

BANNER

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025

THE BANNER.ORG

A young man with short brown hair, wearing a blue, white, and red plaid button-down shirt, is shown in profile, looking down and to the right. He is in a classroom setting, with other students blurred in the background. The lighting is soft and natural.

Being
Counter-
cultural

A Bible for Those Who Can't Read



The Solar Talking Bible

- Easy to use
- Powerful speaker
- Solar powered

"**The Talking Bible is beneficial for everyone,**" Rani shares. For her, it's more than just a way to engage with scripture—it's a lifeline.

After losing her husband and with her only son living far away in another city, Rani's health keeps her confined to her home most days. In these quiet and often lonely moments, the Talking Bible becomes a source of comfort, encouragement, and companionship.

The audio format allows Rani to stay connected to God's promises, even when reading isn't an option. Late at night, when she struggles to sleep, her Talking Bible fills her home with hope and reminds her that she is never truly alone.

Did you know that you can **pay less in taxes while sharing God's Word** with many who still need to hear about the Savior? Through our partnership with Barnabas Foundation you can **build a lasting legacy while giving hope.**



We can help you: Lower your taxes • Include Talking Bibles in your will
• Donate stock, real estate, crops, etc.

To find out more or to request a free brochure, **call Talking Bibles at: 760-745-8105 or email us at: info@talkingbibles.org**



Talking Bibles International • www.talkingbibles.org



419 East Grand Avenue, Escondido, CA 92025 • Telephone: 855-55-BIBLE (855-552-4253) or 760-745-8105 • Mark S Hoekstra, President

How Can We Help?

You and your church now have three options for easier access to CRC ministries and resources.



Click

Search hundreds of resources from CRC ministries and churches.

Try it out at
crcna.org/Resources



Call

Got a ministry question but not sure who to call? We can help.

Give us a shout at
[800-272-5125](tel:800-272-5125)



Chat

Oh yeah, we chat too. Type and we'll type back.

Chat from any page at
crcna.org

If you have a ministry need and wonder if your denomination can help, just click, call, or chat.

We're here to serve.



**Christian
Reformed
Church**

BANNER

BY THE NUMBERS

These were the 10 most-accessed articles on *TheBanner.org* between January and December 2024, in order of most views to fewer. For links and 15 more of our most accessed articles from the past year, visit TheBanner.org/2024-top-25.

Most-Read Articles Online

- 1 Synod Sets a Course of Discipline for CRC Churches Acting Contrary to CRC Teachings
- 2 Did God Order Genocide in the Old Testament? (2022 Cross Examination)
- 3 Synod Hears a Farewell From Grand Rapids East Delegate
- 4 Why I'm Not a Christian Zionist (2019 feature)
- 5 Some Delegates Don't Stand for Public Declaration of Agreement with CRC Beliefs
- 6 Synod Upholds 'Confessional Status' on Interpretation of Unchastity
- 7 The Spiritual Significance of Trees (2020 feature)
- 8 Synod 2024 Declared Disciplinary Measures for Those 'In Protest'
- 9 Synod 2024 Elects Four Midwest Pastors as Officers
- 10 Should Christians Support Israel No Matter What It Does to the Palestinians? (January 2024 Big Question)

Pageviews counted by Google analytics, referenced Dec. 2, 2024.

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.)

- » News: Ontario Congregation Moves to Oldest Building in Town
- » Music Review: *A New Heaven and a New Earth*
- » Documentary Review: *The Remarkable Life of Ibelin*
- » Streaming Series Review: *A Man on the Inside*

FEATURES



10

Healing the Rift: Navigating Family Estrangement

Deb Koster // Disunity is not what God desires for us.



32

What Is Counterculture Now?

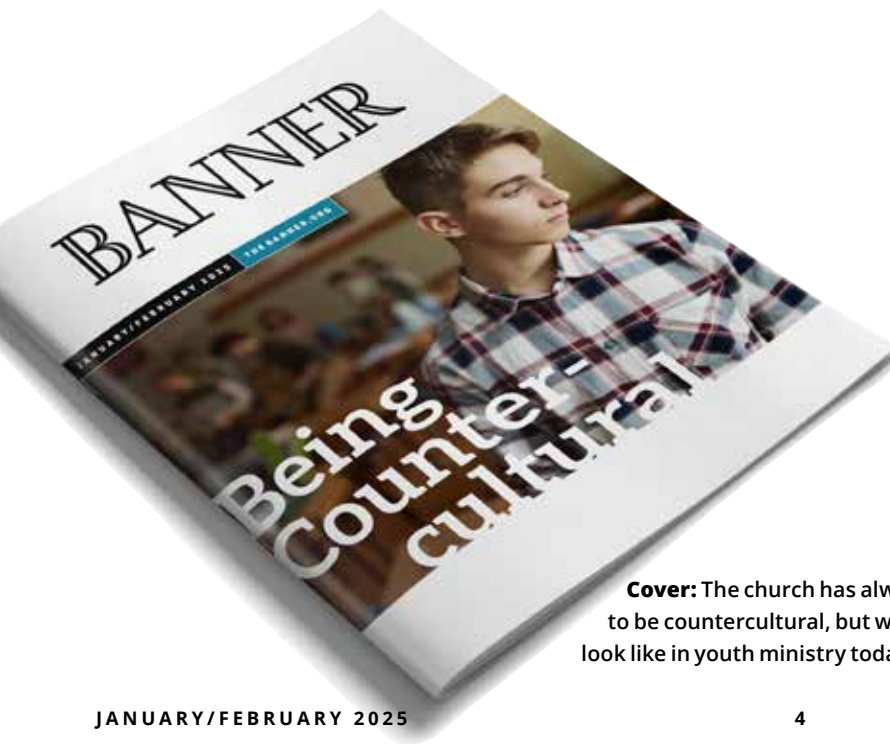
Arek O'Connell // It's easy to cater to trends in hopes of winning youth to Jesus.



36

Faith Matters: When Wine Flows Like Water

Sam Gutierrez // Thoughts about Epiphany.



Cover: The church has always been called to be countercultural, but what does that look like in youth ministry today?

NEWS

15 Bašurić, Maldonado to Lead Intercultural Ministry in Canada

20 Resonate Among Agencies Funding Missionary School Abuse Investigation

COLUMNS

7 Editorial: To Be Like God

Trying to be like God in the wrong way is the sin.

8 Reply All

9 Vantage Point: Giving and Receiving Onions

Abigail Ham // It's natural to desire purpose.

12 Big Questions

Don't people learn best with their own age groups?

31 Discover: Nature Journaling

Cindy Verbeek // Practice the skill of noticing.

35 The Other Six: Confessions of a Practicing Pessimist

Tammy Darling // We must avoid expecting the worst.

38 Mixed Media: 'Keep Writing!'

Lorilee Craker // Mixed Media editor responds to student review pitches.

40 Cross Examination: Can I Lose My Salvation?

Michael Wagenman // It's easy to understand why many ask.

41 Word Play

45 Still: A Melted Heart

Ken Nydam // Something deep must happen.

46 As I Was Saying: Reflections From a Departing CRC Campus Minister

Melissa Kuipers // As I leave this much-beloved job, take these lessons to heart.

Corrections:

The December issue's Table of Contents had two errors. It should have included a reference to Aaron Vriesman's Cross Examination article on page 40 titled, "How Can These Horrible Stories Be in the Bible?" It should not have included a reference to a Still article on page 46. That article will appear in a future issue.

OUR SHARED MINISTRY

Editor Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



Your Labor Is Not in Vain

Brian Clark // We should engage with workers' everyday experiences during worship.

26 The View From Here: Why a Denomination?

Zachary King // Let's start the conversation.

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.

Editor Shiao Chong
Associate Editor Sarah Heth Sundt
News Editor Alissa Vernon
Mixed Media Editor Lorilee Craker
Art Director Dean R. Heetderks
Designer Pete Euwema

Contact Us 300 E Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208 info@TheBanner.org
Address Changes and Subscriptions 800-777-7270 or visit TheBanner.org
Classified Advertising 616-224-0725 classifieds@TheBanner.org
Display Advertising 616-224-5882 ads@TheBanner.org
Editorial 616-224-0824 editorial@TheBanner.org
News news@TheBanner.org

To Advertise: Place your classified ads, including obituaries, online at thebanner.org/classifieds, or email ads@TheBanner.org, or fax it 616-224-0725. Published monthly (except August). Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Mich. Postmaster, send address changes to: *The Banner*, 300 E Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208. Canadian publications mail agreement #40063614. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: *The Banner*, 3475 Mainway, PO Box 5070, STN LCD 1, Burlington, ON, L7R 3Y8. Copyright 2022, Christian Reformed Church in North America. Printed in U.S.A. *The Banner* (ISSN0005-5557). Vol. 160, No. 1, 2025.

Member of the Associated Church Press and Evangelical Press Association.

Global REACH Global IMPACT

Your ad here reaches over 200,000 members, impacting the kingdom and growing your business!

Call for a no-obligation consultation.

616 224-5882
ads@TheBanner.org

To Be Like God

Being like God was not the sin, but trying to be like God in the wrong way was.



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

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

이 기사의 한글번역은 TheBanner.org/korean 에서 보실 수 있습니다.

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

DO YOU KNOW what a merism is? A merism is “a rhetorical device in which a combination of two contrasting parts of the whole refer to the whole” (Wikipedia). For example, if we search “search high and low” for something, it means we searched everywhere. Merisms are common in the Bible. For instance, when Isaiah 57:19 says, “Peace, peace to those far and near,” it means peace to everybody. When Jesus declares he is the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 22:13), the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, he is saying he is not just the beginning and the end, but everything in between as well.

Bible scholars say the phrase “knowing good and evil” in Genesis 3 is a Jewish merism. In Hebrew, it’s an idiom for “unlimited knowledge.” The temptation offered by the serpent to Adam and Eve was for them to be like God in God’s all-knowing ability.

I preached on Genesis 3 once and spoke about the temptation to be like God. After the service, a churchgoer asked me, “But aren’t we encouraged to be like God—or at least, to be Christ-like? How is it then a temptation?” This question helped me arrive at the following insight.


Created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), Adam and Eve were already to some degree like God. Being like God was not the sin, but trying to be like God in the wrong way was. I believe God created us to be like God in God’s *character*—to be loving, gracious, just, and righteous, caring for creation and for each other. But we are constantly tempted by our sinful desire to be like God in God’s *power* instead, especially through the power that knowledge bestows.

As Francis Bacon famously claimed, knowledge is power. At the very least, it gives us some level of intellectual control, which in turn gives us

some emotional comfort and control. Through knowledge, we can “play God” in all areas of life. Ultimately, therefore, Adam and Eve’s turning to the tree of knowledge is a turning away from trusting God to trusting themselves.

Are we not also guilty of eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil? How often have we placed our ultimate trust in our know-how rather than in God?

Here’s a sobering question: Do we abuse even God’s good truths to be like God in God’s power instead of in God’s character? Did the Pharisees, for example, ultimately use their vast religious and ethical knowledge, perhaps unintentionally, to elevate themselves and seek eternal life on their own power?

I believe God calls us to be like God in our character by way of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). If our theological knowledge does not bear such fruit, then we must humbly examine ourselves to see if we have misused the theology to be like God in the wrong way. 

Dear readers: in light of the reduced amount of ministry shares *The Banner* will receive, we might need to reduce our print frequency at times as a cost-saving measure. In addition to this combined January/February issue and our regularly combined July/August issue, it is possible future issues will be combined. We’ll do our best to let you know in advance if this happens.

We will continue to regularly publish online at thebanner.org. To make sure you are notified about what’s new, sign up for the weekly update at thebanner.org/signup.



REPLY ALL

To send letters to the editor, please see our guidelines at thebanner.org/letters.

Synod 2024

I believe the staff of *The Banner* was jolted by the results of Synod 2024 and at a loss on how to report it (“Resounding Words,” July/August 2024). ... While most main-line churches have abandoned or reinterpreted the creeds and confessions on which they were based, they have left behind many thousands of members in search of a church that remains faithful to Scripture. We can become their new home. Now is the time to abandon apologies and equivocations and promote our unique position with enthusiasm.

» Ed Gabrielse // St Charles, Ill.

I was struck by this dialogue while watching the movie *Conclave*: “There is one sin which I have come to fear above all others: certainty. Certainty is the great enemy of unity, the deadly enemy of tolerance. If there was only certainty, and no doubt, there would be no mystery. And, therefore, no need for faith.” A cautionary tale for the Christian Reformed Church? Synod is supposed to be a deliberative body, with delegates listening well and gaining from the wisdom of others. At Synod 2024, where was listening to understand? Where was

the thoughtful deliberation, the openness to other interpretations of Scripture within Reformed understanding? Was there room for doubt? Where was there a recognition of the mystery that now we see through a glass darkly, that not all things are known to us on this side of eternity? I found missing from the decisions mercy and compassion for our LGBTQ+ siblings and those who support them. Christians are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1), and we cannot with certainty know God’s will in all things. Surely our decisions should reflect faith, not certainty, leaning on the grace of Jesus Christ.

» Bev Bandstra // Ladner, B.C.

Elephants in the Room

As I was reading the editorial “Elephants in the Room” (October 2024), I was taken back to the time my wife and I were in northern Thailand riding logging elephants. Those elephants were under the complete control of their masters. They would rather serve their rider than themselves. Isn’t that what happens to us when we submit to the Holy Spirit and let God rule us? Sure, we can go back to the life we once had and let it drive us, but born-again Christians want to serve their master. Paul calls us to beat our old nature into submission to Christ. Our old nature is no longer what drives our motives and desires. The editor says we are driven by our old nature of the past, which causes division and strife. I agree. That is why there is a fix to this dilemma: submit to the Spirit’s leading. Let God’s Spirit sanctify us and bring us into full communion with him. That is when sins are revealed and healing can begin.

» Randy Eskes // Ripon, Calif.

I am a retired CRC pastor who has been living outside the CRC community for more than three years. I was reading your editorial in the most recent issue and was unsettled after reading it. ... When you neglect the discussion of God’s will and obedience to it and God’s Word and our submission to it, you do so to the detriment of the denomination and the ministry of the church. My heart aches for people who are outside the Word and will of God. But my ignoring their sin, self-righteous behavior, and even hypocritical behavior does not do them or the church any good. The church is not ours; it is the body of Christ. We are not fit to do as we will with it. I’d rather sit in the courts of the Lord than in the council of the wicked—and all the while be in prayer that God’s gift of grace in Jesus brings them back to their home with the loving Father who asks that they trust him alone and obey his Word and will.

» Paul Hansen // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Centering Justice in Food Security

I am thankful for the informative article about the Table Urban Farm and Community Church in the November issue of *The Banner*. As a board member, I’d like to highlight and add a bit of additional information. The Table began in 2011 as a CRC church plant. Since 2012, the directors, Craig and Jeanine Kopaska Broek, have been growing food and distributing it directly to local families and local partners free of charge, as well as building community in South Denver. The fresh produce is often distributed a day or two after harvest or refrigerated and offered freely to the public at the Table Public House, a community cafe and gathering place that is also the location of weekly worship gatherings called

Giving and Receiving Onions

A Word of Encouragement for Recent Graduates

"The Feast." As of September, the Table Urban Farm owns the Public House. The goal is that the Public House will be able to underwrite the expenses of the food-growing ministry and to continue to be a place for people to gather and have fellowship. Thanks to many of you for your prayers and financial support.
» Barry Meyer // Denver, Colo.

I GRADUATED from Calvin University steeped in the language of vocation, which Frederick Buechner defines as "where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (*Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABCs*). A year later, I'm in the job market for the third time and still trying to figure out a vocation.

I suppose it's natural to desire a tremendous purpose, especially if you're a Calvin grad. Whether our childhood dream was to be an astronaut, a movie star, or something else, at Calvin students spend four years hearing about the gifts God has given us and God's amazing plans to use them.

But then we graduate. We get a job, more likely than not doing something that has (as far as we can tell) nothing to do with either our deep gladness or the world's deep hunger. We work and pay rent and pray. What happens to vocation?

Spending four years talking about one's individual role in God's plan to restore all creation, it's easy to develop an Anakin Skywalker complex: You are the chosen one! You will solve climate change! You will eliminate hunger!

Sometimes the thunder of our expectations blocks out the quiet voice of our actual power. By reconceptualizing vocation as something more quotidian, maybe we can get closer to what Buechner really meant—that we are called not to one momentous deed, but to an entire life.

Journalist Dorothy Day, cofounder of the Catholic Worker Movement, wrote in 1946 that "we can to a certain extent change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. ... We can give away an onion" ("Love Is the Measure").


What if it's that simple—that we are here just to give away onions? And

Sometimes the
thunder of our
expectations
blocks out the
quiet voice of our
actual power.

what if we're also here, on occasion, to receive an onion? After all, we're part of creation too, as badly in need of renewal as the rest.

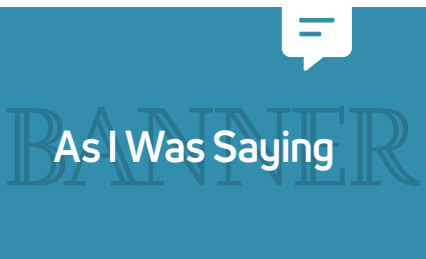
In the book of Jeremiah, God tells his people in exile to settle in, to care for the land they're living in, to proceed with the natural rhythms of life, to seek peace, and to pray.

We're not here to save the world. We're here to work and eat and love and pray and treasure those brief moments of grace we are empowered to give and receive—those moments that demonstrate God's renewal of all things.

None of this helps me decide what jobs to apply for or where to live. But maybe I can detach all of those decisions from my sense of vocation. Whatever comes next, I'll be praying for the grace to give and receive onions—and to let it be enough. 



Abigail Ham is a recent Calvin University graduate who currently lives in Quincy, Mass. She shares her writing and reading life at abbiehamwrites.com.



Find the latest posts from our award-winning blog online at TheBanner.org.

- » Synod 2024: An Appraisal and a Vision
- » A Positive Theological Vision for the CRC
- » How Running Has Instilled a Deep Sense of Gratitude Within Me



Healing the Rift: Navigating Family Estrangement

By Deb Koster

Susan lamented all she had missed because of her estrangement from her children. She understood their reasons for cutting her out years ago when addiction fueled her choices. Yet now, after many years of sobriety, she was still unwelcome and cut off from her grandkids. While she has resigned herself to this reality, it remains painful to be so alone and disconnected in her senior years.

For some, estrangement comes as an unwelcome surprise. John claims to have no idea how things got out of control in his family. He knew things weren't great in the relationship he and his wife had with their son and daughter-in-law, but he felt as if they were making mountains out of molehills. They couldn't agree on anything, and everyday things escalated quickly. They were shocked when their son filed a restraining order preventing them from contacting his family in any way. They didn't see it coming, and now there is no path to mend fences. It is painful for relationships that God designed to be nurturing to instead be filled with distance and hostility.

Christians are not exempt from family relationship challenges. We might keep our family estrangement stories

quiet out of shame, but they are more common than one might think. An article in *Psychology Today* suggests that one in four people are estranged from at least one family member. Such disunity is not uncommon, but it is not what God desires for us. Jesus shared a different vision for his people: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Yet in the brokenness of this world, our relationships suffer.

Why Does Estrangement Happen?

God fashioned us for community. As people made in the image of the triune God, we don't thrive in isolation. We are designed to reflect the fellowship in the unity of Father, Son, and Spirit. Yet we live in a broken world with many issues that fracture relationships. Addiction, abuse, mental health concerns, and unhealthy communication are common in estranged relationships.

Estrangement might result from abusive behavior or an unhealthy power imbalance. When people pull away, they generally have a reason. They might perceive a lack of love and support or feel bullied. When someone in a relationship feels injured, pulling away from pain is a natural attempt to protect themselves from further injury. Dysfunctional relationships are painful.

Estrangement could also be a byproduct of failing to manage conflict effectively. Learning to speak the truth in love and address our concerns to those who have hurt us can transform a relationship. We can't heal what we don't acknowledge. If possible, discuss together whether boundaries or expectations need realignment. Sometimes strong fences are needed for safety, at least for a time. When navigating conflict, Jesus instructs us, we ought to name the offense and address our concerns with the person who has wronged us (Matt. 18:15-20). However, we should not place anyone in an unsafe situation, and we are encouraged to enlist the support of others to work toward justice and reconciliation when possible. Counseling or mediation can help by allowing all the voices to be heard. Working with a counselor can also help us heal from past wounds and learn how to extend forgiveness. Setting clear boundaries is necessary when others don't acknowledge the pain they have caused. No one should have to guess what offense they have committed or why others are upset.

Adjusting Expectations

Boundary expectations might differ across generations. Previous generations likely grew up expecting

children to obey their parents without question. "Because I said so" was all the explanation needed. Sometimes parents have difficulty transitioning from a parent-to-child relationship to a parent-to-adult relationship. Adult children setting boundaries that defy parental expectations might then be viewed as disrespectful and disobedient. As adult children mature and seek to establish limits to protect themselves and their families, they might not always do so wisely. While parents might be stunned at their adult child's defiance, their children might view it as self-care and protection of their family.

Uprooting Pride

Pride invites us to record wrongs and assign blame to others. While often in relational breakdowns there is some blame on all sides, pride prevents us from owning our contribution to the rift. Keeping score flows from our self-righteousness. Pride prevents us from extending an olive branch and building a path toward reconciliation. Humility, on the other hand, helps us see the world through the eyes of others. Every one of us messes up at times; the question is whether we will take responsibility for our actions when we fail.

Anger starts from a good place: recognizing injustice and striving to right the wrong. But sometimes we mistake our privileges for our rights, so some humble self-reflection can temper our anger. When we keep a tally of grievances, our hearts become bitter. Forgiveness is the key to keeping anger from becoming toxic. Jesus, enduring the horrific injustice of the cross, asked God to forgive his tormentors. Forgiveness is vital to uprooting the bitterness that underlies estrangement. We can set down our anger and allow God to be in charge of justice while still maintaining healthy

Our disunity is
not uncommon,
but it is not what
God desires for us.

boundaries that protect us from further abuse. Turning our anger over to God through forgiveness is essential for our spiritual and emotional health, but reconciliation depends upon repentance and changed behavior.

Setting Boundaries


While we might need boundaries for the health and safety of ourselves and our family, we need to approach setting limits prayerfully and in loving ways. Speaking our truth requires a loving context. Without love, our truth will be heard only as condemnation. Offer grace where you can. Being in the same space with an abuser is dangerous, and limits must be set firmly for safety. Yet there might be other situations where grace could be extended. Could you accept a letter or a Christmas gift even if you are not yet comfortable attending the holiday gathering? Could you let your kids connect with their grandparents through phone calls or supervised visits? While we should never put anyone in danger, extending grace like that we have received from Jesus can break down the dividing walls of hostility.

Is Estrangement Christian?

When Jesus talked about those unwilling to acknowledge the harm they have done to a relationship, his instructions were to treat them as a sinner or tax collector (Matt. 18:17). Some have used this as permission to

cut people out of their lives, but that is not what Jesus is saying. Jesus calls us to love our enemies and even to pray for them. The apostle Paul encouraged Christians to do their best to work things out without rushing to take legal action (1 Cor. 6:4-8). We should work to heal relationships when possible while still setting firm boundaries when they are needed. In the brokenness of our world, separation might be necessary, but it is something to grieve while we pray for God to work in the lives of our loved ones.

For Those Affected by Boundaries

If you face boundaries, respect the limits that have been asked of you. Violating them and trying to force a connection will only inflame feelings of disrespect. When boundaries are not respected, the next step is distance, if not restraining orders and legal consequences. Prayer is the most effective path toward relational healing. Only God can change hearts and minds; we can't. Working through relational fracture is challenging and requires the gifting of the Holy Spirit. Without patience, kindness, and self-control from the Spirit, things won't go well. Choose to clothe yourself in the fruit of the Spirit even when others don't. Let God begin the path toward healing, starting in your own heart. Even if a relationship cannot be healed, God is present with us in our pain and walks with us through the messiness of broken relationships. 



Rev. Deb Koster leads the Christian Reformed Church's family and marriage ministry, Family Fire (familyfire.com), at ReFrame Ministries. She and her husband, Steven, worship at Grace Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

BIG QUESTIONS

Faith Formation

Our church is doing more intergenerational ministry events. Don't people learn best with their own age groups?

Historically, congregations did everything together. First-century house churches certainly had no specialized ministry for kids or teens or retired people. Some church historians say the trend for age-specific ministries started soon after World War II. The success of parachurch organizations like Young Life or InterVarsity Christian Fellowship caused the local church to begin to think about having separate ministries focused on particular age groups.

Some such ministries go back even further: the Sunday school movement began in England in the 1780s. But even that is relatively recent history. For centuries, people did church together.

Some separation makes sense, though. Imagine an adult group discussing why the Eastern Church split from the Roman Catholic Church in the year 1054. A group of elementary students would not get much from that discussion. But that example is about church education. The church is also interested in formation. Formation is different from education, although they are certainly related. While education is aimed at building knowledge, formation is aimed at helping people accept the promises made at their baptism and grow in their faith.

When people of different ages do life together, we all learn. Children learn from watching older siblings and parents do things. Psychologist Lev Vygotsky coined the phrase “zone of proximal development” to



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

explain those areas where we are not able to do things on our own but are able to with support from others. Intergenerational ministry puts us in close proximity to those who are a bit further ahead in their faith walk than we are. These folks serve as examples as we together figure out what life in Christ looks like.

But this is not a one-way dynamic. Adults or seniors who spend time with children or teens also benefit from hearing their insights and questions. Well-planned and well-managed, intergenerational ministry is effective and a blessing to all involved.

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.

Missional Living

What does “missional” really mean?

First let me say what “missional” does not mean. Missional church is not primarily about supporting cross-cultural missions overseas. It is not primarily about organizing outreach projects (such as soup kitchens) and events (such as clothing drives or parties in the park), as helpful as providing these services might be. Neither is “missional” about a new church growth model or evangelism strategy (although growing the church numerically is an aspect of

God's larger missional intentions).

“Missional,” furthermore, is not merely about developing better mission statements or talking more about the importance of mission. “Missional” is not about trying to go back to the first-century church either, though one might recognize that many missional postures and practices originated in the early days of disciple making. On the other end of the timeline, “missional” is not about “emerging” or being more contemporary, relevant, or attractional. Finally, “missional” is not synonymous with social justice, yet seeking the well-being and flourishing of the whole community, engaging the poor, and correcting inequalities are part of being God's agents in the world and bearing witness to the good news of God's kingdom come near.

So, what is “missional”? A more accurate understanding of “missional” requires understanding *missio Dei*. By God's very nature, God is the Sent and the Sending One, always seeking to redeem the world. That is the very nature of love, and God is love (1 John 4:8-9). As God's people, we too are sent, empowered by the Spirit to be instruments of God's mission in the world, loving and redeeming. “Missional,” then, is the stimulus, the identity and organizing principle of the church. The church's very nature is to be missional—to show God's love with a goal of redemption. “Missional” is the why and what of the church's existence. The church exists for the sake of the other, to be turned toward

neighbors, for God so loves the world. Being missional thus means we must radically reorient our lives to join God on God's mission right where we live. In our ordinary, everyday lives, personally and communally, we then bear witness to the good news: God is with us, and God loves us!

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.

Relationship

I struggle with my kids' constant fighting. How can I stop the competition so our home can find some peace?

Parenting is a challenging job, and we can feel overwhelmed when outnumbered by children competing for attention. Breathe deeply and ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit as you consider how you can change the environment.

As parents, we set the baseline tone in the home. Consider the model you are setting. Are you able to express your frustrations clearly without raising your voice or losing your temper? We also set the behavioral standards for our children. It's our responsibility to make the rules clear—for example, "In our house, we use kind words, we avoid yelling, we don't call names, and we never hit." In essence, we help our kids recognize the expectations and hold them accountable for living up to them.

Sometimes children act out because they lack the skills to express their feelings. We can help our children by giving them the vocabulary to name their emotions. Anger often flows from big feelings of sadness or frustration. As children give expression to their big feelings, we can acknowledge

their emotions and guide them to better ways to cope. As children practice new ways of expressing themselves, they gain social skills that will give them confidence for navigating relationship challenges.

Children might not admit it, but they long for the approval and attention of their parents. When we recognize that need, we can prioritize affirming all that our kids are doing right. Affirmation sets a positive tone in the house and provides a gracious model for our kids to emulate. Take time to affirm the good rather than just correcting the negatives. Our call to speak the truth in love begins with making sure our children feel loved, cared for, and valued, even when we need to say no. Our children will be able to hear our correction and respond positively to it if they feel secure and loved.

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

Ethics

Is Jesus' admonition "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt. 7:12) an example of moral relativism?

Jesus' Golden Rule seems easy to caricature. I would like each of my neighbors to give me \$20. Does this mean I must give each of my neighbors \$20? I would like to be free to make my own life choices without interference from others. Does this mean I should avoid all criticism of others, no matter how morally heinous or destructive their actions are?

These examples suggest the absurdity of making ethics relative to one's desires, beliefs, or practices apart from

any higher standard of what is good. Jesus himself offers a clear standard for what is good: "If you love me, keep my commands," he tells his disciples in John 14:15. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). "Whoever wants to be my disciple must ... take up their cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). Jesus' commandments and conduct, not our preferences or desires, are the standard of Christian ethics, even when they result in our suffering.

What, then, are we to make of the Golden Rule? We must interpret it in context. In Matthew 7:9-12, Jesus is talking about giving good gifts to others: "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you."

The key here, as implied by the word "so," is the example of the Father. Just as I gratefully receive God's good gifts to me, so I should do what is good for others. I must make their good a priority equal to my own good. The purpose of the Golden Rule is thus not to make me the arbiter of what is good. It is to remind me that I am not more worthy of God's good gifts than anyone else. I want others to do good to me, so I should do good to others.

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



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

Massachusetts Church Plant Boosts Discipleship With Surge School

NEWS

For more news and longer stories about the churches and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church, visit TheBanner.org. Or get the free app by searching for “CRCNA Banner” in your app store.

Follow *The Banner* on social media:

» [Facebook.com/crcbanner](https://www.facebook.com/crcbanner)
» On X: [@crcbanner](https://twitter.com/crcbanner)

Got a news tip?

Know of a noteworthy event or accomplishment in the life of a CRC member? Have details about an interesting ministry in a CRC congregation? Send your news tip to news@TheBanner.org.



City Groups from Emmaus City Church gathered together for worship.

Emmaus City Church in Worcester, Mass., began its second round of Surge School, an eight-month discipleship and spiritual transformation program, in 2024.

Mike Sullivan, the commissioned pastor leading the eight-year-old church plant, learned about Surge School in Phoenix, Ariz., and wanted to see the program implemented in Worcester.

Emmaus City launched the program in 2022 in partnership with First Baptist Church-Holden and Living Word Church, the Pentecostal congregation from whom Emmaus City rents space. That year they had more than 30 participants across the three congregations. In 2024 they had over 30 participants from five congregations.

“We are a beautiful collection of people” from different ethnicities, cultures, and denominations, Sullivan said. Small groups called “Surge Tables” meet weekly to go through a four-part curriculum covering Gospel Story, Gospel Formation,

Missional Church, and Missional Vocation. For each module, groups read a different book: *The True Story of the Whole World*, by Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew; *The Deeply Formed Life*, by Rich Villodas; *The Symphony of Mission*, by Michael W. Goheen and Jim Mullins; and *Every Good Endeavor*, by Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf.

Besides the book learning, participants aim each week to practice one of what they call “B.L.E.S.S. rhythms”—to Bless someone, Listen to someone, Eat a meal with others, Speak the gospel, or Set aside a day for Sabbath.

“(Surge School) is a holistic approach that looks at how the story of God shapes us and what that means for how we live and work in our communities,” Sullivan said. Being together and sharing stories with one another allows people in the group to bring Christ into every part of their lives—even the hardest parts.

The model fits with Emmaus City Church’s other practices, including that of placing each congregant in a City Group, “a community of people who together share and show the life Jesus gives with others in the everyday stuff of life.”

—Callie Feyen

Bašurić, Maldonado to Lead Intercultural Ministry in Canada



Jeremiah Bašurić (left) and Sebastian Maldonado together in Canmore, Alta., in November 2023 for a meeting of the Decolonization and Anti-Racism Collective.

Jeremiah Bašurić, a pastor in Edmonton, Alta., and Sebastian Maldonado, a campus minister in Toronto, Ont., began sharing the position of senior leader for Intercultural Ministry in Canada in November. The position became vacant in July when Pablo Kim Sun left for a role with the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Bašurić and Maldonado had served as part of the Decolonization and Anti-Racism Collective, a group that advised and supported Kim Sun's work, and they decided to apply for the leadership role together.

Al Postma, executive director, Canada for the Christian Reformed Church in North America, said the two presented in their joint application why "working together in this role would be a strength for the ministry." The search committee took that seriously and invited them to interview together, Postma said.

In sharing the role, Bašurić and Maldonado will continue in active ministry in two different Canadian cities. Bašurić pastors at Mosaic House Church in Edmonton and works as a hospital chaplain. Maldonado is a campus minister at York University in Toronto. "The other jobs we have are flexible," Maldonado said. "They also connect us to the community."

Kim Sun was the first full-time senior leader for intercultural ministry, a role preceded by a part-time race relations coordinator in Canada. Before leaving, Kim Sun helped review the role, Postma said, reflecting "the needs he (Kim Sun) saw within the CRC in Canada."

Bašurić and Maldonado will be involved in equipping, training, and encouraging congregations to navigate challenges and opportunities that come from growing in diversity, and they will work to "create communities where all members fully belong." The job description describes the role as "crucial in a context where local churches and society are becoming increasingly diverse, and racialized groups are seeking equity, inclusiveness, and belonging."

The Decolonization and Anti-Racism Collective will continue to advise and support the work. Bašurić said the collective is looking for new members to serve three-year terms because the terms of some serving members are ending. "We are excited to meet new people, connect with them, and have them join us in our work," Bašurić said.

—Kristen Parker

Alaska Korean Church Welcomes New Pastor



The congregation of Alaska Korean CRC celebrated its retiring pastor and its new one Nov. 3.

Chris T. Choe, Korean Ministry leader with Resonate Global Mission, attended a Nov. 3 service at Alaska Korean Christian Reformed Church in Anchorage, Alaska, at which the church celebrated the retirement of long-term pastor Sung Kwan Kim and the installation of pastor David Dae Kyu Kim.

"It was an honorable event to celebrate the retirement of Pastor Kim Sung Kwan, who has quietly served the Alaska Korean CRC for the past 19 years," Choe wrote in the CRC's Korean ministry November newsletter.

More than 7,000 Koreans or Korean Americans live in Alaska, according to the Municipality of Anchorage's Sister City Commission. Anchorage is a sister city to Incheon, Korea. Alaska Korean CRC has ministered in Anchorage since 1994.

David Dae Kyu Kim said there are 12 active churches in the Korean church association in Anchorage, which he appreciates being part of. "Every first Monday of the month, we have a meeting, and I attend to build good relationships with the pastors," he said.

Having previously served in praise and young adult ministry in churches in southern California, Kim now enjoys preaching every week. "About seven to eight years before coming to Alaska, I felt a strong calling to preach God's word every Sunday," he said. "I felt a strong urge from the Lord to share the gospel with many people and bring them to life through his Word."

Kim moved to Anchorage with his wife, Joanne, and teenage son, Paul.

—Alissa Vernon

Edmonton Church Welcomes 32 New Members



First CRC in Edmonton, Alta., welcomed 32 new members Oct. 27.

On Sunday, Oct. 27, First Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alta. welcomed 32 new members, including 21 newcomers from four African countries, six men from Hope Mission's addiction recovery program, four children, and one person transferring from the Canadian Reformed Church. "We are happy you are adding your gifts to ours, that together we become stronger in our service in the mission God has given this church," pastor Bernhard VanderVlis told them.

The growth comes after a time of decline for the 114-year-old church. Total membership was around 400 between 2003 and 2016, dropped to 283 by 2023, and was 317 in 2024 before the surge of new members, according to CRC yearbooks.

Contributing to God's work at First CRC is Valentine Ojelede. He came to Edmonton in 2018 from Nigeria, where he was a school principal and a pastor. Ojelede's wife, Gladys, also a pastor, came in 2019. Their four children, who were among those welcomed into membership Oct. 27, arrived in 2022. Of all the churches they visited in Edmonton, Ojelede said, he and his wife felt most comfortable and welcomed at First CRC. "We can see the love of God in this place," he said.

Nine people from Ojelede's former congregation in Nigeria have since immigrated to Edmonton and joined First CRC.

Ojelede, a staff member at Hope Mission, encourages refugees seeking shelter there and the men in the agency's recovery program to attend First CRC.

Matthew Schoonderwoerd came to First CRC through Hope Mission's recovery program. "Valentine, one of our leaders, began picking us men up every Sunday and bringing us to First Church," he said. Later, membership classes showed Schoonderwoerd "just how important we all are to God's body. God has given each and every one of us gifts, and he has instructed us to use those gifts. Being a new member of First CRC, I am praying that God uses me."

—Janet A. Greidanus

Noteworthy



Aaron Kuecker

Trinity Christian College welcomed its ninth president in October, 65 years after the school's founding in Palos Heights, Ill. President **Aaron J. Kuecker, an ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America, was inaugurated Oct. 3.** He had been serving as interim president and was the college's provost since July 2016. He taught theology and directed the education program at Trinity from 2008 to 2013.



Hamilton (Ont.) District Christian High School took gold, and Smithville (Ont.) Christian High School took silver at the Ontario Boys A Volleyball Championships in November. The teams posed together for a tournament-closing photo. HDCHS has earned the provincial title for the last four years.

In Memoriam

Rev. Louis M. Tamminga (1930-2024)



Wendy Hammond

GEMS Girls Clubs announced a new executive director, Wendy Hammond, in May. Hammond, who grew up in the Christian Reformed Church, has worked for Faith Alive publishing and World Renew. She joined club leaders, counselors, and counselors-in-training from 13 different congregations for a regional training day in Stratford, Ont., Oct. 19.



Dr. Robert Greidanus (center) with his wife, Alisa, and five of their seven children at the Vancouver, B.C., Family Physician of the Year award ceremony.

Dr. Robert I. Greidanus, a member of WestEnd Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alta., with a medical practice in Peace River, Alta., **was honored by the Alberta College of Family Physicians as the province's Family Physician of the Year for 2024.** The award was presented Nov. 8 in Vancouver, B.C., in a national ceremony honoring award winners from all of the provinces and territories.

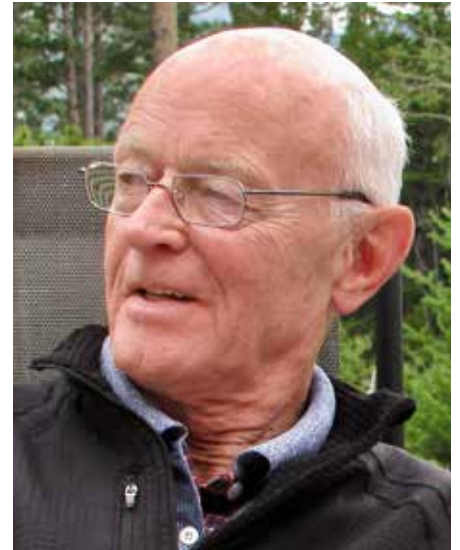
Louis Tamminga has been described as a spirited preacher, compassionate caregiver, efficient administrator, and visionary denominational leader. He served the Christian Reformed Church as its first director Pastor-Church Relations. Louis, 94, died Nov. 11.

“What a gift to the church and to humanity,” a colleague said in tribute. “His abiding personality trait,” said one of his children, “was an outward and fully authentic focus on people as human individuals: their well-being, flaws, concerns, joys, fears, and life stories. He was through and through a pastor.”

Born in Friesland, the Netherlands, as the youngest of 10 children, Louis grew up under German occupation during World War II and was raised by his single mother after his father died when he was 2 years old. These circumstances informed Louis' faith and grounded his love for family, friends, and the Christian community.

After graduating from high school and working in a bank for two years, Louis immigrated to Canada in 1951, then moved to Grand Rapids, Mich., to attend Calvin College (now University) and Seminary. After ordination in 1957, Louis simultaneously served two churches in British Columbia: Smithers CRC and Telkwa CRC. He went on to pastor Maranatha CRC, Edmonton, Alta.; Bethel CRC, Sioux Center, Iowa; and Willowdale (Ont.) CRC. In 1980, he returned to Grand Rapids to begin a three-year appointment as communications secretary with Christian Reformed World Missions (now part of Resonate Global Mission) and then spent 12 years directing Pastor-Church Relations, a service now provided through Thrive. In this role he pioneered relational approaches to pastoral and congregational well-being in times of crisis.

A year after his retirement in 1995, Louis accepted an invitation to serve as a half-time volunteer pastor to CRC



missionaries around the world. He corresponded and met with missionaries in North America on home service, and with his wife, Jean, hosted missionary retreats in many places around the world.

Louis also served Faith Alive, the publication arm of the CRC, as a manuscript evaluator and as a member and one-time president of Faith Alive's board. “Louis was an able, wise, loving leader who always led with his heart,” said Bob deMoer, former editor-in-chief of Faith Alive and *The Banner*. Louis wrote several books and was a regular contributor to CRC periodicals, including *The Banner*, for which he wrote the In Memoriam column for many years.

Louis was predeceased by two sons and by Jean, his wife of 67 years, and is survived by four children, nine grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Wildfires Alter University's Trip Itinerary; Calgary Church Steps In

Each fall The King's University's second-year physical geography class takes a field trip to Jasper National Park to learn about Alberta ecosystems and practice fieldwork techniques. "Over the summer we were deeply saddened to learn that the Jasper wildfires had destroyed the class's usual lodging and field sites, and it looked like this year's trip would be cancelled," the Edmonton, Alta., university said in its November *King's Insider* newsletter. "Thankfully, Emmanuel Christian Reformed Church in Calgary opened their doors and invited students to stay in their facilities free of charge, making it possible to spend this year's field trip in Banff (National Park)."

Professors Michael Ferber and Harry Spaling take turns teaching the course. Ferber led this year's strip of 38 students, and Spaling accompanied. Ferber said he started pivoting plans soon after the July fires, when it became obvious that most of the regular field-trip stops were out of commission. The King's vice president for institutional advancement, Shannon Tuininga, connected Ferber to Emmanuel CRC as a possible accommodation alternative.



Photo by The King's University

Emmanuel CRC in Calgary, Alta., offered relaxing accommodations to students from The King's University in Edmonton, Alta.

"King's has a long history with Emmanuel, and they have been faithful supporters of the university," Tuininga said. "Over the years we have hosted various events there, and several of our supporters are or have been members of this church."

Ferber was grateful for the ready hospitality from the church and its office manager, Yvonne Bosgra, despite the unusual nature of the request. "To my knowledge, this is the first time

we have had an overnight group stay at the church," Bosgra said. She told Ferber, "We can definitely make this work. ... Upstairs we have five classrooms that your group can settle in for the evening. There is also a youth room with some couches, a pool table, and a pingpong table for everyone to hang out in."

Ferber will teach this one-semester course again in the spring and hopes the Jasper sites will be available. "If all goes well, we will be back to Jasper," he said. "However, if it is not possible to return yet, I'll definitely reach out to (Emmanuel CRC) to see if it might be possible to return."

—Alissa Vernon

Church Renewal Lab Adapted for Native American Churches



Photo by Center for Church Renewal

The first Native American Renewal Cohort gathered in October 2024 at Maranatha Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Farmington, N.M.

Seven congregations from the Christian Reformed Church's Classis Red Mesa make up the latest iteration of the Center for Church Renewal's New Horizons project.

In March 2024, the group received a \$1.2 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to tailor the labs for Latino and Navajo congregations over the next five years. Larry Doornbos, a retired Christian Reformed pastor and director of New Horizons, and Kris Vos, executive leader of the Center for Church Renewal, are behind the project.

The Center for Church Renewal's labs—cohorts of churches working through six aspects of church life to develop structures that will encourage continual renewal—started in 2013 but have focused mainly on English-speaking congregations in North America. Doornbos and Vos applied for the new grant to seek a different cultural focus. "It really does come out of the roots of the ministry that Kris and I have," Doornbos said. Doornbos pastored for eight years at Rehoboth CRC in New Mexico, where there are several Christian Reformed Navajo congregations, and Vos serves Sunlight Community Church-Lake Worth, a multicultural Christian Reformed congregation in Florida with a Latino population.

"I was hoping for six to eight people for the first listening meeting for the Native American churches, and over 20 came," Doornbos said. More than 10 churches were represented at that first meeting, which took place in Albuquerque, N.M., in May. Doornbos and Vos reworked their Renewal Lab Toolbox after hearing suggestions such as using the First Nations version of the New Testament. In late October, the first Native American Renewal Lab began in Farmington, N.M., with seven churches involved. Its second session was scheduled for January.

—Maia Vandermeer

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Sidney Cooper

1930-2024

Sid Cooper was a wise and confident leader who recognized his pastoral calling as an honor. Loved and respected by many, Sid, 94, died Nov. 13.

A graduate of Calvin College (now University) and Westminster Seminary, Sid also earned a Doctorandus in Divinity at the Free University in Amsterdam.

After his ordination in 1956, Sid served First Christian Reformed Church in Sarnia, Ont. Then, responding to a need for Dutch-speaking pastors in New Zealand, he was sent on a five-year loan to serve Reformed churches in Christchurch and Auckland and later served congregations in Foxton and North Palmerston, New Zealand. Between those tenures he pastored Trinity CRC, North Haledon, N.J.; Trinity CRC, Artesia, Calif.; First CRC, Sarnia, for a second time; and Alliston (Ont.) CRC. In 1993 he retired to Sarnia and served for several years as an interim pastor.

Sid was an adventurer who loved to explore as much of the world as he could. He shared what he saw through his beautiful photographs.

Predeceased in 2011 by his wife, Janice, Sid is survived by six children, 16 grandchildren, and 24 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Hans Uittenbosch

1932-2024

Lifelong evangelist Hans Uittenbosch was a master storyteller and a man with a generous laugh. Remembered for his passion, joy, servant's heart, and genuine devotion to the Lord, Hans, 92, died Nov. 23.

Born in the Netherlands, Hans immigrated to the U.S. in 1952 on a student visa, eventually graduating from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary. Ordained in 1957, he served two Ontario congregations: Hebron Community Christian Reformed Church in Renfrew and First CRC in Kingston, where he also was deputy chaplain at Kingston Penitentiary. In 1965, Classis Eastern Canada called Hans to pioneer a new ministry as chaplain to seafarers in the Port of Montreal. For the next 26 years, in his trademark clerical collar, he became a beacon of light, truth, hope, and comfort to seafarers from around the world. Hans helped expand the ministry to the ports of Vancouver, B.C.; Seattle, Wash.; and Los Angeles, Calif.

From 1992 to 2016, Hans and his wife took their ministry onto cruise ships, sailing and ministering around the world. Hans also authored the book *On Board With the Lord: Smooth Sailing in Rough Waters*.

Hans is survived by Trudy, his wife of 68 years; three children and their spouses; nine grandchildren; and 12 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Arthur Schoonveld

1936-2024

Adventurous and service oriented, Art Schoonveld always looked out for others and stood up for his beliefs. Described as a bit mischievous, his love for a good laugh was never lost, even up to his last moments with his family. Art died Nov. 16 at age 88.

Born in the Netherlands as the youngest of 13 children, Art's youth was impacted by the German occupation. Shortly after World War II, his mother died, and a brother was killed in the war in Indonesia. Following high school, Art decided to emigrate, first to Canada and then to the United States. He was called to serve in the U.S. Army and spent two years in Germany as a tank driver.

A graduate of Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, Art was ordained in 1966, then served East Martin (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church; CrossPoint CRC, Chino, Calif.; Orland Park (Ill.) CRC; Faith CRC, Holland, Mich.; and Ivanrest CRC, Grandville, Mich. In retirement, beginning in 2001, he served as an interim minister.

Art was a frequent volunteer at the Gateway Mission, a Holland, Mich., agency serving those living with hunger, homelessness, poverty, addiction, or other challenges.

He is survived by his wife, Anita; four children; and 11 grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Resonate Among Agencies Funding Missionary School Abuse Investigation

Resonate Global Mission, the missionary agency of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, is among eight Christian organizations funding an independent investigation into allegations of abuse at Hillcrest School in Jos, Nigeria. The investigation was announced Dec. 1.

Founded in 1942 by Church of the Brethren missionaries, Hillcrest educated the children of missionaries, Nigerian students, and international students with the help of other denominations.

A Hillcrest alumni group has identified about 50 cases of alleged sexual abuse at the school.

Current Hillcrest leaders and funders from the North American Baptist Conference, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Pioneers UK, the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, SIM Nigeria, the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada, Resonate Global Mission, and the Church of the Brethren have agreed to cooperate with and fund the investigation.

“It’s been a very long, tough road, but now we have real hope that the horrors so many of us endured will be brought to the surface,” said Letta Cartlidge, president of the Hillcrest Survivors Steering Committee, in the Dec. 1 announcement.

Zero Abuse Project, a St. Paul, Minn., nonprofit that seeks to prevent child abuse, will conduct the investigation and promised to consider allegations dating back to the school’s founding.

“The investigation will include whether Hillcrest School or others in authority—including the mission agencies cooperating or not cooperating with the investigation—had knowledge of abuse and, if so, how it/they responded to allegations of abuse,” the Zero Abuse Project said on its website.

Kevin DeRaaf, director of Resonate Global Mission, told Religion News Service in an email, “We are grateful to work with



Video screen grab

People walk on the campus of Hillcrest School in Jos, Nigeria.

Hillcrest and our fellow mission agencies in supporting this independent investigation and trust that this process will surface the historical truth of what was experienced by students at Hillcrest and serve as a conduit of God’s healing and restoration for those who continue to live with pain and trauma.”

The CRCNA’s mission agency (which before 2017 was known as CRC World Missions) was not part of Hillcrest school at its founding in 1942 but did send teachers and dorm parents to the school for many years beginning in the 1940s or ‘50s. Resonate doesn’t currently have anyone working at the school. DeRaaf was unable to say whether any survivors of abuse at the school had come forward to Resonate.

“We can’t give detailed answers to some of your questions in order to protect the integrity of the investigation and serve those who have experienced trauma,” DeRaaf said. “However, we trust the investigation process will allow all victims to share their experience and find healing.” He also would not disclose what degree of funding Resonate is contributing to the investigation. “Out of respect for all parties, we are not willing to share the specific amount,” DeRaaf said.

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, a spokesperson for the Church of the Brethren and an alumna of Hillcrest School, said the denomination remains involved with the school and took part in the discussion about how an investigation could move forward.

“We feel a moral and ethical imperative to see that a good investigation is carried out,” Brumbaugh-Cayford said.

Cartlidge said that as many as 6,000 students might have attended the school during its history, of which about a third were from missionary families. Others were international students or from Nigeria.

According to the Zero Abuse Project website, the mission groups and Hillcrest have agreed to help investigators find any documents that might help the investigation. The school and mission groups also agreed to help Zero Abuse survey students who attended Hillcrest. Zero Abuse will publish a final report of its findings and will have sole discretion as to its content.

Hillcrest and the missions groups have also hired Accord, a survivors’ advocate firm, to provide services to survivors of abuse during the investigation.

Cartlidge credited the Hillcrest alumni group with pushing through until it secured the investigation and said there has been a tangible sense of relief among alumni now that an investigation is underway.

—Religion News Service

The Banner has a subscription to republish articles from Religion News Service. This story, written by Bob Smietana and published on religionnews.com Dec. 4, 2024, has been edited for length and to give more context for the Christian Reformed Church. The Banner’s news editor, Alissa Vernon, added the first, ninth, and tenth paragraphs.

Nonprofit Grocery Supported by B.C. Churches

Photo courtesy of Gathering Markit



The Gathering Markit offers pantry staples, fresh produce, and meal kits.

New Life Christian Reformed Church in Abbotsford, B.C., is one of many local churches supporting Gathering Markit, a nonprofit grocery initiative in the city that promotes dignity and choice for families in need.

New Life member Steve Brandsma said he values supporting a local charity that supports people in his own community. He provides eggs and meat from his farm and from other connections in the local agricultural industry.

Gathering Markit serves as a bridge between emergency food relief and conventional retail grocery shopping and offers affordable fresh produce, pantry staples, and ready-made meal kits sourced from surplus donations. The approach combats food waste and provides referred families with practical and respectful access to essentials.

Founder Hieke Morton drew on her experiences as a chef and single parent to create the market-style shopping space. "The goal is providing a hand up, not just a handout," she said. "We want to create a warm and welcoming environment that removes the stigmas that are usually associated with getting food assistance."

Gathering Markit is now in two Abbotsford churches, which have seen families begin to attend worship services after shopping at the Markit, Morton said.

She would like to see this model used by churches in other communities. "Partnering with churches is a great way to connect my clients to a broader community who will love and support them," Morton said.

—Dan Veeneman

'Bucket Boys' Street Ministry Started as a Walk Downtown

Tuesday nights in Bellingham, Wash., a band of friends from First Christian Reformed Church in Lynden, Wash., distribute sandwiches, socks, and bottles of water to the people who are living there without housing.

Dubbed "The Bucket Boys" for the five-gallon pails they carry with supplies, Cal Buys, Glen Blankers, Robert Smit, and Gene Tinklenburg began the weekly practice in 2020 as just a walk downtown, extra socks in hand, to see who might be around. Buys had been missing his regular volunteering at a downtown shelter during the COVID pandemic. Now the four, plus up to a dozen more, drive south from the small farming community of Lynden every Tuesday to walk the downtown streets. The Bucket Boys coordinate their street nights with Bellingham's Envision Mission, supported by other local congregations.

Buys said, "We always tell new people who join us, 'You do not need experience to go on the street with us, but it will be an experience.'"

On a typical Tuesday, Buys said, they'll distribute two cases of water, 60 sandwiches, and 30 pairs of socks. During the colder months, the Second Chance thrift store run by Lynden Christian School provides the ministry with coats and blankets. Volunteers also knit hats.

Buys believes the team's consistency is the key to connecting with the people they meet. "They count on us and have grown to trust us," Buys said. "Some even come up to us and say, 'I do not need anything, but might you pray for my family?'"

"People ask if we see lives changed. We do see some changes and hear heartwarming stories," Buys said, but it "surely has changed us."

—Jenny deGroot



Carl Buys (left) said weekly street ministry "surely has changed us."



Your Labor Is Not in Vain

The Sanctuary as Conversation Between Work and Worship

By Leah Jolly, Calvin Theological Seminary

Cory Willson is no stranger to conversations about integrating worship and work. As professor of missiology, world Christianity, and public theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, Willson teaches, researches, and spearheads grant-funded programs and workshops focusing on this very topic. His book *Work and Worship: Reconnecting Our Labor and Liturgy* (Baker, 2020) is meant to help churches seeking to integrate the daily work and vocational callings of believers into Sunday worship.

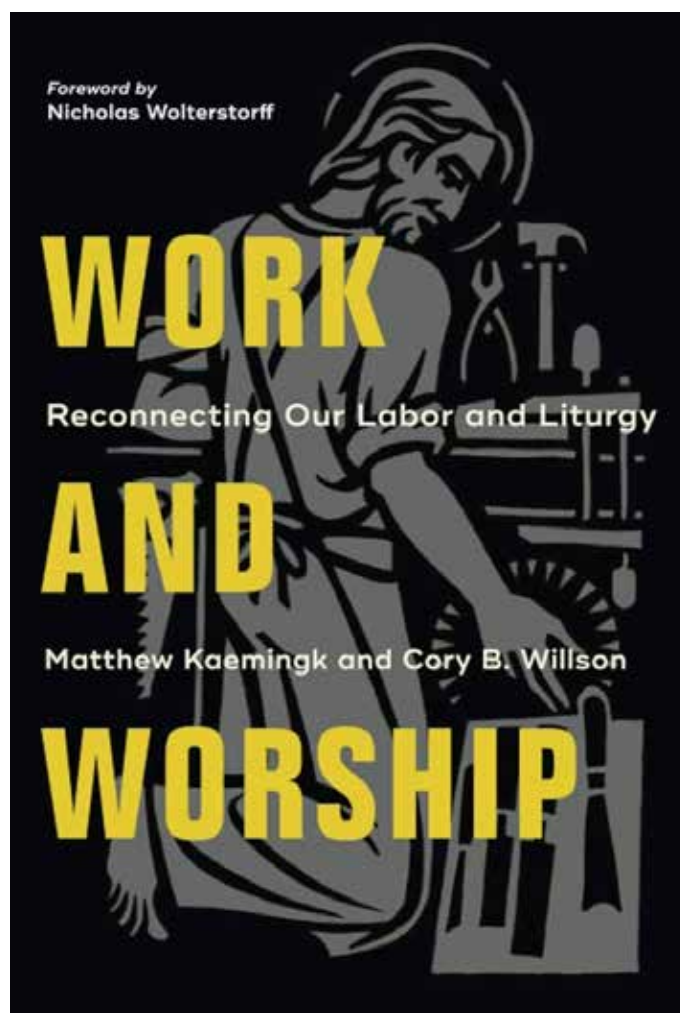
As young adults, Willson and his co-author, Matthew Kaemingk, found themselves working in ministry to young professionals often wrestling with questions about work, vocation, and calling. Over time, they noticed a disconnect between the questions Christians in the marketplace were asking and the discipleship programs or materials typically offered in the church. This disconnect between weekly work and Sunday worship led them into further conversations and research.

As they researched, story upon story came in by email and in conversation about the importance of engaging with workers' everyday struggles and experiences during worship. Willson gives the example of a speech therapist he interviewed who worked with stroke recovery patients. This therapist said the benediction is one of the most important parts of worship for her. Recalling it throughout the week prompts her to pray for her patients, both for their healing and her wisdom as she considers treatment plans. Stories like this became the foundation of *Work and Worship*.

So how can pastors, worship coordinators, and ministry leaders integrate the work of their congregants into Sunday worship? Willson offers four ideas as a starting point:

- » **The sanctuary as a place of formation:** Philosopher James K.A. Smith wrote, "If all of life is going to be worship, then the sanctuary is the place where we learn how." Sunday worship services should not be isolated rituals, but should provide formation for how we live our lives during the week and directly connect to how we engage our work and vocation. As with the speech therapist whose patients come to mind during the benediction, the various aspects of worship should help workers connect their faith to the work they do and the people they serve.
- » **Workers as priests:** *Work and Worship* introduces one of Willson's primary metaphors: "priest and parish." All Christians are called to be priests in their daily work,

Cory Wilson is a professor of missiology, world Christianity, and public theology at Calvin Theological Seminary.



home life, and relationships. One practical way churches can equip believers to be priests is to invite worshippers to pray on behalf of their co-workers, lifting up their joys, struggles, and petitions to God during Sunday worship. This connects their daily experience of work to their Sunday worship. If the sanctuary is to be formative, the workweek must be brought to worship.

- » **Spiritual practices and disciplines:** In addition to prayer, Scripture reading, and other devotional practices, Willson recommends taking what's learned in corporate worship and carrying it throughout the week. This could involve reflecting on a line from a song or sermon each morning during one's commute, arriving early to engage in a prayer walk at one's workplace, physically lifting the day's to-do list to dedicate it to God, or saying short breath prayers before walking into meetings or hitting "send" on emails. This practice of ongoing spiritual reflection helps believers carry Sunday worship into their daily life.

» **Incorporating lament into worship:** Willson contends that lament is often missing or underappreciated in many churches' worship services. Drawing on the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff, Willson explains, "God's sovereignty doesn't mitigate, but is the foundation of our lament. In lament, we are taking God's character and promises seriously." When believers lament, they affirm God's character, sovereignty, and promises in the face of suffering and confusion. When we integrate lament with praise, we bring the full range of human emotions before God. This can take place in a special lament service, a small group, or as part of the Sunday morning service.

In addition to authoring *Work and Worship*, Willson leads Calvin Seminary's Institute for Mission, Church, and Culture, through which he aims to answer three questions:

- » What is God's mission in the world?
- » How can the church participate in that mission?
- » How can seminaries equip the church to fulfill this mission?

Seminaries, Willson says, exist to serve the church to equip and empower Christians to live into their priestly identity and mission in the world. When the priesthood of all believers is emphasized for the entire congregation, not just for



Participants at a *Work and Worship* seminar in Washington, D.C., work on a photo activity.

the pastoral staff, all are encouraged to be active participants in God's mission in the world.

Yet Willson recognizes the challenges many churches face. For some, even four years after the COVID pandemic's onset, it's difficult to convince people to come back to in-person worship when online participation is so convenient. But instead of focusing on making church "attractive," Willson recommends, churches should think about how their practices and discipleship habits equip believers in their priestly role. If Christ is Lord over all parts of life—work, relationships, civic life—then believers must be encouraged to live out their faith in public spheres as well as in private and in worship.

Through books like *Work and Worship*, churches can find ways to help every believer integrate their primary vocation—agents of God's redemptive work in the world—into their everyday work. And by God's grace, the sanctuary is the place where they learn how. **B**



Work and Worship seminar participants brainstorm ideas.

Cultivating Prayer and Spiritual Discipline to Transform Lives

ONE OF THE FIVE GOALS of the Christian Reformed Church's Our Journey ministry plan is to "cultivate practices of prayer and spiritual discipline."

As individuals and congregations across the CRC work toward this milestone, they are renewing a commitment to prayer and spiritual practices that deepen our faith and allow us to be agents for God's work around the world.

Roy's Journey

One member of ReFrame Ministries' prayer team recently had a serious health scare that showed the transformative power of prayer in our lives and communities. Roy recently shared his testimony of how his faith sustained him during his illness.

"In August (2024), I was suddenly hospitalized for emergency surgery due to a gangrenous gallbladder, which led to sepsis and multiple organ failure," he shared.

On the brink of death, Roy said, words from Psalm 23 came to mind: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, ... you are with me" (Ps. 23:4, ESV). Roy's body was fragile, but his spirit held on to God's promises.

"I was so ill and confused that I forgot to pray—until the Holy Spirit reminded me of my prayer practice," he said.

In the middle of uncertainty, Roy felt God's presence guiding him to peace and reminding him of the power of prayer.

"God truly guided me beside still waters, carried me when my strength failed, and reminded me of ReFrame's prayer ministry in the midst of my confusion," he said.

The Power of Prayer

As Roy was struggling, thousands of people in the ReFrame prayer team



As an open window allows fresh air and light to enter, our prayers can be an open invitation for God's presence to fill our lives.

were already interceding for him and many others around the world. This team of more than 7,000 volunteers receives weekly prayer requests and prays on behalf of others in need.

"As a member of the ReFrame prayer team, you are part of a worldwide group of brothers and sisters in Christ who pray for the needs of others," said Emily Vanden Heuvel, ReFrame's prayer ministry coordinator. "You may not be able to see the faces or hear the voices of those in your prayers, but your impact on the lives of others is meaningful."

Another prayer team volunteer recently described prayer as "talking to God through an open window."

"Just as an open window allows fresh air and light to enter," Vanden Heuvel said, "may our prayers be like an open invitation for God's presence to fill your life as you pray for others. God hears us and sees us right where we are."


By God's grace, Roy said, he was able to leave the hospital a few months after

his first message to the prayer team. "God is gracious to us," he shared. "Challenges remain, but we have come this far by faith."

Join Us on the Journey

The Bible encourages believers to pray with faith, trusting that God listens and responds. The apostle John writes, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14).

Roy's story reminds us that prayer is a powerful means through which God transforms us, bringing peace and hope even in the hardest times.

Together, let us cultivate a life of prayer, opening the windows of our hearts for God's transformative presence. You can find a variety of resources to help you and your congregation cultivate this practice at crcna.org/OurJourney/prayer. 

—Brian Clark,
ReFrame Ministries

The View From Here

Why a Denomination?

I HAD A GOOD LAUGH recently when I learned that one of my teenagers was peppering her teacher with unwelcome “whys” about mathematical formulas and theorems. When worn down by their pupils’ questions, even the most patient pedagogues will eventually concede: “Because they are!” For a person like me, whose math skills are subpar, that answer works—but it doesn’t work for everyone.

A big question on the minds of many Christian Reformed folks these days is a similar “why.” Why be part of the CRC denomination? As our North American culture has become more individualistic and anti-institutional, the case for being part of a denomination—or any collective organization—has weakened. Over the next few months, senior leaders in the CRCNA want to share a few answers to that question that go beyond “Just because.”

Our humble Church Order gives four reasons for the existence of classis (regional assemblies of CRCs), and those same four reasons apply to our denominational existence. We are a community of churches that has chosen to do ministry together, and Church Order Article 39 spells out four good reasons for that.

The first reason is that our relationship to each other allows us “to seek, discern, and submit to God’s will.”

A biblical example of this kind of collective discernment and submission is Acts 15:1-35. As Gentiles converted to faith in Jesus, the first question facing the church was whether or not they should be required to follow Jewish ceremonial laws, such as circumcision. Along with their amazing report of God’s work among the Gentiles of Asia Minor, Paul and Barnabas submitted this question to the apostles in Jerusalem.

What happened next is interesting. First, the apostles prayerfully listened to and reflected on the experiences of Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and others with Gentile converts. Second, they devoted considerable attention to the Scriptural prophecies about the Gentiles and the requirements of the Law.

Out of this deliberation came a decision: Gentiles need not be bound by ceremonial laws except for the commands not to eat the meat of strangled animals, the blood of animals, or the meat of animals sacrificed to idols (Lev. 17). The council also reminded the Gentile believers to avoid the ubiquitous sexual immorality that characterized the surrounding Greco-Roman culture.


These 35 verses in Acts were a turning point in the history of the church. The Jerusalem Council sought, discerned, and submitted to God’s will together. As a result, the way opened for God’s mission to the Gentiles.

This process was not without its hurdles. Some early Christians vehemently disagreed with the decision. As New Testament writings attest, the issues addressed by the Council remained divisive wedges (see 1 Cor. 8:7-13, 1 Cor. 10:14-28, and Rev. 2:24 for ongoing coverage of this debate). And many in the “Judaizing” wing of the church remained dissatisfied with the positioning of the Jewish ceremonial laws in the lives of Gentile converts. Yet, together, the church found a way forward that was faithful to the Word of God and the work of the Spirit.

In today’s contentious and quickly changing culture, collectively seeking, discerning, and submitting to God’s will remains essential for our churches. This collective discernment is the work of our church councils, classes, and synod. Collective discernment also happens through those we

appoint to serve in our educational institutions and ministry agencies. This kind of collective discernment fulfills God’s encouragement to “trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5-6).

Yet we acknowledge that our denomination’s collective discernment is currently being contested. As in Paul’s day, there is sharp disagreement in our churches about our corporate decisions. This is as heartbreaking today as it was for the church then. We also recognize that some of our past decisions have been less than perfect and require ongoing discernment. However, even with our imperfections in mind, the biblical model of collective discernment is a good reason to be part of a denomination. On our own, our ability to see the big picture is limited. Together, we gain greater insight and can better seek and discern what God’s will is.

In the next few issues, the View From Here column will share other reasons for being a denomination. If you’d like to participate in the conversation, I invite you to visit the Network (crcna.org/Network), where we hope to share concrete examples of each of these reasons. 



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

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

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

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

Loan Fund Makes Collaborative Expansion Possible

SINCE 1983, the Christian Reformed Church's Loan Fund has provided low-interest loans for church building improvements. In recent years, these loans have supported collaborative projects such as a renovation at Madison Church: South Hill (Grand Rapids, Mich.) that included space for a licensed early childhood center and a children's ministry wing. In 2024 the Loan Fund financed Rudyard (Mich.) CRC's classroom addition, which will also be used by a local Christian school.

Rudyard CRC is in Michigan's rural Upper Peninsula. It was organized in 1901 by Dutch settlers and has been on the same piece of land for more than a century. The church started with a small chapel and later built a second building for classrooms to serve its growing congregation. Eventually the chapel was torn down, and the congregation built a new sanctuary attached to the classroom building. Some classrooms were removed to provide space for fellowship activities, meals, and gatherings.

As the congregation grew, Rudyard CRC saw a need for more space for youth ministry. It assembled a building committee to explore solutions. While it had been considering an expansion for quite some time, Rudyard's fundraising capacity was limited. The congregation is in a small farming community without many members able to make large donations.

Despite the space constraints, the church's youth ministry has flourished. God has entrusted Rudyard CRC with many congregational children and even more community children who attend the church's GEMS (girls club), Cadets (boys club), youth group, and vacation Bible school programs. They had been making do with some additional effort—Cadets learned woodworking in the fellowship hall using equipment hauled to and from



Photo by Mike Ross, general contractor, Whiskey River Inc.

Rudyard (Mich.) CRC and a local Christian school used a loan from the Loan Fund to build something that met both their needs.

the attic each week; GEMS met in the narthex and sanctuary, where they set up and packed away their projects each week; and for VBS, the narthex and fellowship hall were partitioned with blankets for different age groups and activities.

At the same time, a small Christian school nearby was facing its own challenges of operating out of an old building that was inaccessible to people with disabilities. The school received a donation for improvements, but the donation would not fully fund the needed renovations or a new building.

Out of their shared financial limits and need for classroom space, an opportunity for collaboration between church and school was born. They developed a long-term site plan with a phased approach that would meet the church's and school's current needs and allow for future expansions. Rudyard CRC talked with commercial

banks about securing a loan, but the requirements and rates still put the project out of reach. The CRC's Loan Fund offered the low-cost financing Rudyard CRC needed to begin construction and bring the vision to life.

Nate Beelen, an educator and the church's building committee chair, believes the church has a responsibility to be a light in the community by providing spiritual education to students in both the local Christian and public schools. In his holistic picture of education, he sees the church playing an important role by working with and alongside families to support the spiritual development of their children. This building project creates space for those opportunities to happen during school hours, in the evenings, and on the weekends. The church hoped to begin using the new addition by the start of the new year. "It wouldn't have happened without the Loan Fund," Beelen said.

The Loan Fund hopes to continue supporting churches and schools in their growth and is exploring the possibility of lending directly to Christian schools too. The Loan Fund's lending activities are made possible by investments. It offers investment certificates with terms ranging from one to five years. More information can be found at crcna.org/loanfund.

— Layla Kuhl,
CRC Loan Fund

Faith Formation at Home and at Church: A Q&A With Jill Benson

Synod's mandate to Thrive, the Christian Reformed Church's congregational support agency, calls the agency to equip and encourage CRC congregations "to practice lifelong faith formation and missional discipleship from a Reformed perspective, across all ages and stages of life, with particular attention to children, youth, and emerging adults."

Jill Benson's work with Thrive centers around implementing that call. We asked her to share reflections on her faith formation role, the resources or events that excite her, and the impact she sees throughout CRC congregations.

In your role, much of your energy is dedicated to supporting parents and children's ministry leaders in faith formation for children and youth. Can you elaborate on what your day-to-day looks like?

As a resource developer focused on curriculum, I primarily work with DWELL, a children's ministry curriculum for preschool through grade eight. I am mainly writing and editing materials to keep DWELL current and providing support to leaders. I'm currently working on updating our sixth- to eighth-grade materials with the DWELL refresh team.



I also serve as the project manager for our endeavors within the Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative through a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. As a part of that work, I'm overseeing an update of Thrive's *Spiritual Characteristics of Children and Teens* resource and supporting parent listening sessions throughout the United States and Canada.

In addition to Sunday School curriculum through DWELL, what types of resources or opportunities for connection are available to parents?

The Faith Formation page of Thrive's website has a variety of helpful resources. I think a great starting

point is the Family Faith Formation Toolkit, particularly the resource page, which includes resources for Lent, Easter, Christmas, technology, and parenting. The Children's Ministry Toolkit also has a lot of great information, and I love the Faith Practices Project resources.

DWELL also has a specific set of resources for at-home faith formation, including a free Jesse tree Advent devotional. The Advent devotional was one of the first projects I worked on after starting my role, and it's one of my favorite resources to use with my own family. We have around 478 churches using our DWELL materials, with 191 of those being Christian Reformed churches.

What do you find meaningful in your role?

There's a lot I find meaningful about my work, but recently it's been really meaningful to lead Sunday school at my own church using our DWELL Flex materials that I helped to put together. It's great to see how the children engage with those materials and to have a front seat to the impact of our work.

DWELL curriculum is available to all CRC churches at a discounted rate through Faith Alive, with the DWELL Assist grant program available to congregations who might need more financial assistance to buy materials. Churches can donate to this fund at crcna.org/Dwell.

Listening sessions for parents through the CPCI grant will be hosted at various churches throughout the U.S. and Canada in 2025.

— Kristyn DeNooyer,
Thrive

Daring to Raise Twins

IN LISA SEE'S NOVEL *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*, an early and defining moment of the story occurs when the main character assists her birth attendant mother with labor and delivery for a woman in their rural mountain village. But when healthy twins are born, there is no rejoicing. Instead, the family despairs. Their traditional beliefs hold that only animals birth multiple babies, and it is unnatural for humans. The twins' family believes they must end their babies' lives to prevent illness or death in their community.

This tradition has existed in some communities throughout the world over the course of history. Even today, in one district where World Renew is at work, a people group believes that if twins are born and raised in the village, illness and death will come. If a mother has twins, the whole family must stay outside the village for at least two weeks until the proper cleansing ceremonies can be done. There is intense pressure to kill twins born in the village, but if the woman gives birth in a hospital, another family may be found to raise the children.

In this district, Lana* became pregnant in early 2022 and went for regular prenatal checkups at the local hospital throughout her pregnancy. Each time Lana and her husband went for a checkup, they would ask her younger brother, Philip,* to interpret for them. When Lana went for an ultrasound in October, the doctor strongly emphasized that it was important for Lana to give birth at the hospital.

"I was with them at this checkup but was unaware that my sister was pregnant with twins," Philip said. "We had lunch together, and after they left, I somehow sensed that my sister was carrying two babies. So I returned to the hospital to ask the doctor, and



she confirmed that yes, my sister was pregnant with twins, but she had been afraid to tell her."

Knowing that no one in Lana's ethnic group had ever raised twins in their own village due to the cultural taboos, the doctor did not dare tell Lana and her husband for fear they would kill the twins. She had encouraged a hospital birth hoping she might help find a home for the babies. "I thanked her for her concern and told her not to worry," Philip said. "We would raise the babies."

At home, Philip conferred with other relatives and villagers about what to do. "I asked them to go and talk with my brother-in-law and sister, explaining to them that they were receiving a special gift from God," he said. "At first they felt sad and wondered why this had happened to them. They worried that others would think their family would bring bad luck to the village. However, after much discussion and encouragement, Lana and her husband decided that they would raise the twins."

Relatives and World Renew staff decided to take Lana to a larger

hospital in a town some distance away so she could have a safe delivery—and so the babies would not be born in the village. There, she gave birth to two healthy boys. Because World Renew health staff were aware of the situation and present to promote maternal and newborn health, the pressure on the family from other villagers not to raise the twins was diminished.

"Although other villagers were worried at first, many of them are now quite happy to have the twins around, especially the younger generation," Philip said. "I believe that in the future, other people throughout our region will also keep their twins because they will see that nothing bad happened to our family or village."

**Names have been changed for the security of World Renew staff and program participants.*

—World Renew staff

Get the latest from your denomination!

Subscribe to *CRC News* to receive news, upcoming events, missionary stories, and more every Wednesday.

crcna.org/Subscribe



News



DENOMINATION Denominational Survey Opens

The annual survey for the CRCNA is now open. One survey respondent shares his experience.

[Learn More](#)

WORSHIP A Catch of Fish

During the Calvin Symposium on Worship, John August Swanson spoke of how Luke 5's miraculous catch has inspired his art and helped him through some hard times.

[Read Story](#)



INSPIRE 2019 Windsor Welcomes You to Inspire

Ambassador Community CRC in Windsor, Ont., invites you to attend Inspire 2019 in their city. Registration is now open!

[Read Story](#)

INTERNATIONAL Helping Yemen

Yemen is the world's largest humanitarian



Would you like to receive *The Banner* for free? Just fill this out and mail it back to us.

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Church Name (optional) _____

Mail to:
The Banner
1700 28th St. SE
Grand Rapids, MI
USA
49508-1407



Or go online to TheBanner.org/Signup.

You do not need to be a member of the Christian Reformed Church to sign up.

Nature Journaling

IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, if we see someone poaching or polluting we are encouraged to call the ORR hotline: Observe, Record, Report. But what about when we see something breathtaking? King Solomon “spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish” (1 Kings 4:33). King Solomon observed, recorded, and reported what he saw in creation. One of my favorite ways to do this is through nature journaling.

What Is Nature Journaling?

In the foreword to the book *How to Teach Nature Journaling*, by John Muir Laws and Emily Lygren, Amy Tan writes that she wanted “to be intensely curious, to wonder aloud, to see the story in front of (her) and try to capture an interesting aspect of it in a drawing.” This is what nature journaling is about: observing some part of creation and recording it through words, pictures, and numbers. For me,

it is also a way of reflecting on and sharing in the Creator’s delight in all that God created and called very good.

So pull out some paper and some pencils, crayons, or paint and join me on a journey through the world of nature journaling. You don’t have to be an amazing artist or a brilliant writer. It’s more about the process of noticing than about producing a masterpiece.

Noticing and Wondering

First, find something from creation in or near your home. Ask yourself: What do I notice? Then, using words, numbers, and pictures, record that on your paper.

When you think you are done, add more detail. Ask yourself: What color(s) is it? What about shapes? Patterns? Spots? Broken parts? Record those.

Once you’ve recorded everything, ask, “What do I wonder?” Maybe you wonder why an object is shaped a certain way, or why a part is broken, or what purpose God has for it. You don’t need to know the answers. You don’t even need to find the answers. Just wonder.

Then record what the object reminds you of. Connect it with something you already know, and record what comes to mind.

Finally, record what comes to mind when you ask, “What does God want to tell me about myself, God, or creation?”

Seeing creation in a more intimate way through nature journaling allows us to better understand how God creates, sustains, and redeems the world. It also helps us understand the parables of Jesus, who lived much closer to the land than modern humans do. And you just might find yourself joining the Creator in delighting in and wanting to better care for God’s good creation. **B**



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.





What Is Counterculture Now?

By Arek O'Connell

Having served in youth ministry for almost 20 years, I know one thing for certain: Nothing changes so rapidly as youth culture. Culture no longer shifts over a generation. It happens overnight.

For those in youth ministry, one of the most exhausting challenges is staying relevant. A persistent fear is becoming an out-of-touch “old person,” so we might risk spending too much time engaging the culture and too little time confronting it with the countercultural message of the gospel. It’s easy to fall into the trap of catering to trends in hopes of winning youth to Jesus, but this reactive approach might lead to misplaced priorities and unintended consequences.

The church has always been called to be countercultural, an alternative to the values of the world. What does that look like in youth ministry today? It starts by recognizing that the field is fertile for sowing the gospel. Young people aren’t uninterested in God; they are weary of how the church has been presenting Jesus to them. What they crave is purpose, community, meaning, and ritual.

The culture our young people have been raised in and shaped by has sold them a utopian world of

digital comfort. But the church offers a culture that is instead personal and present, one where belonging is crucial and suffering is welcomed and even expected.

The Fertile Field

In her book *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World*, Tara Isabella Burton paints a picture of the religious character of young people today that is simultaneously depressing and hopeful. She believes that we do not live in a godless society, but rather a “spiritual, not religious society.”

Burton calls the “spiritual, not religious” group “Remixed.” They “envision themselves as creators of their own bespoke religions, mixing and matching spiritual and aesthetic and experiential and philosophical positions ... (and) rejecting authority, institution, creed, and moral universalism. They value intuition, personal feeling, and experiences. They demand to rewrite their own scripts about how the universe, and human beings, operate. They want to choose—and, more often than not, purchase—the spiritual path that feels more authentic, more meaningful to them. ... And they want, when available institutional options fail to suit their needs, the freedom to mix and match, to create

their own daily rituals and practices and belief systems.”

That’s not all bad news. The Remixed, Burton says, long for the same things we all do: “a sense of meaning in the world and personal purpose within that meaning, a community to share that experience with, and rituals to bring the power of that experience into achievable, everyday life.”

Meaning, purpose, community, and ritual are what all people—especially young people—are searching for in their spiritual journeys. Even “secular” people hunger for “a spiritual identity and surrounding community that *precisely* reflects their values, their moral and social intuitions, their lived experience, and their sense of self,” Burton writes. Whoever offers that will win them over.

The field is fertile and ready, and it only takes a quick scan of what’s “winning” in youth culture today to see it. A Taylor Swift concert is likened to a spiritual experience. Tables hosting games of *Dungeons and Dragons* become a chapel for some. Church attendance and travel sports remain locked in battle, and the battle to offer meaning, purpose, community, and ritual is being won by the culture. The world has offered solutions to spiritual longings and desires, and many feel the church has not.

The challenge for the church, then, is to go out onto the field and get in the game. I am one of those pastors who spent a lot of hours in my office strategizing how I could pull the field into my church. It wasn't until I left the office to go to the field that I started to see the true opportunity ready and waiting.

I have the privilege of serving as the chaplain for East Kentwood (Mich.) High School's varsity football team. In my first year, I caught a vision for how fertile the field truly was. Studying the book of James after practice in the locker room became "church" for some of these kids as they opened God's Word for the first time. Simply speaking, God's Word was enough for them. Exegetical breakdowns and historical context weren't needed. They only needed the Word of God to be spoken.

One memory I will cherish forever is when I read James 2:19 aloud. There were some students listening from afar, not participating, who heard "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." To my great surprise and joy, one of the listeners, who I was sure didn't like me, exclaimed, "Man, Coach, that's deep. I really needed to hear that today. Thank you!" Praying to have this kind of opportunity in your office is not a vain effort, but neither is going out onto the field, on their turf, to share God's Word in faith.

The world doesn't offer true purpose, meaning, community, and ritual as the body of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit does. Offering an enticing alternative ironically begins by asking the same questions as the culture we're seeking to counter: How do we offer people meaning, purpose, community, and ritual in our time together? What follows are the three things I believe need to be prioritized in the counter-culture we can offer.

Meaning, purpose,
community, and
ritual is what all
people—especially
young people—are
searching for
in their
spiritual journeys.

Personal over Digital

The thousands of digital communities that exist for young people offer them meaning, purpose, and ritual. Though they might offer more efficiency, ease, and effectiveness and undeniably reach more people, we saw evidence during the COVID pandemic that digital communities lack the transformational relational depth of personal, physical communities.

The physical act of gathering as brothers and sisters in Christ isn't just a command and encouragement we find in Scripture (Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Thess. 5:11). It is also a gift from God: "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1).

Humans desperately need to meet with each other face to face. We can pretend to care, but we can't pretend to show up. Physical presence requires sacrifice, but it's worth the cost. Practically, we are countercultural when we care less about the number of people we're reaching for Christ and care more about each individual and their walk with Christ. We are countercultural when we know the name of each person who walks through the doors.

In a world obsessed with the newest digital platforms to connect us across our devices globally, spurning technological advancement in favor of human connection is certainly countercultural.

Belonging Over Authenticity

Authenticity in and of itself is not a bad thing—if by "authentic" one means "genuine, real and transparent." However, I fear that the type of authenticity promoted in our culture has the potential for far more damage than good.

In his book *Ethics of Authenticity*, philosopher Charles Taylor contends that the dominant form of authenticity in our culture today was born in the 1800s out of both Enlightenment and Romantic ideals. Fundamentally, it elevates individual expression and diminishes the importance of relationships. Taylor argues this "authenticity" is just "self-determining freedom" masked as authenticity.

The danger Taylor sees with this kind of authenticity is that to be your most authentic self, there must be some type of rebellion against oppressive forces seeking to make you submit. "Indeed," he writes, "the very idea of originality (authenticity), and the associated notion that the enemy of authenticity can be social conformity, forces on us the idea that authenticity will have to struggle against some externally imposed rules."

For Christians, this type of authentic expression of self flies in the face of Jesus' kingdom ethics of authenticity. "Whoever wants to be my disciple," Jesus said, "must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it" (Matt. 16:24-25).

We are socially conforming creatures by nature. All one needs as proof are the uniforms for sports teams, schools, hobbies, and jobs. We often blindly conform socially in order to belong in a community. I am not suggesting that we also espouse blind social conformity to the authority of the church. That's not what Jesus modeled. He constantly confronted and challenged the social, cultural, and religious norms of his day. Jesus' example shows us a different way forward for confronting and challenging norms—a way in which we still know we belong and our authenticity can remain intact.

Jesus showed us that true authenticity does not come from independence from or rebellion against external authorities and norms. Jesus could be the most authentic version of himself because he knew how much he was unconditionally loved by the Father. This feeling of acceptance and belonging from the Father was so meaningful, purposeful, and life-giving that Jesus thought it unthinkable to rebel against such unconditional love. He fully submitted himself to the Father, even to death on a cross.

For us, too, the beginning of true belonging and the foundation for true authenticity is in the recognition and experience of first being loved unconditionally by God. People will not believe until they know they belong. The most effective way we can communicate to young people that they belong—that they don't have to turn to rebellious "authenticity" to find their true selves—is to love them unconditionally as they are today, just as God loves us.

Suffering Over Comfort

Consider the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power

is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you."

Ask yourself the following questions as you consider this passage:

- » Why would God put the invaluable treasure of God's glory into fragile vessels?
- » Why doesn't God save us from being hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down?
- » If Jesus is alive in my heart, how is it that death is at work in me, and why am I giving myself over to it?

God places a valuable treasure in unimpressive clay so that when it breaks in hard times and the light of the Holy Spirit shines through us, people will know it is God at work in us and not ourselves.

But why doesn't God save me from pain and suffering in the first place? An unfortunate lie adopted by some in our current culture is that if you become a Christian and give your life to Jesus, he will make everything better and you'll be happy. Jesus wants to rescue us from suffering, right?

Wrong.

Jesus provides us with the strength to be content in him, no matter the circumstances—whether in plenty or in want, in sickness or in health, imprisoned or free. Jesus never once promised us comfort objectively in this world. To the contrary, he

promised that life would be hard in this world if we choose to follow him.

Perhaps God knows that's what draws us and others into deeper dependence on him. And if we partner with Jesus in his sufferings and death, we will partner with him in the bodily resurrection when he returns.

No one likes to suffer. No one gleefully welcomes pain. In a world determined to eradicate pain and suffering, what a countercultural witnessing opportunity we have for the sake of the gospel when we not only accept pain and suffering, but welcome it with the expectation that God will be present and cause growth through the power of the Holy Spirit.

It seems like a simple concept, but the church was never meant to be a support leg or offshoot of the culture we live in. It has been, continues to be, and will forever exist as the body of Christ that faithfully engages the culture of the world while living and proclaiming the alternative culture of the kingdom of God.

The church can offer an enticing yet faithful counterculture when it prioritizes the personal over the digital, offers belonging rather than encouraging individualism, and welcomes suffering rather than trying to avoid it. And this counterculture can offer the deeper, truer sense of meaning, purpose, community, and ritual that young people are longing and searching for. **B**



Arek O'Connell is an outreach and young adult pastor and a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., and attends Hillside Community Church.

Confessions of a Practicing Pessimist

If I'm busy preparing for the worst, I forfeit the present and the possibilities within it.

I NEVER CONSIDERED myself to be a pessimistic person until I read this quote from author Nicole Zasowski: "Pessimism is a means of control as we attempt to take the element of surprise out of our grief." I'd always thought I leaned toward the glass-half-full side; I didn't know what I didn't know.

The revelation that I was indeed pessimistic came on the heels of a life trauma. As I write this, my 49-year-old "baby" brother is in a coma in a Pittsburgh hospital three hours away. He had fallen, and the blood thinners he was on made the bleeding in his brain worse. He was flown to a local trauma center, where a surgeon removed the right side of his skull. Later that day he was flown to the more equipped hospital in Pittsburgh.

I was preparing myself the entire time for his death; the impending grief had begun. It was then that I happened upon the quote, and my world was rocked.

Hello, my name is Tammy, and I am a practicing pessimist.

Six months ago I lost my mother to dementia and Parkinson's disease. The year before that, my father died. I grieved for their deaths before they were gone too; I see that clearly now. It appears I've always lived waiting for the next bomb to drop.

Almost two years ago, my husband began a thyroid cancer journey in which I found myself imagining life without him. It wasn't until I read the quote connecting pessimism to grief that I understood what I was doing—and why.

Self-preservation is a sneaky thing.

I understand now how much I catastrophize in the hopes that no pain, disappointment, or trauma will take me by surprise. It turns out dread carries a hefty price tag. There are losses, and

then there are losses connected to those losses, and that's a heavy burden to bear. Christ wants me to cast those cares upon him (1 Peter 5:7).

But if I'm busy preparing for the worst, I forfeit the present and the possibilities within it. My default has been to rehearse the potential pain as a means of lessening or controlling it instead of pressing into a hopeful imagination.

Ephesians 3:20 says that God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."

Living hyperaware of potential disappointment or pain isn't genuine living. What if, instead of imagining the worst, I imagine the best—God's best? Disappointment and pain might still come, but not always. I was imagining life without my husband, but he's been declared cancer-free.

Here's the thing: My feelings might be real, but that doesn't mean they're true. When my husband received the cancer diagnosis, dread washed over me. I imagined myself a widow, and the grieving began right then and there. My feeling of dread was real, but it wasn't true. Now I understand that I can feel a feeling but not allow it to control my life.

And that's where I am today: allowing myself to feel the feelings, but not allowing them to consume me. I can fear the future, or I can live in the present moment, uncertain as it might be.

My goal is to put my pessimistic days behind me, to deal with life's trials as they come in a way that allows for peace to coincide with uncertainty and for joy to be present with sorrow. Life is a beautiful mixture of good and hard, and I want to fully embrace every moment, trusting in God. **B**



Tammy Darling is the author of 1,500 published articles and three books. She lives in rural Pennsylvania.

When Wine Flows Like Water

In Advent we
long for the light,
at Christmas
we revel in it,
and throughout
Epiphany we
see by it.

*How priceless is your unfailing love,
O God! ... You give them drink from your
river of delights. For with you is the foun-
tain of life; in your light we see light.*

—Psalm 36:7-9

IN THE SMALL PORTUGUESE town of São Lourenço do Bairro, on a quiet Sunday morning in 2023, residents were stunned when they looked out their windows and saw a river of wine flowing through the narrow streets.

For almost an hour, the burgundy river flooded gutters, splashed homes, and stained the road as it flowed through the town. Confused residents later learned that nearly 600,000 gallons of wine—enough to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool—had burst from two storage tanks at the Levira distillery that sits on a hill above the town. The spill was so massive that it triggered an environmental alert. Fortunately, the deluge was diverted into a nearby field before it could flow into the Cértima River. For days afterward, videos went viral as news outlets from all over the world reported on the river of good-quality wine.

Three years earlier, on the morning of March 4, 2020, in Castelvetro di Modena, Italy, residents were surprised when sparkling red wine came pouring out of their faucets and showerheads. The nearby Cantina Settecani winery quickly apologized in a Facebook post explaining that a malfunctioning valve in the bottling line caused a decrease in pressure in a large storage silo, resulting in wine penetrating the water line and running through faucets in about 20 nearby homes.

Videos posted online showed some residents concerned about the contaminated water supply, but others delighted in the mishap, filling empty wine bottles and calling the incident “a dream come true.”

During Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Christ. After marveling at the wonder of God’s generosity, the gospel writers are eager to fast-forward to the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. Starting Jan. 6, the liturgical calendar ushers the church into the season of Epiphany. The word Epiphany means “to bring to light,” and Epiphany is the third liturgical season in a row with light as its main theme. In Advent we long for the light, at Christmas we revel in it, and throughout Epiphany we see by it.

Because Epiphany features light as revelation, the lectionary situates three important stories near the start of the season that function like a trifocal lens: the Magi from the east, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, and the wedding feast in Cana. These three gospel stories bring clarity to our blurry understanding of Jesus’ identity and mission as we often find ourselves (along with the crowds) confused by his teaching and blinded by his powerful miracles.

All three focal stories are worthy of attention, but only the gospel of John tells the story of the wedding feast in Cana and places it prominently as the first of seven signs.

John 2 opens with a scene that feels familiar and contemporary: a small-town wedding. After a few narrative strokes, John quickly concentrates our attention on an unfolding catastrophe: running out of wine. Anticipating the couple’s embarrassment and shame, Mary steps in and tells her son Jesus to do something about the emerging crisis. Then the focus turns to six stone water jars.

At this moment in Jewish history, serious attention was being given to meticulous Torah adherence. The Torah (the first five books of the Bible) contains important laws that God



Sam Gutierrez is the associate director of the Eugene Peterson Center for the Christian Imagination at Western Theological Seminary. More of his creative work can be found at printandpoem.com.



This screenshot of a video shows the wine river that residents of São Lourenço do Bairro, Portugal, saw in 2023.

gave his people to set them apart as holy and beloved. Over time, Israel's spiritual leaders teased out a total of 613 laws from the Torah and then invented additional smaller rules to safeguard people from breaking them. To preserve purity in God's presence, the Pharisees dictated rules not in the Torah, such as washing hands, cups, pitchers, and kettles at meal-times (Mark 7:1-4). What we see at the wedding are six stone jars holding water for washing so that everyone could maintain purity as they were eating and drinking.

Throughout the gospels, the Pharisees are upset when Jesus breaks these rules, and Jesus rebukes them for the heavy burden of excessive rules they placed on the shoulders of the people (Matt. 23). So the significance of Jesus turning the ritual water for cleansing into high-quality wine for a wedding celebration cannot be understated.

The most obvious connection is to draw a straight line from Cana to Calvary. We don't feel the punch in the same way the original readers would have, but the miracle at Cana

is a powerful and pointed critique of Israel's leaders, who taught that through meticulous external adherence to rules they could achieve and maintain cleanliness, outside and in.

The miracle of changing water into wine points to what Jesus is going to do on the cross: pour out his blood to cleanse us thoroughly from our sins.

An equally significant connection, though not as immediately obvious, is the announcement and inauguration of a new age. All seven signs in the gospel of John are unique, light-filled revelations, but together they reveal the same bright epiphany that shines powerfully in this first sign: In and through Jesus, the love, healing, and wholeness of God's kingdom is now abundantly flowing and available to anyone who desires to dip their cup and drink. It's just as Isaiah 55:1 prophesied: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters. ... Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."

Now the promise given to Abraham, flowing through David, and pouring

into Christ to overflowing is spilling out into the streets to bless the nations with the riches of God's grace.

In 2018, in a small village in Wales, a large tanker truck overturned and spilled 7,000 gallons of milk into the local river. Social media posts showed the creamy river cascading over rocks as it coursed through the town. There were no lasting environmental effects, so afterward some had fun with the absurdity of the situation. "All we needed was a giant bowl of cornflakes and it would have been perfect," one person posted online. Another person saw a religious parallel and wrote, "All we need is honey next and it's totally biblical."

In the biblical imagination, honey, milk, and wine are all symbols of abundance. Yet some Christians don't know what to do with a miracle of Jesus resulting in such an absurd amount of fine wine, especially when the guests have already been drinking. The key to understanding this story is found in an easy-to-miss phrase right at the beginning: "On the third day."

With these four words, John plants a seed of resurrection hope, both in the story of Jesus and in the story of those who put their faith in Christ. That seed points to another celebration when those who belong to Jesus are raised from the dead. With hearts overflowing with gratitude, they will be seated at the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-9) and raise a glass to praise the Lord for his goodness (Ps. 116:12-13).


On that day, dreams will come true when God saves the best for last. Heaven's silos will burst open, and the wine of God's fulfilled kingdom will stream through every street and show-erhead, just as Joel 3:18 says: "In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk." **B**

'Keep Writing!'

Mixed Media Editor Encourages Student Reviewers

IT ALL STARTED when Katy Dekens, an English teacher at Surrey Christian Secondary School (SCS) in Surrey, B.C., wrote me an email in mid-October:

"My students are beginning a review-writing project, and we are just starting to work through some mentor texts to understand the elements of a strong review. Reviews are a great way for us to think through the themes and messages that texts like movies and books present to us."

She invited me to speak to her class via Zoom about why review writing is important. It was a joy to speak to her students, who had good questions about the process of reviewing media. I hoped they would grasp the importance of highlighting benefits to the reader/listener/watcher in each review—and did they ever! In this issue's Mixed Media is a sampling of the thoughtful pitches and mini-reviews submitted by the SCS students and my short responses. 



Lorilee Craker, a native of Winnipeg, Man., lives in Grand Rapids, Mich. The author of 16 books, she is the Mixed

Media editor of *The Banner*. Her latest book is called *Eat Like a Heroine: Nourish and Flourish With Bookish Stars From Anne of Green Gables to Zora Neale Hurston*.



TELEVISION

Beef

Reviewed by Muskaan Dhillon

Released in early 2023, the series *Beef* is all about intricate emotions of anger, raging conflict, and uncomfortable conversations with a hint of humor. What makes this series so relatable and thought-provoking is its engaging premise, emotional depth, and complex characters who grapple with their flaws and insecurities. *Beef* also successfully tackles subjects of depression and isolation. *Beef* is an exploration of the human psyche, the consequences of our actions, and the complexities of our emotions.

L.C.: We did have one of our reviewers review Beef when it came out, but we didn't run it, as we decided that some of the content might be problematic for some of our more sensitive readers. However, I love how you describe the series and the benefits to the viewer. Keep writing!



VIDEO GAME

Elden Ring: Shadow of the Erdtree

Reviewed by Jaxon Boender

Elden Ring represents what an open-world game should be, with a million things to do. The game is suitable for older people because of its medieval/fantasy theme with a complex and intricate storyline. It boasts a huge challenge to fresh players and experienced players alike. It develops people with three main lessons: patience, resilience, and ingenuity.

L.C.: I like how you stated who the game was for and how it could benefit them. Keep writing!

P.S. Check out our review of another video game, The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom.



MUSIC

Two Star & The Dream Police

By Mk.gee

Reviewed by Trinity Kirchtag

Mk.gee's recent album, *Two Star & The Dream Police*, explores relatable topics relevant to any age. While not explicitly Christian, the lyrics unpack ideas of alienation, a lack of control, and the desire to belong to someone. These are all common human experiences, ones present even in biblical stories. The main theme of the Bible is to love one another.

L.C.: I like the way you pointed out that the album is not explicitly Christian but has value for Christians in its artful themes. Keep writing!



Student reviewers from Surrey Christian Secondary School.



ANIME SERIES

**Bartender:
Glass of God**

Reviewed by Enoch Chen

Bartender: Glass of God is a fastidiously crafted anime series that revolves around the serene life of a Japanese bartender, Sasakura. His story resonates with many people's daily career lives, bringing an intimate connection to the audience. Warmth radiates from this anime. Simply listening to Sasakura's soft and gentle voice can make everyone feel comforted. Invite Sasakura to serve you a drink!

L.C.: I like the way you pointed out that listening to the bartender's voice is comforting. Your pitch sparked an interesting conversation at the dinner table with my Korean daughter and my two international "sons" from China and Korea. They love Crunchyroll (an anime streaming platform). Keep writing!



HOCKEY

**The Vancouver
Canucks' 2024
playoff run**

Reviewed by Abigail George

The Banner should review this because it not only addresses the Canucks' playoff run but also reflects what it's like to be a Canucks fan. It is not about the wins or losses; it is about the emotions and feelings that unite the community. Describe the atmosphere in Vancouver, the fun among fans, and the excitement of late-night celebrations and cheering. The team showed incredible perseverance by overcoming obstacles. Reviewing this would inspire others to start watching and help them discover the joy of being part of the Canucks' journey.

L.C.: You are a girl after my own heart with your love for the Canucks, except I love the Winnipeg Jets! Thanks, and keep writing!



MOVIE

**Deadpool and
Wolverine**

Reviewed by Kamsi Okoli and Ayden Wong

Okoli: The movie can help you figure out that you sometimes go through hardships. It helps to show you how to persevere through rough times and how it will reward you if you stay focused.

L.C.: You did a good job of pointing out the benefits of the movie. Ultimately, our more sensitive readers would balk at the R-rated content, but I encourage you to keep writing and thinking critically about movies.

Wong: *Deadpool and Wolverine* combines Deadpool's humor with Wolverine's seriousness. It demonstrates how to collaborate despite differences. The R rating makes the movie more realistic in connecting with people, using dark humor and intense action to engage with mature audiences. Even the most unlikely partnerships can teach us to cooperate, no matter our differences.

L.C.: While Deadpool and Wolverine would probably be a bit much for our more sensitive readers, I love how you brought out the movie's highlights. I especially liked your last line. Keep writing!



MOVIE

Inside Out 2

Reviewed by John Shin and Olivia Kim

Shin: *Inside Out 2* tells the story of Riley at age 13, entering high school with new emotions: Anxiety, Embarrassment, Ennui, and Envy. *Inside Out 2* balances humor, visuals, and emotional depth relevant to audiences of any age.

L.C.: This movie would be a good fit for us, and we will review it soon. I am excited to watch it myself. Keep writing!

Kim: Through Riley's development, audiences can put themselves in her shoes. It delves deep into poignant subjects: mental health, the struggle of growing up, relationships, and emotional development. It merges entertainment with meaningful storytelling.

L.C.: I am planning a review of the movie in conjunction with a book review of Healing What's Within, by Christian therapist Chuck DeGroat. He encourages readers to watch both Inside Out movies. I like the way you bring out the benefits to the viewer. Keep writing!

Can I Lose My Salvation?

Faith lost and faith (re)found are both part of the human experience.



Michael Wagenman is the Christian Reformed campus minister at Western University in London, Ont., where he invites undergraduate students to put their faith into loving service and mentors graduate students. His most recent book is *The Power of the Church: The Sacramental Ecclesiology of Abraham Kuyper* (Wipf & Stock, 2020).

CAN I LOSE MY SALVATION? It's easy to understand why many ask. There are plenty of examples of people who have gone from committed Christian believers to adherents of other religions, agnosticism, or atheism. Loss is a painful part of life, and we all experience it at times—sometimes even when it comes to faith.

Faith lost and faith (re)found are both part of the human experience. But “Can I lose my salvation?” isn’t answered by our life experience alone. It’s not even the most helpful question to ask first.

“Sara” was raised in a loving Christian home before going to university and becoming persuaded by atheism. In her 10th year on campus, as she neared the completion of her third degree, she was looking for some new friends to play guitar with and wandered into a “jam night” hosted by a Resonate-supported campus ministry. While there, she was captivated by hearing the voice of Jesus, the good shepherd, telling her how deeply she is loved and enfolded by God.

Sara is a composite of many stories from my 20 years of campus ministry representing how I’ve seen Jesus’ parables about lost things (Matt. 18; Luke 15) get retold in many students’ and professors’ lives.

Maybe we can now see why “Can I lose my salvation?” isn’t the best question. It bears all the marks of what sociologist Christian Smith calls “moralistic therapeutic deism”—the faulty assumption in our anxious, individualized age that Christian faith is primarily about me, my feelings, my behavior, and my eternal well-being. In contrast, the Bible is first and foremost a testimony about God and God’s gracious love for creation.

The Bible’s grand narrative arc asks a very different question about the lost things of life: Can God be trusted with creation, even when we wander from

God’s path and get lost? To the frustration of the religious leaders, Jesus repeatedly teaches that God is the One who looks after those we categorize as “lost.”

We live in a world where things get lost. But Jesus says that the good shepherd won’t let even one sheep (or coin or child) remain lost forever. We might feel or think that we have lost our salvation. We might think someone we know has lost their salvation. But Jesus says that God is tenacious in searching until all of his are eventually found and rescued. Can we trust that?

We might give up, but God never does. The Bible’s refrain is consistent: God is gracious and compassionate, abounding in love and faithfulness (see Ex. 34:6; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; Ps. 103:8; Ps. 145:8; Joel 2:13; and Jon. 4:2 for a few examples).

Jesus paints word pictures with his parables. He is emphatic: God will one day heal and gather all of creation under a canopy of divine love, joy, and peace. Even here and now, God can be trusted with this cosmic vision. Because God can be trusted with the sparrows sitting in the trees and the flowers growing in the fields (Matt. 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-34), God can equally be trusted with everything (and everyone) in between.

Can I lose my salvation? In a manner of speaking I can. But if or when I do, the good shepherd will continue to show unmerited favor toward me, most especially when I get lost.

That’s what grace is. The good shepherd came to find the lost. For Jesus, one lost sheep is worth searching out and bringing home so that none of his will be lost.

Jesus makes this seemingly absurd claim about God’s grace. But that’s why the religious leaders killed Jesus. A message of grace for the lost is dangerous to those who use their power to categorize and dismiss others. **B**

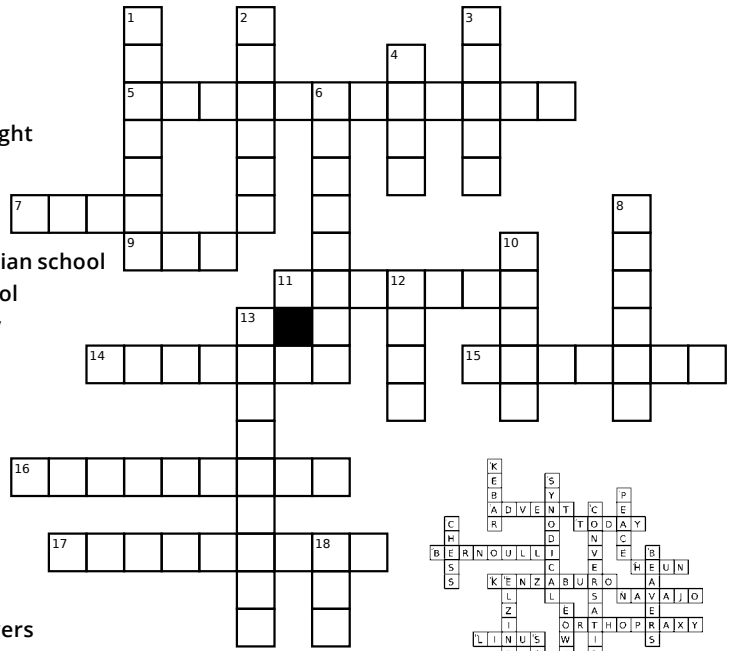
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions in the next print issue.
 (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

Down

1. New president of Trinity Christian College
2. A rhetorical device in which two contrasting parts of the whole refer to the whole
3. A children's ministry curriculum for preschool through grade eight
4. Classis Red _____ includes churches and missions in Northwest New Mexico and Northeast Arizona
6. A skill needed in nature journaling
8. The suburb of Vancouver where student writers attend a Christian school
10. *Inside Out 2* tells the story of Riley at age 13, entering high school with new emotions: Anxiety, Embarrassment, _____, and Envy
12. We live in a world where things get _____
13. Being _____ means joining God in mission where we live
18. Journalist and cofounder of the Catholic Worker Movement

Across

5. Disunity experienced by some families
7. This flowed through the streets of São Lourenço do Bairro
9. A member of ReFrame Ministry's prayer team
11. He co-wrote the book *Work and Worship*
14. "Keep _____," Mixed Media editor encourages student reviewers
15. Members of First CRC in Lynden, Wash., use these to deliver supplies
16. _____ Markit offers affordable fresh produce and ready-made meal kits
17. One of two intercultural ministry leaders in Canada



Solution to the December 2024 puzzle
 COMMITMENT

The world is full of noise,
 pushing in every direction. Find your way forward and prepare for a career while exploring what it means to reflect the love of Jesus Christ wherever you go, in whatever you do. Turn down the volume and listen closely.

Your Future is Calling

LEARN MORE AT REDEEMER.CA

DEADLINES: Ads for the March issue are due January 31, 2025; April: March 7, 2025. Subject to availability. Details online at thebanner.org/classifieds, or for display ads see thebanner.org/ads. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

PRICES: Most ads are \$0.45^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.38^{US} per character and \$65 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

TO ADVERTISE: Place your classified ad online at thebanner.org/classifieds or email it to classifieds@thebanner.org or fax it to 616-224-0834. Questions? Call 616-224-0725.

Agenda for Synod 2025

Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the Office of General Secretary of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda:

- a. Overtures, communications, and appeals to synod are due no later than March 15, and must first be processed through the local council and the classis.
- b. Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the Credentials for Synod form, as well as the completed information form for each synodical delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes and the appointed delegates as soon as possible, but no later than March 15.

Materials judged legally before synod will be included in the *Agenda for Synod* if received before the synodically established deadlines.

Zachary J. King,
General Secretary of the CRCNA

Annual Day of Prayer

Synod has designated the second Wednesday in March (March 12, 2025) as the Annual Day of Prayer. All CRC congregations are requested to take this opportunity to ask for God's blessing upon the world, our nations and communities, crops and industry, and the church worldwide.

U.S. Councils, if it is judged that the observance of the Annual Day of Prayer can be more meaningfully observed in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer (U.S.), you have the right to change the date of a special service accordingly (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 578). The National Day of Prayer (U.S.) is Thursday, May 1, 2025.

Zachary J. King,
General Secretary of the CRCNA

Denominational Announcements

CLASSIS ROCKY MOUNTAIN William Brouwers was approved as a Minister of the Word candidate at Classis Rocky Mountain on October 11, 2024 and accepted the call to serve Dispatch CRC in Cawker City, Kansas.

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 or contact the search team: search@duncancrc.org

FULL TIME SENIOR PASTOR Connections Church in Highlands Ranch, Colorado welcomes applicants for the church's senior pastor position. Candidates should have excellent and engaging preaching skills and be enthusiastic and capable leaders. Candidates also should have a strong desire to promote outreach to the surrounding community and beyond and be able to provide supportive and comforting pastoral care. Interested pastors should send their ministerial profile or inquiries to Joe Unrein, co-chair of the Pastoral Search Committee, at pastorsearch@myconnections.church. Visit us at www.myconnections.church.

FULL-TIME PASTOR Williamsburg Christian Reformed Church, located in a rural community south of Ottawa, Ontario, is looking for a full-time pastor to lead our congregation. For more details about our church, please visit our website at WilliamsburgCRC.org or email SearchCom@WilliamsburgCRC.org.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR A FT SR. PASTOR at Golden Gate CRC (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.

UNITY CRC IN PRINSBURG, MN is seeking a full-time pastor to join us in our vision of being a "body of Spirit-filled believers, rooted in God's Word, growing in God's grace, and committed to reaching others for Jesus Christ." Unity CRC is a growing, active, and committed community. Info available at unitycrc.org. Please send inquiries to Perry Breems at pm-breems@gmail.com.

Church Anniversary 75 Years

BETHEL CHURCH IN ZEELAND, MI will celebrate 75 Years on Sunday, January 19, 2025 with a worship service at 9:15am. All are welcome! (bethelchurchzeeland.org)


Retirement

CELEBRATE PASTOR RANDY LEDEBOER'S RETIREMENT on January 26 at inSpirit Church, 870 74th St., Byron Center, MI. The service starts at 10 AM, followed by lunch and fellowship. Hope to see you there!

Worship Services

WINTER WORSHIP IN BRADENTON, FL Bradenton Chapel invites you to join us for Sunday Worship and Wed. Bible Study. Visit our website at bradentonchapel.com

Employment

 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** Countryside Camp & Conference Centre, the summer home of Camp Shalom, and a robust conference centre ministry, located south of Cambridge, ON. We are looking to hire our next Executive Director - our long-serving Managing Director is retiring. If you're interested in leading this vibrant and evangelical organization, please find the role posted on Facebook and on the Camp website. www.countrysidecamp.com

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 50 YEARS

MUSCH, TOM AND JILL of Cutlerville, Michigan, mark 50 years of marriage on February 14, 2025. Married in 1975, they have built a life full of faith, love, and joy with their children and grandchildren.

Two new books by Nancy Tupper Ling



A beautiful illustrated collection of poems and prayers coauthored with June Cotner to help children develop an appreciation for the natural world.



A visually stunning picture book that introduces young readers to the Bible with poetry and art, exploring the entire story in one sitting!

These books can be purchased wherever you order books.

Or nancytupperling.com/books-for-children

Obituaries

AUKEMAN, MARK J. age 100, of Hudsonville, MI passed away on December 6, 2024. He was preceded in death by his wife Betty, of nearly 70 years, his only son Mark, and son-in-law Rick Bultema. He is survived by his 4 daughters, Carol (Rev. Rich) Rienstra, Shirley (Rick dec.) Bultema, Gloria and Nancy Aukeman. Eight grandsons and spouses, 15 great grandchildren.

MARY VAN DYK (NÉE WIERDA) went home to be with her Lord on October 24, 2024 at the age of 88. She is missed by her children Sandi and Bruce Ornee, Terry and Julie, Mike and Debbie, David and Rachel, and Nancy and Bryan Westra, 15 grandchildren, 18 great grandchildren, and six siblings and their spouses. Her love for God and her family will long be treasured.

TONIA M. KUPERUS (FEENSTRA), age 78, of Stanley, NY, went to be with the Lord on November 1st, 2024, after a long battle with breast cancer. Toni was born in Nijlan, Friesland, and immigrated to the United States with her family in 1956. She is predeceased by her parents and two brothers. Toni is survived by, and will be greatly missed by, her husband, Henry, of 56 years, her children Wendy (Todd) Voogt-Howard, Amy (Andy) Robertaccio, and Scott (Rachel) Kuperus, 10 grandchildren and 1 great-grandson. The funeral was held November 11, 2024, at the East Palmyra CRC. Memorial donations to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation (give.bcrf.org) in Toni's name are appreciated.

UITTENBOSCH, REV. H. peacefully and joyfully passed away in the Lord on Nov 23, '24. He is survived by his wife of 68 years, Trudy Schuringa Uittenbosch; 3 children, Marcel (Gwen), Selwyn (Helen), Desiree (Kevin); 9 grandchildren; and 12 great grandchildren.

Kay Wiegers, nee Bandringa, age 80, beloved wife for 60 years to the late Bernard "Bernie" Wiegers (2023). Loving mother of Brian, Craig (Deborah), Brett (Nancy), Tammy Marek, Trisha (Wayne) Boss and David (Torie). Cherished grandmother of Casey (Andrew) Kowitz, Abby (Alex) Freitag; Amanda (Nicolas) Novacek, Kadee (Simon) Summers, Nathan, Justin, Brandon, Daniel Wiegers; Vincent and Joseph Marek; Liz (Derek) Boomsma, Britany (Jeremy) Karr, Kylie (Zim) Rivas, Mickey (Colton) DeJong, and the late Zachary Boss. Proud great-grandmother of Zach, Lily, Maddie, Daisy, Ivy, Levi, Violet, Cooper and Claire. Dearest sister of Carol (late Dan) Beland, and the late Raymond Bandringa, Jr. Dear sister-in-law of Theresa (late Robert) Wiltjer and the late Hilda (late Donald) Huisenga, the late Grace (late Art) Rosenwinkel, the late Dina (late Will) Wichers and the late Barbara (late John) Buursma. Fond aunt of many nieces and nephews. Express your thoughts and condolences at colonialchapel.com

Products and Services

DRIED BEEF AND HOLLAND METTWURST 10% off with this ad and 15% off with a current church bulletin. If the bulletin is outlined, receive an additional 2%. Meaty ham hocks for soup also available. VandenBrink Hams, 1330 Leonard NW, Grand Rapids, MI. Expires 2/28/25. www.vandenbrinkhams.com

I CAN LIST YOUR HOME FOR \$1000 OR 1.5%. 1992 Calvin grad will list your property using a Low Fee Business Model - full service, with savings. The system works! 160 closings in 2023, and over 125 lifetime Banner clients. We help clients buy properties as well. Contact Doug Takens of Independence Realty, 6801 Gettysburg, Hudsonville, 616-262-4574 or takens@sbcglobal.net

REMODELING? Call Ken DeVries today for a free estimate on windows or kitchen/bath renovation. 616-457-5880. Since 1985. www.homework-construction.com

TRUE BLUE CAREGIVERS It is our passion to help seniors stay in their home with our reliable and friendly care. We offer assistance with routine hygiene, meal prep, light house-keeping and other task related to daily living. Our company is locally owned and operated by Calvin alums. We have been serving the greater Grand Rapids area for over 13 years and are bonded and insured. To learn more about our services, contact us at Truebluecaregivers.com or call 616-406-6819.

Real Estate Sales / Rentals

ANNA MARIA ISLAND CONDOS Large pool, beach access, free WiFi, 1&2 Bedroom, 1 block to beach. \$900-\$1200 a week. Contact Tim at 941-704-7525 redekercondosonami.com

COTTAGE FOR RENT 4 bed, 3 bath, updated. Sleeps 12, Hess Lake, MI private waterfront. \$2,000/week. Call Lonnie 616-942-0048.

COTTAGE FOR RENT 4 bed, 3 bath, updated. Sleeps 12, Hess Lake, MI private waterfront. \$2,000/week. Call Lonnie 616-942-0048.

MINER LAKE YEAR ROUND RENTAL 3 bed 2 bath Sleeps 8 gorgeous home family/friends fun all sports lake 30 minutes SW of Grand Rapids gohlkemary@gmail.com

NAPLES AREA, FL Gated 2 br. condo. Great pool. Easy access. Beautiful walking area. Vermuda Pointe Check internet Vanderbilt Lakes. By month 616.560.2895.

Advertising helps you
connect with the CRC
616-224-5882
ads@thebanner.org

NETHERLANDS WATERWAYS
CRUISE | Apr 18 - 27, 2025



MORE INFO

GUIDED ITINERARIES

EXPLORE. CONNECT. EXPERIENCE

NETHERLANDS WATERWAYS CRUISE

Apr 18 - 27 | Bruce & Judy Buursma

THE GOLDEN AGE OF SPAIN

Apr 24 - May 7 | Pastor Hal & Jeanie Oakley

LA DOLCE VITA! EXPLORING THE CULTURE, CUISINE & WINE OF ITALY

Apr 28 - May 8 | Paul & Brenda Harris

HERITAGE OF GERMANY

May 5 - 17 | Dr. Jim Bratt & Dr. Suzanne Bratt

COASTAL CROATIA: BY LAND & SEA

Jun 12 - 23 | Dan & Amy Hermen

SCOTLAND: HIGHLIGHTS & HIGHLANDS

Aug 8 - 18 | Eric Van Tassell & Courtney E. Brewster

2025 EUROPEAN HANDBELL FESTIVAL

Aug 19 - 29 | Deborah Rice & Keith Cole

PACIFIC NORTHWEST: CASCADES TO COAST

Sep 5 - 14 | Ralph Stearley

AMSTERDAM TO BRUGES: A SCENIC BIKE & BARGE TOUR

Sep 9 - 18 | John & Rachel Witte

AVIAN ADVENTURES: BIRDING THROUGH THE NETHERLANDS

Sep 15 - 25 | Philip Vande-Riet & Sophia Witte

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS IN GREECE

Oct 13 - 24 | Dr. Jeffrey A. D. Weima

BEST OF SOUTHERN ITALY

Oct 13 - 24 | Denise Iarossi Taylor & Mike Bellomo

SIGN UP TODAY!
wittetours.com/banner

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING ELSE?

Our Vacation Consultants can help you get wherever you want to go!

Visit wittetravel.com to get started.

witte Travel & Tours

Grand Rapids, MI | 616.957.8113



is Calling You to join

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

Find out about a 30-year-old Christian school founded on and fueled by:

**True Knowledge,
Faith in Christ & Godly Character**



WE ARE SEARCHING FOR

Christian educators called to be heads of school, principals, curriculum coordinators, teachers, to serve in theologically Reformed, Christ-centered K-12 schools in **Indonesia**

Find out more about us @careeratsph sph.edu/career

YOUR AD COULD BE HERE

Advertising helps you
connect with the CRC
616-224-5882
ads@thebanner.org

Kid finally moved out?
Get them their own copy of
The Banner. For free.

TheBanner.org/Signup

Already getting *The Banner*? Use the address above to make any changes.



WORSHIP.CALVIN.EDU

Calvin Symposium on Worship

FEBRUARY 5 - 7, 2025
CALVIN UNIVERSITY
GRAND RAPIDS, MI

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship
and Center for Excellence in Preaching

Ask. Share. Connect.

The CRCNA is big. Since we can't always meet for coffee, let's meet at The Network to compare ministry notes.

Covering over 60 different ministry topics, you'll find blogs, discussion topics, ministry Q&As, and much more. Get involved by asking a ministry question, posting a blog, or sharing a resource today.

Visit crna.org/network

A Melted Heart

The most important task of the church is to cultivate melted hearts in those it reaches and teaches.



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

IN 1958, a different Hurricane Helene smashed into the East Coast. I was 9 years old, and I clearly remember it because it caused an electrical outage in our New England town, which shut off the freezers at Lynch's Pharmacy, which were now full of melting ice cream. School was canceled that day, which added to the delicious blessing of free ice cream given out by the store. Soon we neighborhood kids were lined up to each receive a half gallon of very soft ice cream and a plastic spoon. We sat on the sidewalk and ate as much as we could. *Thank God for hurricanes!* we thought.

As happiness can come to children from melting ice cream, spiritual joy comes from the melting of our hearts when we experience the gifts of forgiveness and being enfolded into God's family as an adopted child of God. Many believe the gospel but never fully trust it. We all want God's help, but something deeper in our hearts must happen to us to be able to want God's hold. We must melt!


We never would have had the opportunity to eat that ice cream for free if it had not been melting in the store's freezer. The pharmacy's financial loss became our happiness. Our opportunity to receive the joyful gift of the gospel is through faith in Jesus' pain and loss. Does that biblical truth melt your heart?

When the 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ* came out, many refused to see it because they'd heard that the depiction of gore was overwhelming. And it was! In the movie, Jesus' body is ripped open, and viewers may be inclined to cover their eyes. Yet when I saw it, I was overwhelmed but not repulsed. I left the theater feeling deeply loved by God in a way I had never felt before. My heart melted when I saw how much Jesus suffered to pay the wages of my sin. I saw how much love Jesus must

have for me to succumb to such a torturous death to pardon me.

To be a Christian, John Calvin said, is "to live a life of self-denial" because the essence of sin is selfishness. We see that selfishness in everyone. In my work as a marriage counselor, self-denial is always necessary for reconciliation, but it doesn't come easily. Forgiveness requires self-denial by the victim. That is not easy either. It takes melted hearts to reconcile a relationship. And to have a heart that can forgive a betraying spouse first takes a heart melted before God.

The most important task of the church is to cultivate melted hearts in those it reaches and teaches. The Lord's Supper is one opportunity to remember and believe, with a melted heart, that the body of Christ was broken for the forgiveness of all our sins. How we commemorate Holy Week is another opportunity. The drama of what happened to Jesus on Good Friday should melt us.

How do we become so "poor in spirit" that we can feel the freedom of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3)? Ultimately, it is the task of the Holy Spirit to bring about a melted heart. But you can pray and ask for it with assurance. "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children," Jesus says, "how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13). So pray for a spiritual melting. It's much better than ice cream! 

Reflections From a Departing CRC Campus Minister

The best campus ministries are constantly experimenting.

As I Was Saying is a forum for a variety of perspectives to foster faith-related conversations among our readers with the goal of mutual learning, even in disagreement. Apart from articles written by editorial staff, these perspectives do not necessarily reflect the views of The Banner. This was first published Sept. 20, 2024, at TheBanner.org.

HALF A YEAR AGO, my husband and I made the difficult decision to leave our home and relocate. As a result, I had to leave the campus ministry position I had served in for three and a half years. Before this position, I had served at another campus ministry for two years and had also volunteered with another campus ministry during my graduate studies.

As I leave a much-beloved job, not knowing whether I'll return to this kind of work again, I've been reflecting on some of the lessons I have learned through my years in this unique mission field of campus ministry. I'll share a few of them here in hopes that the Christian Reformed community continues to value and support this important outreach to an often misunderstood demographic.

1. The best campus ministries are constantly experimenting. Early on in my ministry internship, my mentor Michael Wagenman described campus ministry to me as a laboratory. It's a place to try things out and see what works. I had never heard ministry described like that, but it was immensely freeing to be able to try different things, ask for wisdom and guidance, step out with the unique gifts and interests God had given me, and then reflect on what worked and

what didn't. I tried leading a crafting group, a prayer group, a musical worship team, a lunch drop-in, and an on-campus Sunday worship service. Some of these events succeeded and became embedded in our weekly programming; others didn't. (Note: events involving food are usually a hit with students.)

I've carried this approach with me over the years. Last term, after I tried to host "Creative Hour" in the cafeteria, I reported to my student leaders that only one person came to the event. Their faces fell in empathetic disappointment. But I was unfazed—I had been doing this long enough to know that sometimes happens. We reflected on why it didn't work (maybe we didn't advertise long enough; perhaps there were too many similar events happening on campus; perhaps it wasn't the right time of day for this kind of event). I told them the event was still a success in my mind because it provided me with meaningful one-on-one time with a quiet, artistic student, someone who would never reach for a pastoral meeting but was able to connect better while drawing and doing something she loved.

2. Effective ministers are constantly looking for opportunities to give away power. I began my campus ministry at Mohawk College halfway through the school year and smack-dab in the middle of a pandemic lockdown. The chaplain at the neighboring university, Michael Fallon, and I brought the college and university students together over Zoom for weekly gatherings. This provided me the gift of a semester to observe Michael's well-established ministry. I was struck by how little Michael spoke during these student ministry events. Student leaders ran the meetings, leading prayer, announcements, ice-breakers, and speaker introductions.



Melissa Kuipers is a fiction and non-fiction writer living in Nova Scotia with her husband and two children.

Michael would make these announcements sound more dynamic and interesting, I sometimes thought while listening to young adults still honing their public speaking chops. Still, the ministry was thriving in a time when so many campus ministries were struggling.

Michael later told me, “Students want to come out when they see their peers leading. It gives them a sense of ownership. They think, “That could be me someday.” I’ve seen over the years how Michael is constantly looking for opportunities to follow Christ’s example by passing the power over to those he is discipling so that the ministry does not rest just on his shoulders but is shared among its members.


3. You have to be ready to pivot at any point. As I mentioned, I started my job in the middle of the COVID lockdown. Over the next two years I hit roadblock after roadblock as the campus figured out how to operate through a pandemic. I learned that things change frequently at a college, and that meant our ministry had to strategize and reroute often. We had to find a different organizational umbrella to connect with, new spaces for meetings, and new ways to advertise when rules about posters changed. Truthfully, I struggled to find my place on campus.

4. It takes time to see the fruit of your labor. In the midst of all these challenges, I wondered whether the ministry had run its course. I thought of all the other campus ministries that had tried to establish themselves on this particular campus. None had lasted more than a few years. Then a guest speaker visited our small but stalwart group and reflected on Luke’s parable about the fruitless fig tree (Luke 13:6-9). “It takes years for fruit to grow on a tree!” she pointed out. I held these words of encouragement. It was time to water and fertilize

and wait. Sure enough, the following semester, the ministry began to bloom again. The next year our community grew in every way and formed a beautiful, diverse group of students who supported each other in their faith and lives.

5. Campus ministry can be lonely work, but it doesn’t have to be. When I first took a job in campus ministry, my boss/minister’s first question for me was “Will you be alone?” She later told me, “Ministry is lonely work. Make sure you find your people.” She’s right. Particularly for chaplains and campus ministers, serving alone in a big institution can feel isolating. Fortunately, there were structures in place to provide me with support and accountability. Christian Reformed campus ministries have overseeing committees, and ours was intentional about having a staff representative as well as a pastoral presence, both of whom were supportive and encouraging. Of course, plugging into a local congregation that was invested in my work was immensely important. We also have the Christian Reformed Campus Ministry Association, which provided me with a way to connect virtually and in-person with other chaplains across the continent who understood the unique challenges and joys of serving in a post-secondary institution.

Years ago I heard someone at a leadership conference say, “If it’s lonely at the top, you should climb down until you find others.” For their relational and spiritual wellness, ministers need to be intentional about finding others to pastor them. We cannot build the kingdom in isolation.

Having been on both sides of campus ministry, I am so grateful for the gifts it gives young adults during an extremely formative and often disorienting time of life. As I am called away from this fulfilling work, I am so grateful to have played a part in the legacy that is Christian Reformed campus ministry. I pray that the CRC continues calling campus ministers to create space for their voices and the voices of the students who find their homes in these unique and critical ministries. 

NEW

Deacon Essentials

Deacon Essentials is a free leadership development course designed to equip both new and experienced CRC deacons.

Through five group-learning sessions, this course will orient participants to teachings about deacons in the Bible, in the CRC confessions, and in the deacon ordination form. It unpacks the unique role of a deacon and explores the related topics of Stewardship, Mercy and Justice.

Each lesson contains a key teaching, opportunity for team discussion, and questions to guide further reflection.



Learn more and sign-up at
crcna.org/deacon-essentials

