and the shame brought about by their defeat. Godzilla is also a warning about the horrors of nuclear warfare.



*Godzilla Minus One* is a 2023 Japanese film produced by Toho Studio that attempts to return to the roots of the prehistoric monster. The film tells the story of a young kamikaze pilot who struggles with the shame and guilt of failing to do his part in the Japanese war effort. As he attempts to rebuild his life after the war, the city is attacked by Godzilla, who destroys it with a mushroom cloud of

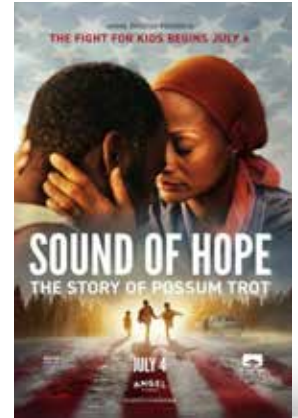
fire, shock waves, and radiation.

Subtitled in English, this movie transcends the monster movie genre to tell a beautiful and compelling narrative highlighting themes of duty, shame, love, loss, loyalty, sacrifice, cooperation, and redemption. Christians will easily discern the redemptive story arc as they ponder the ending and ask questions about what it means to “lay down one’s life” (John 15:13). In addition to telling a great story, the film won the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects in 2024.

(Rated PG-13. Now streaming on Netflix, Apple TV+, Amazon Prime, and other platforms.) **B**



Sam Gutierrez is the associate director at the Eugene Peterson Center for the Christian Imagination at Western Theological Seminary. More of his creative work can be found at [printandpoem.com](http://printandpoem.com).

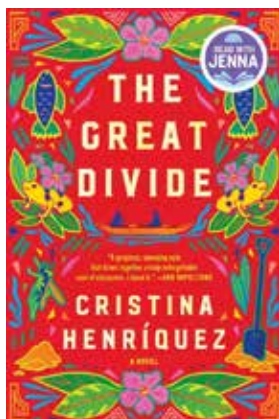


## Sound of Hope: The Story of Possum Trot

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

With riveting performances and a script that does not sugarcoat foster care and adoption, this stirring film tells the true and inspiring (if harrowing) story of how 22 families in one church in East Texas adopted 77 children.

The action centers around a small church with few resources. Donna Martin (played by a compelling Nika King) feels the call to adopt, and soon she convinces her husband, Rev. W.C. Martin (Demetrius Grosse) to get on board. They parent four additional children, all in various stages of trauma. Diaana Babnicova is outstanding as a teen so damaged she intermittently presents as a cat. As an adoptee and an adoptive mother, I am thankful this movie did not turn this into a fairy tale; the redemptive arc is strong but realistic. (Rated PG-13, Angel Studios)



## The Great Divide

By Cristina  
Henríquez

Reviewed by Sonya  
VanderVeen Feddema

Author Cristina Henríquez skillfully weaves together the lives of characters whose stories are lived out against the backdrop of the death, brutality, oppression, and destruction that the construction of the Panama Canal entailed.

While Henríquez explores character Francisco's perception that the canal is "the great divide that would sever Panama in two," she also subtly explores numerous other great divides experienced by her characters: between parents and children, rich and poor, colonizers and the colonized, white people and Black people, men and women, the spiritual world and the physical realm, and people's hopes for the future and their unrealized dreams.

*The Great Divide* delivers engaging characters, a complex storyline, and an insightful, justice-focused critique on the cost of progress at the expense of the poor and powerless. (HarperCollins)



## The Child in Our Midst

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

Each week, Lindsey Goetz and Ahyuwani Akanet, two of the directors from the Center for Faith and Children at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, chat with professionals in the field of children's ministry.

The podcast, like the center that hosts it, values the bridging of theory and practice. The hosts believe that thought leaders in children's faith formation and those who work in ministry with kids have much to learn from each other—and this belief comes across well in their conversations.

Goetz and Akanet are knowledgeable and winsome hosts who know when to share their personal stories and when to ask more from their guests. Anyone who works with children in churches or schools and cares about faith will find things to learn in these delightful conversations.



## Churro Stand

By Karina N.  
Gonzalez; illustrated  
by Krystal Quiles

Reviewed by Sonya  
VanderVeen Feddema

Young Lucia loves to help her mother bake churros—tube-shaped pastries coated in cinnamon and sugar that are popular in Latin America and Spain. With a suitcase filled with sweet delicacies, Mama, Lucia, and her older brother Santiago head out to sell their wares in Union Square in New York City. But will they experience any success on a hot day when the ice cream vendor seems to be attracting all the customers?

*"Churro Stand* was written to honor the magical heroism of working parents, grandparents, and guardians," the author says. "May they be celebrated and recognized for their sacrifices."

Illustrator Krystal Quiles' artwork captures the energy and camaraderie of street vendors and the significance of their contributions to society while depicting the routines of one loving, hard-working family. (Abrams)

## The Lowdown

### **Being a Sanctuary:**

Pricelis Perreaux-Dominguez, who has experienced abuse, trauma, and racism within the church, takes us on an honest, biblical, and reflective journey as she examines the state of the church and offers us a hopeful path forward. (Brazos Press, September)

### **Starring Zachary Levi and Zoey Deschanel:**

*Harold and the Purple Crayon* is a live-action/animated film based on the 1955 children's book. (Rated PG, Columbia Pictures. In theaters Aug. 2.)

### **A Female Matlock:**

Brilliant septuagenarian Madeline "Matty" Matlock (Kathy Bates) decides to rejoin the workforce at a prestigious law firm where she uses her unassuming demeanor and wily tactics to win cases and expose corruption from within. (Sept. 2, CBS)

### **From the Author of The Midnight Library:**

Retired math teacher Grace Winters is shocked when she inherits a run-down house on a Mediterranean island from a long-lost friend. With a one-way ticket, Grace arrives in Ibiza and searches for answers on how her friend lived and died. But what Grace uncovers seems impossible, forcing her to confront her past in a new novel from Matt Haig. (Sept. 3, Viking)

## How Do We Know God Is Real?

The Bible itself teaches that creation around us and conscience within us show that the invisible God is real and present.



Todd Statham is the Christian Reformed chaplain at the University of British Columbia (Okanagan Campus) and a research fellow at the Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology in Cambridge, U.K.

**I RECALL A FRESHMAN** philosophy class where the professor challenged us with this question: How do you know that anything is real? I was surprised to learn that philosophers have been debating for centuries how—or even if—we can know whether a thing is real or not, God included. But for Christians, this question isn't academic; neither can we be agnostic about the answer. "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). By entrusting ourselves to God, we are staking our very lives on God being real!

With so much at stake, some Christians seek to prove that God is real by appealing to scientific evidence, philosophical arguments, or personal experience. There's merit to this. The Bible itself teaches that creation around us and conscience within us show that the invisible God is real and present in what we see and feel (Rom. 1:20). Our Reformed tradition has welcomed these sorts of appeals, but at the same time it underscores that to confidently know that God is real (and to know him as great and good) is God's gift to us, one we grasp through faith. In fact, it's because God's reality is "revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit," as John Calvin put it (*Institutes* 3.2.11), that we can be more sure of God's reality than if we were to rely merely on shifting scientific evidence, disputable philosophical arguments, or our feelings. "And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:15-16).


At the same time, to know that God is real is not always easy. The intellectual climate in the West over the past few hundred years has left all of us assuming a thing is real only when we can see it or touch it. Such prejudice buffers us from the God who is real yet intangible

and invisible. The small group I led on campus this past year wrestled with this as we worked through C.S. Lewis' classic *The Screwtape Letters*. This book imagines a series of letters from a senior demon named Screwtape to his student on how best to undermine Christians' faith. In one letter, Screwtape recounts how one day the rock-hard atheism of the man under his 'care' began to crumble as the book he was reading opened him to the mysterious presence of God. Screwtape quickly nudged the man out the door to get some lunch:

*Once he was in the street the battle was won. I showed him a newsboy shouting the midday paper, and a No. 73 bus going past, and before he reached the bottom of the steps I had got into him an unalterable conviction that, whatever odd ideas might come into a man's head when he was shut up alone with his books, a healthy dose of 'real life' (by which he meant the bus and the newsboy) was enough to show him that all 'that sort of thing' just couldn't be true.*

Never, insists Screwtape to his underling, let a person "ask what he means by 'real.'"

I'm grateful that my professor challenged us with that very question. Because it is such an overwhelming presumption of our age that what is real is only what we can see and touch, we need to pray often for faith to know what is truly real. I pray regularly through John Baillie's wonderful *A Diary of Private Prayer*, and perhaps you'll find this petition of his as helpful as I do:

*O eternal God, although I cannot see you with my eyes or touch you with my hands, give me today a clear conviction of your reality and power. Do not let me go into my work believing only in the world of sense and time, but give me grace to understand that the world I cannot see or touch is the most real world of all.* 



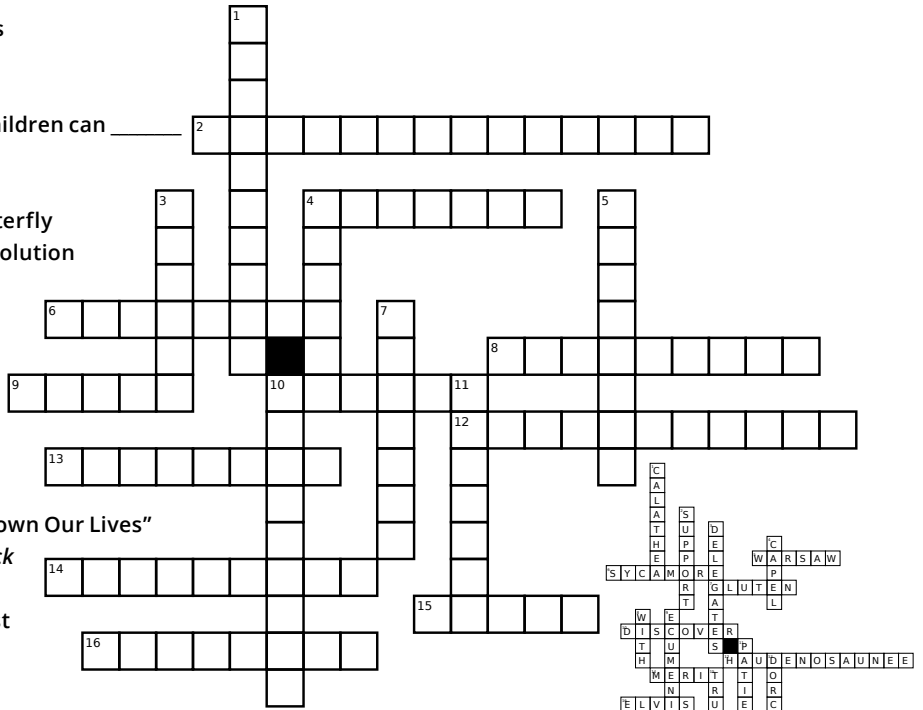
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions next month.  
 (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

**Down**

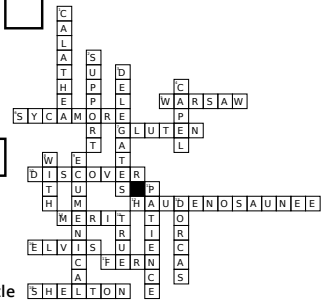
1. Put these in place to protect yourself and others
3. The CRC's training program on Indigenous reconciliation, \_\_\_\_\_ Exchanged
4. Merced (Calif.) CRC opened two places where children can \_\_\_\_\_
5. City where you'll find the Garden of Hope
7. "\_\_\_\_\_ and Rows"
9. Form a caterpillar takes before becoming a butterfly
11. More of these can be a problem rather than a solution

**Across**


2. Classis Rocky Mountain includes English-to-Spanish \_\_\_\_\_ at its meetings
4. Trinity CRC in Rock Valley, Iowa, offered \_\_\_\_\_ during June flooding
6. Calvin Theological Seminary's director of Latino/a ministries
8. \_\_\_\_\_, author of "Godzilla Teaches Us to Lay Down Our Lives"
9. Kathy \_\_\_\_\_ stars in the new female-led *Matlock*
10. \_\_\_\_\_ *Stand* is a new children's book
12. Topic for the 2024 Young Adults Writing Contest
13. It describes a proverbial slope
14. Where 25 languages are spoken
15. God promised to "bestow ... a crown of beauty instead of \_\_\_\_\_" (Isa. 61:3)



Solution to the June 2024 puzzle



FAITH  
 ⇄  
 PRACTICES




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 LISTEN TO THE SPIRIT.  
 AND BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS


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**DEADLINES:** Ads for the October issue are due August 30, 2024; November: October 4, 2024. Subject to availability. Details online at [thebanner.org/classifieds](http://thebanner.org/classifieds), or for display ads see [thebanner.org/ads](http://thebanner.org/ads). Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

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**Available for Call**

**AVAILABLE FOR CALL** The council of Faith Community CRC, Wyoming, MI, recommends Rev. Cedric Parsels, who most recently served as pastor of Dorr, Michigan CRC, as available for call to the churches.

**THE COUNCIL OF OCEAN VIEW CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH** (Norfolk, Virginia) announces that Rev. Petr Kornilov is available for call. Rev. Kornilov has served our congregation faithfully, enthusiastically, and with a pastor's heart, for the last nine years. He loves preaching the Gospel in a practical, down-to-earth way. We wholeheartedly commend him to the churches for consideration. Rev. Kornilov expects to relocate to the Grand Rapids area this summer and is available for pulpit supply or a call. He can be reached at 757-893-0907 and [petrakoff@gmail.com](mailto:petrakoff@gmail.com).

**Church Positions Available**

**DUNCAN CRC** on beautiful Vancouver Island, is seeking a full-time, dynamic pastor to be part of a ministry team, with a passion for youth and ministering to all ages in our congregation. Info available: [duncancrc.org](http://duncancrc.org) or contact the search team : [search@duncancrc.org](mailto:search@duncancrc.org)

**FULL-TIME LEAD PASTOR** Georgetown CRC in Hudsonville, MI, is seeking a full-time Lead Pastor who will deliver bold, biblical preaching, nurture spiritual growth for themselves and the congregation, engage with members of all ages, enhance community involvement, and collaborate with church members to embrace Georgetown's vision and calling. He will lead our multi-generational church in its mission to Love God, Love Each Other and Serve the World. Please contact us at [pastorsearch@georgetowncrc.org](mailto:pastorsearch@georgetowncrc.org) or [www.georgetowncrc.org/profile](http://www.georgetowncrc.org/profile).

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**LUCKNOW COMMUNITY CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH** is prayerfully seeking a fulltime Pastor. We are a small rural town in Ontario. Please contact our Search Committee at [plbrink13@gmail.com](mailto:plbrink13@gmail.com) for more information.

**UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR A FT SR. PASTOR** at Golden Gate CRC ([ggcrc.org](http://ggcrc.org)) in San Francisco to provide leadership, direction and vision for our 3 diverse congregations and 4 associate pastors. Qual: M.Div. accredited theological seminary. Min 5 yrs. church pastor exp. Proficient in English; fluent in Mandarin or Cantonese. Authorized to work in the US. Inquire at [srpastorsearch@ggcrc.org](mailto:srpastorsearch@ggcrc.org).

**Congregational Announcements**

**MISSION COMPLETED:** 67 years after the establishment of a servicemen's hospitality ministry in Norfolk, VA, and 61 years of faithfully serving God as a church, the congregation of Ocean View Christian Reformed Church completed her mission on July 1, 2024. The congregation voted to establish an endowed scholarship at Calvin Theological Seminary in honor of Rev. John Calvin Rickers, our founding pastor. We rejoice in God's faithfulness.

**Birthday**

**BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS**

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY DAD!** Emo Winkle will celebrate 100 years of God's goodness on Sept 20. Mail greetings to Rest Haven Homes 1424 Union Ave NE GR MI 49505.

**Anniversary**

**WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS**

**VANDERVLIT, GERALD ETHEL (VISSER)** 70th Anniversary on September 7, 2024 208 E 2nd St. Colton SD 57018. Children: Rod (Lois), Rhonda, Mark (Kay), Paul (Pam), Deb (Brian), Dave (Kellie) 17 Grand Children, 4 Step Grandchildren, 38 Great Grand Children, 5 step Great Grandchildren, 1 Great, Great Grandson. Praise and thanksgiving to God for all His faithfulness

**Obituaries**

**BUURSMAS**, Barbara nee Wiegers died May 13, 2024. She was the loving and devoted wife of the late John Buursma for 67 years. Her children Susan and Richard Landman, Kathy and Greg Door, Randy and Debra Buursma will miss her dearly. Her grandchildren Renee, Tom Wagenaar, Dan and Rachel Door, Jenelle and Jake Vlietstra, Nate and Jackie Door, Ben

and Becky Buursma, Derek and Deqa Buursma, Erica and Josh Klenz will also miss their Beppe.



**JEN, HSI-YIN YU ("LILY")** went home to be with her Lord on July 1, 2024 at the age of 95. Her extended family celebrates her long life and deep love for our Lord Jesus Christ. Together, Mrs. Lily Jen and her husband Rev. Isaac Jen (1927-1988) served the Chinese people through the Christian Reformed Church's home missions in Chicago, foreign missions in Taiwan, and radio broadcasting in Palos Heights, Illinois. To honor their life-long commitment to missions, donations are suggested toward either a) The Isaac and Lily Jen Missions Scholarship at Calvin Theological Seminary, or b) The Rev. Isaac I. Jen Chair in Chinese Broadcast Ministry Endowment Fund at ReFrame Ministries.



**KAMPS, JOHN** Russel (Jack) Kamps, 88, of Rehoboth, New Mexico went to be with Jesus on June 30th, 2024, at La Vida Llena in Albuquerque. Born on April 25th, 1936, in Rehoboth, New Mexico, he was a devoted husband to Kathleen (Kyse) Faber and a loving father to Bryan, Craig, Kimberly and Janelle. Jack was a hardworking and dedicated physician. Born in 1936 at Rehoboth, he graduated from Rehoboth Mission School in 1953. Growing up he chased horses around Rehoboth and traveled Navajo land (Diné Bikéyah) with his missionary father, Jacob, playing musical accompaniment for church services. In 1957 he graduated from Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he fondly remembered singing with the Back to God Hour Radio Choir. He graduated from Baylor School of Medicine, Houston in 1961. After completing medical school and internship at Jefferson Davis Hospital in Houston he served as a flight surgeon in the Air Force for two years at McCord AFB in Tacoma, Washington before moving to Denver to start in private practice. In 1965 he relocated with his family to Rehoboth, New Mexico where he was the physician for Rehoboth Mission Hospital. In the late 1960's/early 1970's he was instrumental in planning and building a new Rehoboth

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Christian Hospital in Gallup, New Mexico. He developed a group of dedicated physicians and medical practitioners, Cibola Medical Group, who served the Gallup community for many years. He served on the Hospital Board and was Medical Director at Gallup-McKinley Christian Hospital, and the Board of Councilors for the New Mexico Medical Society. Jack was known by his patients for his availability and humor. He retired after 42 years of medical service. Jack's hobbies and interests helped define who he was. He loved to garden, corn and chile being the crops he was most interested in. He and Kyse were small plane pilots and owned a plane for several years. He loved to tinker around the house and fix things. He loved picnics in McGaffey and in the red rocks around Gallup. He enjoyed skiing with family and friends at Purgatory. He worshiped and served at Rehoboth and Bethany Christian Reformed churches. His love for singing in God's house was something he shared with his children, and his children will always remember his beautiful voice.

He is survived by wife Kyse, son Bryan and Linda Kamps, granddaughter Tara and JM DeYoung (Evelynn, Samantha and Parker), grandson Chad and Jenna Kamps (Raelynn and Dawson), grandson Russell Kamps, granddaughter Gina and Billy Martin, son Craig Kamps, granddaughter Chloe Kamps, daughter Kim Kamps and Tom Wynne, grandson Justin and Logan Wynne (Eliza and Kalahan), grandson Egan and Tiffani Briggs Wynne, daughter Janelle and Donovan Vestal, grandchildren Ivan, Audria and Erika Vestal, and brothers Gordon and Phillip. He is preceded in death by brothers Roland, Lloyd, and Edwin.

A memorial service was held at Bethany Christian Reformed Church, Gallup, NM on August 3rd, 2024, at 1:00 pm. In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts can be given to the Kamps Family Endowed Scholarship for Rehoboth Christian School families. Please make gifts out to Rehoboth Christian School, PO Box 41, Rehoboth, NM 87322 and indicate in memory of Jack Kamps. You can also give online at <https://rehobothchristianschool.factsmgtadmin.com/give/> and indicate the memorial on the payment page. We find comfort in knowing that Dad is in the loving arms of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and that his legacy lives on through the faith he taught us, the love he shared and the memories we will cherish.



**MIERSMA** Harold T., 91, of Breton Woods Holland Home, was called to heaven on June 14. He is survived by his wife, JoAnn (Kuiper) Miersma, loving family, and many friends. A celebration of Harold's life will be held on

Wednesday, June 19 at 5:30 PM at Brookside Christian Reformed Church, 3600 Kalamazoo Ave SE, with one hour of visitation prior, beginning at 4:30 PM. In lieu of flowers, the family requests memorial contributions can be made to Grace Legacy Builders ([gracelegacybuilders.org](http://gracelegacybuilders.org)), Kuyper College ([www.kuyper.edu](http://www.kuyper.edu)), or Talking Bibles ([talkingbibles.org](http://talkingbibles.org)).



**PLEKKER, ELEANOR "POLLY" (DEGROOT)** of Hanford, CA, age 86, graduated to heaven on April 28, 2024. She was born in Everett, WA to Arthur and Margorie (Groot) DeGroot, the oldest of 12 children, and was preceded in

death by her parents and brother Charles DeGroot. Polly loved the Lord, her family, and was loved by many for her humor and kindness. She delighted in nature: hiking on Mt. Baker, gardening, rock hounding, river fishing. She always kept a book to read. She married William deBoer when 19 and lost him 2 years later to pancreatic cancer. She then married Pastor Arie C. Leegwater, and for the next 35 years was a homemaker who also served church communities with her open smile, doing her duties in a number of parsonages throughout the US and Canada, until Arie's death in 1995. In 1997 Polly married Dr. Robert Plekker until his death in 2019. They spent their first years traveling in a motorhome, then several years on cruise ships while Bob served as ship's dentist. In 2013, they moved from Bellingham, WA to Hanford, CA for the sunshine and to be closer to family. During the final years of her life, she enjoyed visiting with at least one of her sisters daily.

Polly is survived by five children: Patricia deBoer, Kenneth Leegwater, Richard (Darlene) Leegwater, Cynthia Borden, Michael (Dawn) Leegwater, as well as three stepchildren: Deb (Steve) Windemuller, Sue (Bob) Lyzenga, Tammy (Tim) Van Zalen. She has nine grandchildren: Sarah (Gabriel) Anderson, Jonathan Leegwater, Eleanor (Jason) Leegwater-Richmond, Alexander Borden, William Borden, Alexandra Leegwater, Aaron Leegwater, Allison Leegwater, Anna Lisa Leegwater, as well as ten step-grandchildren: Valerie (Jason) Porter, Kyle (Rachel) Windemuller, Kelsea (Joel) Studebaker, Wade (Christi) Windemuller, Michelle Lyzenga, David Lyzenga, Paul Lyzenga, Daniel Van Zalen, Katherine Van Zalen, James Van Zalen. She also has two great-grandchildren and 34 step-great-grandchildren.

Polly's surviving brothers and sisters are Christina Joy (Andrew) Anema, Arthur Steven DeGroot, Evelyn (Mike) van Andel, William DeGroot, Kathleen DeGroot, Marjorie DeGroot, Barbara DeGroot, Ruth DeGroot, Helen (Perry) Herrgesell, Roy (Elaine) DeGroot. Her surviving sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law are Mary (Keith) Beavon, Barbara Leegwater, Bernie Vanderlest. There are numerous nieces and nephews.

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**SCHOTANUS, MARYLYN**, age 88, passed away on July 5, 2024, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Marilyn was preceded in death by her loving husband of 61 years, Bill. She is survived by her children, Ann (D) Brown and Bill (Dawn) Schotanus, and her grandchildren, Claire (Brandon) Sytsma, Grace Schotanus, Carrie Brown, Jake Schotanus, and Paige Schotanus. Her siblings Judy Tuffs and Tom (Lynda) VanderLaan also survive her, along with in-laws, Eunice Vanderlaan, Viola Ans-

orge, and Dr. Peter (Charlotte) Schotanus. She was preceded in death by siblings and in-laws, Rev. Dr. James Vanderlaan, John Vanderlaan, John Tuffs, Raymond (May) Schotanus, Thelma (Sidney) DeYoung, and Gene Ansorge. She was a member of Plymouth Heights CRC.

**VAN ZYTVELD, JACK (HARRY JACOB)** On June 29, 2024, Jack Van Zytveld passed away surrounded by his three sons and the love of family and friends around the world. Born in 1933 in Chicago, as the only child to Cornelius and Helen (Rice) Van Zytveld, his early years saw the death of his mother and many months spent in the care of a variety of family members who did their best to provide stability. He graduated from Illiana Christian High and Calvin College with a tour of duty in Korea in between.

He married the love of his life, Jane (Volkema), in 1958 and they set up home in Denver, CO. Jack made a career of teaching and faith-filled leadership at Denver Christian Schools for more than 30 years. He was always working

outside of teaching to support his family and still found time to be an active member of the congregations he called home. He preferred to remain in the background but somehow still was a leader.

Preceded in death by his parents as well as his stepmother, Catherine (Bos) Van Zytveld, his sister, Harriet Barry, sisters-in-law, Annabelle Volkema and Carol Van Zytveld, brothers-in-law, Fred Volkema, Art Volkema, Keith Barry and Nelson Zwaanstra. Survived by his sons, James (Marlise), Donald, and David (Karen); 6 grandchildren, 3 great grandchildren; his sister, Janice Zwaanstra, his brother, John (Jan) Van Zytveld, his sister-in-law, Martha Volkema; and numerous nieces and nephews. Private services will be held in Denver. More info online.

**VANDENBOSCH, ALVIN** age 96 passed away on May 29, 2024 in Edgerton, MN. He is survived by his wife, Rosella; daughters Lynn (Russ) Hollender, Laurel, and LeAnn (Nico Cheston); 6 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren; and siblings Henrietta VanEssen,



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Dorothy Wiersma, Thelma Hoogland, and James VandenBosch. His family is grateful for a long life filled with love and service.

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## Purpose for Purchase

If we're always seeking, always exploring what we could be and what we could do, we'll miss out on who we are and where we are.



Kendy DeHaan grew up in Bradenton, Fla., and is a member of Bradenton Christian Reformed Church. She is currently studying secondary education, English, and French at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich.

**“WHAT IS ONE PROBLEM** you face at work?” The young engineer sighed as he replaced the conversation-prompt card in the deck. “I don’t ...” His eyes dropped to his hands. “I’m still trying to figure out how I can do something I love and make money. It just doesn’t seem possible.”

A rumble of agreement flowed through the other young professionals—a plastics engineer, a salesman aspiring to real estate, a nurse rethinking graduate school, an unsatisfied accountant, a nonprofit coordinator, and me, a prospective teacher. The networking event that had seated us together was invite-only, aiming to connect the young white-collar workforce of Grand Rapids, Mich. Outside of our ages and ZIP codes, we had very little in common.

But this moment—a plea for passion and meaning—resonated with all of us.

The first time I was called a Gen Zer, I had to fight the urge to hide. A middle school teacher—righteously fed up by students’ antics—went on a tangential spiel, declaring us all unprecedentedly self-centered, raised by iPhones, Generation Me. I was surprised, but above all I was terrified that my teacher was right.

However, as my colleagues leaned in, eyes open wide, I realized that the truth was not nearly as simple as my teacher had made it seem.

“You can still change,” the salesman encouraged. “My boss, he’s 50 and is going back to school to run his own business. You’re still young. You’re not stuck.”

My Instagram reels—mostly how-tos for transitioning out of teaching or for traveling to gorgeous destinations on a budget—would agree. There are so many options to explore, so why stick with an underpaying, unglamorous job?

But part of me wonders if more options are not the solution, but the problem.

Our ability to imagine a more glorious future is one of the pillars of our Christian faith. We’ve been saved from sin to a glory of whose depths we can only begin to dream. But this very imagining can also be our downfall.

In a society that lauds fast fashion, the grind, and having a fridge in both your kitchen and your garage, consumption drives our imagination. We salivate over the next hit, the next purchase, the next wild night out. The quality of our existence intertwines with what we have, where we’ve been, and the speed of our trajectory to the top.

But if we’re always seeking, always exploring what we could be and what we could do, we’ll miss out on who we are and where we are. We’ll hurdle the challenges we were made to savor and squash the discomfort we need to nest in. Paul reminds us that this life is a race with a prize waiting at the end. As a reluctant runner, I know that glory is rarely felt in the second mile. Our victories in life are not our crown, but the compassion and purpose we move with and toward will be the shining gems on our diadem.

The salesman listed his favorite critically acclaimed self-help books, but the crease between the engineer’s brows only deepened. “All that to say,” the salesman reassured, “you’ve got options. If you’re unhappy, you can just change.”

Raucous laughter resonated from a nearby group as the engineer handed off the deck of prompts with a shrug. “I just wish I had a purpose.”

A nurse’s hand froze over the next prompt card. For half a second, his face softened. “Real.”

Then he cleared his throat and read the next prompt. **B**



## Refine

These simple moments are the rhythms of our days.



Adrianna Ten Napel is a social worker who attends Stratford Christian Reformed Church in Stratford, Ont. She enjoys spending time with her husband and three kids, hiking new places, thrifting, and learning how to skateboard.

**I SIT ON THE FLOOR** with my daughter as she sets up her safari animal toys, something we've done countless times before.

Lion, tiger, gorilla.

I feel a small sense of pride as I gaze at her sweet face beaming with excitement and determination as she manages to line up the animals without accidentally knocking them over. My son lets out a cry, and I get up to feed him on the couch. I continue to watch my daughter.

Zebra, camel, monkey.

These simple moments are the rhythms of our days. In the same way my daughter tirelessly sets up her toys every day, I go through the motions of being with, feeding, reading to, and playing with my kids. My days feel so simple compared to the life I led before having kids. Now I often wonder how I am being a light in my community and strengthening my faith.

Recently a friend mentioned how being a parent is a refining process. To be a parent is to "die to oneself" by slowing down, by putting aside one's immediate needs to focus on one's children. It is a daily rhythm of grace and faithfulness.

Gorilla, antelope, elephant.

God in God's goodness does this for us. God meets us where we are and holds us when we are on the ground crying. God stops to find the lost sheep, to meet the woman at the well, to be our friend when we let God down.

Could parenting be a refining process that makes us look more like Jesus?


My son lets out a cry. I pick him up and rock him gently as he closes his eyes to fall back to sleep. I'm struck by how my immediate response is to attend to my child who needs me with no hesitation. In the same way, God meets us

where we are. Sometimes in places of deep hurt or shame, God in God's goodness bends down to pick us up to find rest in him.

Cheetah, crocodile, rhinoceros.

The quiet, daily rhythms of parenting are refining me to be more like Christ. I find much purpose in this thought. A simple life like mine can mirror that of our Savior. With this, I find rest in knowing that my tasks hold merit, and sanctification can happen as I am folding my son's laundry and seeking God.

Perhaps as my kids grow older my daily rhythms will look different. To the human eye, my purpose might begin to look bolder or more exciting. Whatever my evolving daily rhythms hold, I can rest knowing that my greater purpose does not change: to seek a life of refinement toward becoming more Christlike.

My daughter starts picking up her animals to put away. It is almost lunchtime, and after a nap we will head outside. My son is cooing on the floor, reaching for the toys that have been placed around him. He is on the cusp of rolling over, and we revel in the newness of his ever-changing skills. I say a little prayer over my children and head to the kitchen to prepare lunch, considering Colossians 3:17—  
"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." 



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