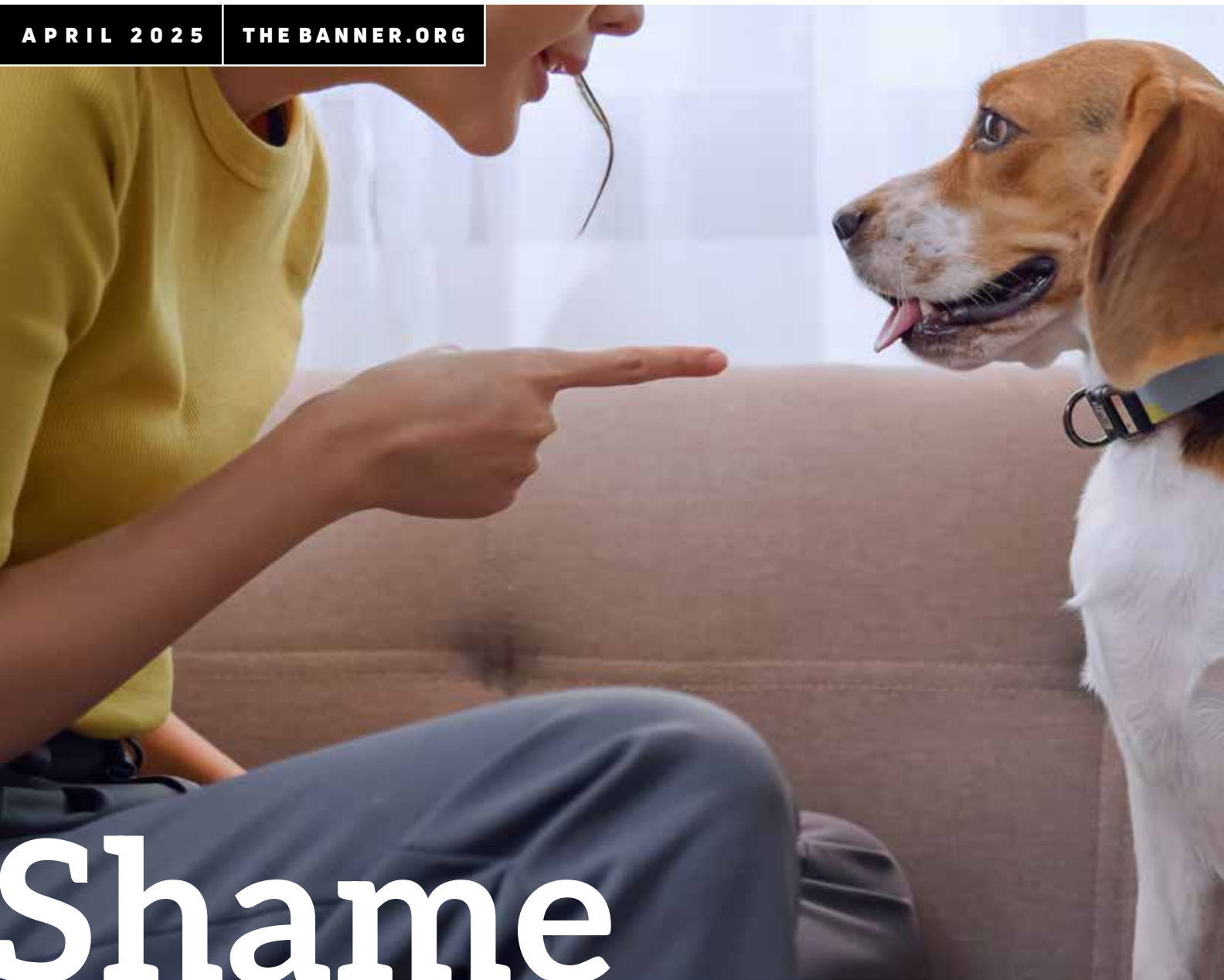


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# Shame

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# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

Reports from classes of the Christian Reformed Church meeting since last June's synod include **33 congregations** who have begun a process of disaffiliation from the CRC. They aren't distributed equally among all classes, but **17 of the denomination's 49 classes** have at least one disaffiliating congregation—for various reasons—about 35% classes.

### Disaffiliating Congregations

**12** classes have one disaffiliating congregation

**2** have **2**

**1** has **3**

**1** has **4**

**1** has **10**

Data comes from the received agendas and minutes of 2025 classis meetings as of Mar. 7, 2025.

## 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.)

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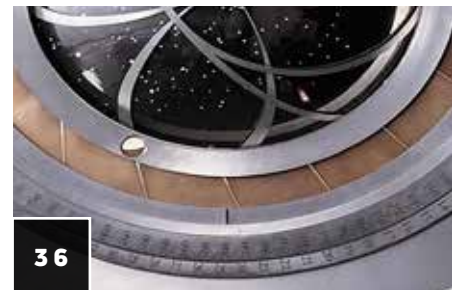
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*The Banner* is the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church. Opinions expressed in *The Banner* are not necessarily those of the editor or the CRCNA.

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## Lament

I hoped that we could disagree in gracious and Spirit-filled ways.



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

Spanish and Korean translations of this editorial are available at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

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**LIKE THE PSALMISTS OF OLD**, I have been lamenting lately, honestly sharing my griefs, fears, and frustrations with God. Allow me to share some of them with you.

I have served God as faithfully as I can. All these years I have tried to be fair to different views, as a journalistic ministry is supposed to do. I am not perfect. Forgive me my past failures. Now it is mid-March, and I am tired. I feel caught in the messes of national and denominational splits.

I am watching the trade war between Canada and the U.S. escalate. It feels as if Canada, my country, is under attack, which means my family and I feel like we are under attack. The amount of swirling misinformation does not make it easier. I pray to God both to protect Canada and help Americans.

Our spiritual unity in Christ is not dependent on our politics. However, while our spiritual unity is God's gift to us, our institutional unity is something we need to cultivate by caring for and supporting one another. I pray that our binational church can be one in solidarity.

This denomination, like any other, can be a powerful tool in God's mission. But I mourn the divisions among us. Many Christian Reformed members on both sides of the border, for various reasons, are currently asking why the CRCNA should be their denomination. Some have already made the decision to leave.

I lament that 33 pastors have recently left the CRC, with more expected to leave across various regions of our binational denomination. At least 33 churches have started the disaffiliation process. More will likely do the same. I am saddened when members, clergy, or churches leave— for any reason.


May God forgive us for our divisions and conflicts. I hoped that we could disagree in gracious and Spirit-filled ways. Instead, I see people digging in with their tribes, choosing to silence any dissent with all-or-nothing mindsets.

I worry when I see people afraid to question synodical decisions, let alone disagree with them, for fear of repercussions. But I understand. Over the years, I too have been attacked for my opinions, and I might be again. Yet I hope the “sound of silence” does not grow like a cancer in our denomination's soul.

Even those who believe that homosexual sex is sinful are silenced if for various reasons they disagree with Synod 2024's decisions on church order and discipline. I see them silenced by those who interpret disagreement with the latter as disagreement with the former. Have we crossed the line between shepherding people into holy conviction and intimidating them into institutional compliance?

God knows I am tired of all this. But I thank God that Easter is coming.

In the midst of all these uncertainties, I cling to Christ's resurrection hope. Countries and denominations rise and fall, but God is our unyielding rock. I trust that God will work in all things for the good of those who love him (Rom. 8:28). Not even the gates of hell can overcome God's church (Matt. 16:18).

Revive your church, Lord, and unite your people in your mission of reconciliation. Remove the dividing walls of hostility (Eph. 2:14). Come, Lord Jesus. Amen. 

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# Shame: What Is It Good For?

By Lorilee Craker

My face burned as I tipped over the big blue garbage bin and crawled inside, laying a towel on the “floor” as I mopped up the spilled fruit and watermelon juice with paper towels.

What was I doing inside a garbage can? Good question. I was at the end of renting a cottage on Lake Michigan and was cleaning up the place when I dumped a plastic clamshell of expired fruit in the cottage garbage can outside. In my hurry to get the place shipshape, I failed to close the lid properly, and somehow I missed the plastic bag, too. The fruit and juices spilled all over the inside of the can. I knew I couldn't leave the fruit to fester in the heat, but what could I do?

It was awful—and the worst part was the shame.

Another story:

Within a few weeks of becoming a father for the first time, author Chuck DeGroat dropped his newborn daughter. Twice.

Once, while watching a football game, he was changing Emma on a soft ottoman, but as he reached for a diaper, she somehow rolled off face down on the carpeted floor. They both cried.

The second time, he was at a restaurant with his little family, enjoying their first meal out together. He rocked Emma to sleep and placed her in her baby carrier, but did not click the handle back into place for fear the click would wake the baby. Half an hour later, DeGroat grabbed the baby carrier, forgetting it had not clicked into place, and Emma flopped out, this time on concrete. “I shrunk in shame,” he said. “I wanted to resign from parenting.”

There's that word again: shame. It's one of the most primal emotions we experience. The only people who don't experience it are those who lack the emotional range for empathy, such as narcissists.

This brings us to the third shame story—actually, the first shame story ever told.

After Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the forbidden tree, they slunk out of their perfect garden home, naked and suddenly acutely aware of it, disconnected from God and from each other. “Searing shame severed them from themselves, even their own bodies. ... They were not well,” writes DeGroat in his book *Healing What's*

*Within: Coming Home to Yourself—and to God—When You're Wounded, Weary, and Wandering.*

Adam and Eve were not well, and neither are we when shame—greasy, pervasive, and stubborn—coats us like black crude oil covers a bird's feathers.

“Shame,” writes Jenai Auman, author of *Othered*, “wasn't part of the original created order. It is a signal—if not the signal—that creation isn't what it should be and that life didn't have to be this way.”

## **Shame vs. Guilt**

It's easy to confuse shame with guilt or embarrassment, but shame is way more toxic. We make a mistake that we would never chide a friend for (at least not out loud), yet we beat ourselves up. Shame is deep discomfort, a feeling of having done the wrong thing—again. Shame keeps us in defensive mode, hustling hard toward behavior modification. It makes us feel less-than, cracked, and unworthy of belonging and connection. We usually hide the thing we are ashamed of, pushing it into the darkest corners of our souls.



Therapist and author Brené Brown defines shame as “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging.” That is to say, we didn’t just *do* something wrong, we *are* all wrong. Different from guilt, which Brown says can be “adaptive and helpful,” shame is debilitating and cuts us off from God and others. (In Eastern cultures, shame is strongly tied to the community, resulting in a more collective experience of shame compared to Western cultures, where shame is often thought of as an individual experience.)

### **Seeds of Shame**

Sometimes shame is rooted in past trauma, in things done *to* us rather than *by* us. Irene Rollins, a pastor’s wife and author of *Reframe Your Shame: Experience Freedom From What Holds You Back*, writes about her addiction to alcohol and her great shame as a mother over passing out drunk on the bathroom floor.

After going to rehab, Rollins was able to connect the dots. The seeds of her alcoholism had started when she was much younger. “I was looking for love in all the wrong places,” she writes. “What I really wanted was for my dad to say how beautiful I was, check in on me, and say I was valuable.” Once she uncovered the roots of her pain, Rollins could seek help and healing.

### **Shame Lifters**

How do we diminish the power of shame in our lives? We can’t do it alone. Wisdom from above can help us spot shame before it blights our spirits. Instead of shoving shame in a box in the basement of our souls, we can learn to identify it. DeGroat even recommends calling it out within ourselves:

“You may need to acknowledge the hidden part of yourself at the business

Instead of shoving  
shame in a box in  
the basement of  
our souls, we can  
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identify it.

meeting when you stumble over your words and a fire surges up through your chest and into your face,” he writes. Greet the dark emotion, and it will lose some of its power: “Hello, shame. I’m with you. It’s OK.” This might seem weird, but it works.

If we don’t admit our shame and process it with God and others, we will stay mired in the muck.

“Shame loves secrecy,” Brown says. “The most dangerous thing to do after a shaming experience is hide or bury our story. When we bury our story, the shame metastasizes.” Make sure the person you share your shame with is safe, or talk with a professional therapist who can offer healing empathy.

Shame, whether from something as big as alcoholism or as seemingly small as being careless with the garbage at a cottage rental, can do terrible damage if left unchecked. Satan loves it when we are bogged down in shame because then he has us where he wants us: feeling unloved and isolated. That’s exactly where Adam and Eve were until God came to the rescue, which God always does.

### **God Attends to Us**

A middle-aged woman, feeling irresponsible, kneels in a garbage bin, trying to make things right. A new father, wondering how he can be

trusted to care for his infant daughter, shakes his head in disgust. A young couple, heartsick that they had blown up their beautiful lives with one terrible choice, ask themselves how they got there.

But then, in all three stories, something unexpected happens—and it will happen in your story, too. God pursues them with care and gentleness. For Adam and Eve, God made tunics of skin and clothed them (Gen. 3:21). God covered their nakedness so they would be ashamed no more.

“Even in that ancient story,” DeGroat writes, “God compassionately attended to Adam and Eve, to anxious hearts and shame-riddled bodies.” And God, the shame-lifter, does the same thing for us.

Because of Christ’s work on the cross, we can, like Rollins, reframe our shame with God’s help. Rollins learned to say “I am not bad. I just have a problem with alcohol.” Insert your own situation here: “I am not messed up, but I did make a mess of this.” Or “I am not irresponsible. I just made a mistake.”

No matter our source of shame or how big or small our shame is, we belong to God, body and soul. We always have a rescuer to lift us out of miry pits, even those we have created ourselves. As the psalmist says in Psalm 34:5, “Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces.” No shadow of shame, now and forevermore. **B**



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*.



## BIG QUESTIONS

### Faith Formation

#### Are children in the church capable of taking on lead roles in our worship services? If so, how might we encourage this?

Years ago it was rare for anyone but the pastor to speak in the worship services we attended. In many Christian Reformed churches, though, people have since realized that if worship is the work of the people of God, then it makes sense for more of the people to have a voice in worship. In the CRC, ordained pastors preach and preside over the sacraments. There are many other parts of a worship service that can be led by those in the congregation who are capable and willing. That includes children.

In our congregation, the prayer for illumination and the Scripture passage are read every week by congregants, including children. They can also lead other parts of the liturgy. When we installed new elders and deacons last spring, for example, one of the liturgists was the grandchild of one of the deacons. And each week during one of the opening songs, children in third or fourth grade walk down the center aisle to bring the Bible into the sanctuary, place it on the pulpit, and light the Christ candle. At the end of the service, they return to remove the Bible and carry out the light.

Other ways for children and teens to use their gifts in worship might include leading singing, taking the offering, or running sound or video. The key is for adults to help them prepare for the task they're being asked to do so they can succeed and the whole congregation can be led in worship. Children and teens, as well as other groups in our congregations, can

and should participate in the service where and when they can.

To encourage this participation, talk to your pastor or whoever else plans worship in your church. Using the members of your congregation in worship makes the worship feel more like a mutual act of God's people and adds a sense of belonging.

Laura Keeley is a former regional catalyzer in faith formation with Thrive, the ministry agency of the Christian Reformed Church. Robert Keeley is a professor emeritus of education at Calvin University. The Keeleys recently retired after 31 years as directors of children's ministries at 14th St. CRC in Holland, Mich.

### Relationships

#### My married kids don't want to have children. To me, this is a self-centered decision. How can I convince them to be fruitful and multiply?

Decisions about starting a family, how many kids to have, or when to have them don't involve a family vote. They are personal decisions that couples make prayerfully. Couples should prayerfully discern how they can honor God in all the decisions they make in their marriage, but as adults, they are free to make their own choices. Making comments or pestering them about their decisions isn't helpful. You might not be happy with your children's decisions, but it's not your place to interfere.

Instead of dismissing your kids as selfish, consider their reasons. Listen to your children's concerns if they are willing to share. Let them express their thoughts without debating their perspective or questioning their choices. Perhaps they have career goals that don't leave them time to devote to a family. Maybe the world seems too scary of a place to bring children into,

or they don't see themselves as parents. Maybe they want more time to enjoy their marriage before making a decision about having kids. If they'll share, listen to their reasoning without judgment or debate.

Being upset with your kids won't help. As Christians, our decisions shouldn't be motivated by anger or fear, but instead by love and hope. While your heart might have wanted grandchildren, consider how you can use your time and energy to be fruitful in building God's kingdom. Consider volunteering with kids in your church or community to be a grandparent to those needing connection.

Christians throughout the ages have served God faithfully regardless of whether they were married or had children. The apostle Paul did neither, and his efforts were fruitful. As Christians, we have a responsibility to share the good news of salvation, but this does not require having a family of one's own. Your children can nurture the faith of others in many ways without having children. They might be excited about their opportunities to affect the lives of others through mentoring or service.

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

### Ethics

#### Should I feel guilty for the unjust actions of my ancestors or my country even if the actions happened before I was born?

Indigenous peoples were violently subjugated, their land occupied, and their people confined to reservations.

Africans were shipped across the ocean and forced to labor under arduous conditions, facing brutal consequences if they resisted. People of color were excluded from neighborhoods, schools, businesses, and even churches, suffering discrimination at every turn.

True, this is by no means the whole story of North America's complex past. But it is an undeniable part of it (as I show in my new book, *The Wars of the Lord: The Puritan Conquest of America's First People*). Whether we want to face it or not, the legacy of injustice continues to profoundly affect our communities today.

Sometimes these stories are told in such a way as to suggest that to be white is by definition to be racist. White people ought to feel guilty, it is suggested, because only guilt will drive them to do something about it. This provokes an inevitable reaction. History is downplayed or ignored because it is uncomfortable. People reject the notion that they should feel guilty for injustices committed before they were even born.

How should we as Christians feel about all of this? On one hand, the Bible clearly teaches a covenantal understanding of moral responsibility. All of Israel suffered when Achan stole some of the plunder from Jericho that had been devoted to God (Josh. 6-7). On the other hand, the prophet Ezekiel clearly declares that children are not guilty for the sins of their parents. "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:20).

The key is to distinguish between guilt and responsibility. We should not feel guilty for someone else's sin, but even if we were, Christ's death on the cross is more than sufficient to atone for all the sin that has been committed in the world. Yet it is precisely our freedom from guilt that impels us, in the

love of Christ, to bear the burdens of those who suffer. There is no indication that the good Samaritan felt guilty for what happened to the man robbed and beaten on the road to Jericho, but he did take responsibility for him. And Jesus uses this as his example of what it means to be a neighbor to those around us. "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

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*.

### Missional Living

## What is a holistic gospel witness?

A holistic gospel witness is a challenge to popular reductions of the gospel that diminish the full scope of the good news that Jesus proclaimed and lived. In Luke 4:16-21, Jesus declares that the Spirit "has anointed (him) to proclaim good news to the poor" and "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Colossians 1:20 affirms that through Jesus, God was pleased "to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven." All things! Holistic gospel witness affirms that the good news is the redemption and reconciliation of *all* things!

In contrast to this understanding, the gospel (and our mission) has often been reduced in three ways. The first reduction emphasizes accepting Jesus so that you go to heaven when you die. From this perspective, evangelism is about saving souls and involves a simple transaction between an individual and God, after which we're good to go. A second reduction defines the gospel in terms of belief statements and doctrines. In this version, being

a Christian is about believing and adhering to these scripts, again limiting the scope of God's grace and reign. A third reduction is to conclude that the gospel is only about social activity, such as caring for the poor and advocating for justice. But holistic gospel witness is so much more than any of these truncated versions.

God is about making all things new and establishing the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. The testimony *Our World Belongs to God* emphasizes the holistic nature of the mission of God's people by asserting that the Spirit calls all Christ-followers to embrace God's mission in their neighborhoods and in the world by feeding the hungry, bringing water to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and freeing the prisoner. We repent of leaving this work to a few, for this mission is central to our being.

As we seek to discover and join the Spirit anew on God's mission in our neighborhoods, may we do so with the holistic, all-encompassing, life- and world-transforming good news that "God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. ... 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away," for Jesus is making everything new! (Rev. 21:3-5).

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.



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

# Ontario Church Opens Doors to After-school Enrichment Program

## NEWS

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

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**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](mailto:news@TheBanner.org).

Cross Town Impact has offered free after-school programming to schools in and around Brockville, Ont., for 15 years. When one location decided to stop hosting, Athens (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church stepped up to help.

Cross Town Impact’s founder and director, Greg Houldcroft, attends Athens CRC with his family. The church now hosts one of the two-hour after-school programs Houldcroft runs each week at four different locations in three different cities. Cross Town Impact offers students in third through sixth grades homework help, a nutritious snack, a craft, and a positive Christian character influence. Kids who might not have another place to belong have access to loving adults and older teen volunteers focused on growing developmental assets in these young people.

“The more of these (assets) they have, the greater they thrive,” Houldcroft said. He believes that meeting kids where they are is essential to Cross Town’s mission. “We’re here to extend the arms of the church, to get right in there—build relationships, and create a safe space for them to grow and thrive.”

Most of these free, volunteer-run programs, called Impact Zone, are hosted by public schools the kids attend—something Houldcroft prayed for in the very beginning. Brochures for parents lay out the scope of the program, including its biblical content, but Houldcroft has occasionally gotten some pushback about bringing religion into a publicly funded space.

“Each year, we prayerfully apply to use the schools’ community spaces, and it is ultimately up to the principals to grant us approval,” he said. Cross Town Impact had to move from one school location at the beginning of this academic year, eventually finding a new home at Athens CRC down the street.

“If a program leaves, there is a real possibility that it doesn’t come back,” said Athens CRC elder Jason DeJong, whose children, now between 18 and 25, volunteered at Impact Zones when they were younger. “Our church was excited to offer our facility and help the program continue in Athens. Being able to share with children that God values and loves them is a gift for the whole community.”

Besides hosting the Impact Zone at no cost to Cross Town, Athens CRC supports the program with annual offerings, as do several other Christian Reformed congregations. Cross Town became a partner missionary ministry of Classis Eastern Canada in 2020.

“I advocated that their ministry fit well with Resonate (Global Mission) in terms of engaging youth, developing youth leaders, and positively impacting the community,” said Winston Visser, the classis’s outreach mission developer. The partnership doesn’t include classical financial support but recognizes “that our faith and ministry goals align, allowing Cross Town access to our resource network of CRC congregations and donors as an approved ministry,” Visser said.

—Alissa Vernon



Photo by Cross Town Impact

**Greg Houldcroft, director of Cross Town Impact, stands with students brandishing balloon swords after a retelling of the story of David and Goliath.**

## Faith Contexts for Math Equips Christian Educators

Recognizing the challenge many Christian educators face in integrating faith with mathematical instruction, Dordt University professor Valorie Zonnefeld has built an online resource with real-world applications from a Christian worldview.

Zonnefeld, a professor of mathematics, wants students to see the discipline as more than just numbers and equations. She wants them to recognize how math can be a tool for highlighting the beauty and order of creation, serving others, and making a positive impact in the world.

She launched Faith Contexts for Math ([sites.google.com/view/faith-contexts-for-math/](https://sites.google.com/view/faith-contexts-for-math/)) last year.

“Math is often viewed as a difficult subject to teach from a Christian perspective,” Zonnefeld said. But she believes that providing accessible and easy-to-absorb resources will help equip more teachers to integrate faith into their math instruction, ultimately enriching the educational experience for students in Christian settings.



**Dordt University mathematics professor Valorie Zonnefeld wants students to see mathematics as more than just numbers and equations.**

Faith Contexts for Math shows how math plays a role in everything from environmental stewardship to economic justice. “How can mathematics be used to bring restoration?” is one of 18 questions in the High School Statistics and Probability section with three suggested applications: “Analyze statistics of under-represented populations; incarceration demographics; poverty and quality of education.”

The site’s content is organized by grade level from kindergarten to high school and includes lesson plans, discussion guides, videos, and interactive materials. Zonnefeld, who attends Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa, collected the material over years of collaboration with educators, students, and colleagues. In 2016 she presented the body of work at the Heartland Teacher’s Conference, refining it to share online last spring. She said the contributions from practicing teachers and students have been integral in ensuring the content is practical and relevant.

—Dan Veeneman

## Noteworthy

**Two Christian Reformed Church members, one in British Columbia and one in Ontario, were among this winter’s recipients of a King Charles III Coronation Medal.** Chantal Huinink, a member of Waterloo (Ont.) CRC, was presented with her medal by Mike Morrice, Member of Parliament for Kitchener Centre. Eleanor McComb, a member of Willoughby CRC in Langley, B.C., was selected by Tako van Popta, MP for Langley-Aldergrove. MPs from across Canada selected recipients who “have made significant contributions to the country, a province, territory, region, or community, or an achievement abroad that brings benefit or honour to Canada.” Huinink is a speaker, author, and social justice advocate who has worked toward affordable housing, sustainable and accessible public transit, and improvements to the Canada Disability Benefit. McComb advocated for the safe passage, welcome, and settling of more than 50 refugees to the Langley area.



**Eleanor McComb**



**Chantal Huinink and MP Mike Morrice**



**The Institute of Christian Studies, a Christian graduate school founded in Toronto, Ont., in 1967, has severed ties with the Christian Reformed Church in North America** over the denomination’s

confessional interpretation that homosexual sex is unchaste and the school’s view that subsequent actions “effectively expel all those whose Christian consciences call them to dissent from the Human Sexuality Report and its conclusions.” In an open letter posted to its website Feb. 18, ICS announced the Jan. 15 decision of its board of directors to discontinue ICS’ status as a denominationally related educational institution. CRC General Secretary Zachary King and Executive Director-Canada Al Postma issued a joint statement Feb. 19 saying they received the communication “with a heavy heart.” King and Postma said in their statement that “synod does not have any immediate authority over ICS or its decisions, and so cannot do more than express its sentiments about the changed nature of the relationship,” which they expected could come from Synod 2025.

## Affiliations Shift in Classis Grand Rapids East and Beyond

The past several synods (annual general assemblies) of the Christian Reformed Church in North America affirmed and upheld a confessional interpretation that homosexual sex is a sin and recommended pastoral care that “offers to all the grace of God to enable holy living” (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 428). Synod 2024 asked congregations and pastors who had spoken or written opinions contrary to this—such as statements affirming the participation of LGBTQ+ people in the life of the church regardless of relationship status—to repent and submit to the authority of the church’s teaching. It asked churches declining to do so to work toward disaffiliation from the CRCNA.

Thirty-three congregations have made resolutions of disaffiliation since Synod 2024, with two completing the process. Ten of those congregations—the biggest contingency in any one classis—are from Classis Grand Rapids East, a classis with 17 organized congregations. These resolutions were noted at Grand Rapids East’s Jan. 16 classis meeting, where seven ministers were released to enter ministry outside of the CRCNA and one was released to enter a vocation other than ordained ministry. All seven pastors remaining in ordained ministry were welcomed into the North Grand Rapids Classis of the Reformed Church in America Feb. 18 along with 26 other CRC ministers in West Michigan who had requested ministry transfers.

Photo supplied to Religion News Service by James Early



**At the Feb. 18 meeting of the RCA’s North Grand Rapids Classis at The Community Church in Ada, Mich., 33 former or current CRC ministers were welcomed into ministry in the RCA.**

“North Grand Rapids Classis has a history of being open to ministers and churches that share common theology, faith practices, and approaches to ministry,” said classis president Katie Musick-Reynhout. She explained that in the RCA, “a minister’s ordination and membership is held by classis. CRC ministers may request to transfer to the RCA by contacting the classis. The decision to receive the transfer of their ordination is at the sole discretion of the classis, following guidelines provided by the Book of Church Order.”

North Grand Rapids stated clerk Rob Teitsma provided *The Banner* a list of the transferring pastors who consented to sharing their names: Revs. Amanda Benckhuysen, Ken Bieber, Jay Blankespoor, Kelly Buist, Randall Buursma, Phillip De Jonge, David Deters,

Julie DeGraaf Feenstra, Ronald Feenstra, Rebecca Jordan Heys, Duane Kelderman, Steven Koster, Alfred Mulder, Sherri Leisman, Thea Leunk, Lisa Meyer, Matt Postma, Adam Rodeheaver-Van Gelder, Sue Rozeboom, Christopher Schoon, Ryan Schreiber, Sarah Schreiber, Kathy Smith, Heather Strooboscher, Becky Tjapkes, Elizabeth Vander Haagen, Karl Van Harn, Len Vander Zee, Rhonda Workman, and Brad Zwiers.

### ‘Not Alone’

Several of the departing ministers shared their reasons for leaving in letters to Classis Grand Rapids East. “Regrettably, given the direction of the denomination in recent years—as evidenced by Synod’s tenor, decisions, and actions—I no longer feel at home in the CRC,” wrote Western Theological Seminary professor Sue Rozeboom, who had been ordained in Classis Grand Rapids East in 2013. “I realize I am not alone,” Rozeboom continued. “Many ministers and congregations in the CRC are feeling alienated and moving on, out of the CRC. Even as I deeply lament

the circumstances that have brought us all to this moment, my good hope for the one body of Christ remains.”

The disaffiliation process is prescribed in the supplement to Church Order Art. 38-f and includes filing a resolution to disaffiliate with the classis, two congregational votes, and a final acquiescence of the classis to the congregation’s request. Classis Chicago South acquiesced to the disaffiliation of Suburban Life CRC at its meeting Feb. 22, marking the first completed congregational disaffiliation due to the decisions of Synod 2024. Hessel Park, Roseland, and Hope CRCs are also in the process of disaffiliating from that classis, which has a total of 15 organized churches.

## Living Together With Difference

Boston Square CRC filed its resolution with Classis Grand Rapids East in October 2024 because, its council wrote, “Boston Square Christian Reformed Church is a congregation of followers of Jesus Christ who desire to continue to worship and serve God together despite our differing opinions on the definition of chastity and its confessional status.”

The RCA’s North Grand Rapids Classis also expressed a desire for “living together with difference around human sexuality” in a policy with that name adopted in 2023. It says: “We accept our divergent interpretations of scripture as genuine attempts to follow the Spirit of God obediently. ... We commit to respecting the work of ministers and consistories as they exercise local pastoral authority in decisions regarding marriage and congregational leadership.”

## Ecumenical Ties

The RCA is currently a church in communion with the CRCNA. The two denominations have several jointly affiliated congregations, and pastors ordained in one denomination can serve in the other, in accordance with Church Order Art. 8-b.

The RCA shares confessional documents with the CRCNA, but the denominations differ in their approach to polity, with differing emphasis on confessional alignment and accountability. Laura Osborne, the RCA’s coordinator of interreligious relations and an ecumenical guest of Synod 2024, clarified to that synod that neither the RCA’s articulated position on same-sex marriage nor its polity giving the responsibility of ordination of ministers to classes had changed. “We have our historical stance that marriage is between one man and one woman,” Osborne said. “Many of our classes still will not ordain or solemnize same-sex marriages. Some will.”

Synod 2024 asked the CRC’s Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to re-examine the ecumenical relationship with the RCA and make a recommendation to Synod 2025.

## What About Remaining Grand Rapids East Congregations?

Non-disaffiliating congregations in Classis Grand Rapids East are considering how they might organize to continue to be effective in ministry together. In a communication to Synod 2025, the congregations suggest creating a new classis for the Grand Rapids metro area, perhaps a better option than two other “difficult possibilities” for the congregations that have chosen to remain with the CRCNA: “either continue as a much-diminished Classis Grand Rapids East, or disband and disperse the classis to join neighboring classes,” the communication says.

“We have begun a discussion of what may be a compelling alternative: invite Grand Rapids congregations from neighboring classes to join with the remaining Classis GR East congregations to form a new ‘Grand Rapids City Classis.’” The

communication says the proposal has been shared with congregations in other classes in and around Grand Rapids’ southeast side.

## Ongoing Process

More CRC ministers are expected to be received by the RCA’s North Grand Rapids Classis in May. Classis president Musick-Reynhout said the classis “has established a 200-mile radius for receiving ministers and congregations choosing to transfer to the RCA,” and it has received requests to join “from active parish ministers, specialized ministers, and retired ministers.”

The RCA’s Holland Classis and City Classis also expect to receive former CRC ministers. City Classis adopted a “framework for living together in the midst (of) difference around issues of human sexuality” in 2018.

In the CRC, 17 of 49 classes have one or more disaffiliating congregations (according to classis minutes published as of March 12): 10 in Grand Rapids East, four in Chicago South, three in Lake Erie, two in Toronto, two in Eastern Canada, and one in each of 12 other classes.

—Alissa Vernon,  
News Editor

*The photograph used with this story is republished from a Feb. 19 Religion News Service story, according to The Banner’s license.*

# Classis Watch: Winter 2025

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

Candidates **examined and approved for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** (Arts. 6 and 10): Will Brouwers, Yanyan (Ruth) Xing, Keith Hoekstra, Jake (Minho) Jeong, and Rob Golding.

Ministers welcomed **from other denominations** (Art. 8-c): Revs. Jean Gomes and Han Sung Kim.

Ministers **loaned** (Art. 13-c): Rev. Man Sub (Lewis) Kim to Valley Korean Central Presbyterian Church, North Hills, Calif.

**Ministers released from ministry in a congregation** (Art. 17-a): Revs. Michael Vander Laan from Sahali Fellowship CRC in Kamloops, B.C.; Joe Ellis and Michelle Ellis from Telkwa (B.C.) Community Church; John Kim from Lord's Grace CRC in Tracy, Calif.; and Robert Hoekstra from Vanastra Community CRC in Clinton, Ont.

**Declared eligible for call:** Revs. George Saylor and Ram Aryal (Art. 17-c); and James A. Broekema (Art. 14-e).

## Leaving Ministry in the CRC

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

**Honorably released**, via Art. 14-b: Ronald Feenstra, Sue Rozeboom, Elizabeth Vander Haagen, James Blankespoor, Adam Rodeheaver-Van Gelder, Kathy Smith, Chris Schoon, Tim DeJonge, Tim Bossenbroek, Ken Beiber, Rhonda Workman, Hong Youn (Daniel) Kim, Ryan Swierenga, Tara Foreman, Nathaniel Schmidt, Rebecca Tjapkes, Nathan Groenewold, and Darren Colyn (effective July 1, 2025); via Art. 14-c: Eric Kas and Aaron Gunsaulus; and via Art 17-c: Josh Van Til.

**Ministers retiring, emeritus status** (Art. 18): Revs. Luis Pellecer (effective Dec. 14, 2023), Paul Lomavat (effective July 31, 2024), Kyung Soo (Paul) Jho, Larry Spalink, Leonard Kuyvenhoven, Joe Vanden Akker, Mike Wagenman, Jay Shim, Daniel Roeda, Roger Nelson, Daniel Hutt, and William Koopmans (effective June 2025).

**Resigned as minister emeritus:** Sam Cooper, Don Hekman, and Clayton Libolt.

## Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors called to specific roles within their classes** (Art. 23): Gabriel Amador, Nora Pinero, and Doug Felts (Classis Rocky Mountain); Sylvie Charliekaram and Nassar Zand (Toronto); Christopher Roberts (Hudson); Richard Garcia (Southeast U.S.); Ryan Pelton (Greater Los Angeles); Mclowly Soré (Wisconsin); Matt Tuininga (Chicago South); Lauren Tanis (Central California); Dave Gritters (Central Plains); and Justin Makowski (Lake Erie).

**Ending service as commissioned pastors** (Art. 24-d):

Jon Pollnow and Ron Baker (Ontario Southwest); Rodney Betten (Grandville); Kenneth Dryfout (Toronto); Brent Janke (Wisconsin); and Toyosi Awesu (Huron) were **honorably released**. Kevin Van Wyhe (Grandville) was **dismissed**.

Granted **commissioned pastor emeritus status** (Art. 24-e): Pablo Gaggero (Rocky Mountain) and Gerry Muller (Columbia).

## New Ministries and Ministry Changes

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

**Status changed from organized to emerging:** River Rock Church in Folsom, Calif., and Radical Grace Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

**Disbanding or closed:** Conrad (Mont.) CRC; Imagine CRC (emerging) in Belgrade, Mont.; Hillside CRC in Abbotsford, B.C.; The Well in Kelowna, B.C.; Church of One Heart CRC in Northridge, Calif.; City Life Church in Sacramento, Calif.; and Love Song Community Outreach of Fresno (effective Dec. 31, 2025).

**Disaffiliated:** Suburban Life Community CRC in La Grange Park, Ill., and the multisite Vitalpoint Church in Ilderton, Exeter, and Clinton, Ont.

**Name changes:** The L.A. (Calif.) Global Mission Church is renamed **Jesus First Reformed Church**.

## Synod

*Classes may direct requests or communications to synod according to the Rules for Synodical Procedure. The following are coming to Synod 2025:*

» A request from Classis Zeeland to highlight the Nicene Creed on the occasion of its 1,700th year. Zeeland also requests that prospective denominational board nominees be interviewed by a synodical advisory committee.



## Christians Uniting in Song and Prayer in West Michigan

- » A communication from Classis B.C. Northwest noting the “far-reaching consequences—namely the erosion of trust for individual officebearers and BCNW congregations”—of Synod 2024’s decisions related to confessional adherence.
- » A communication from Classis Grand Rapids East outlining how non-disaffiliating congregations of that classis are exploring the possibility of a new Grand Rapids City Classis that could include congregations from adjacent classes.
- » A communication from Classis Red Mesa protesting “the changes made to the process of gravam(ina) which make it hard for Classis to live in unity with the denomination.”
- » A request from Classis Central Plains to encourage churches to support the spiritual health of pastoral spouses.
- » A request from Classis Illiana to examine the CRC’s membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches, reporting no later than for Synod 2027.
- » A request from Classis Ontario Southwest to reverse the decision of Synod 2024 requiring officebearers to sign the Covenant for Officebearers every year. The classis says the requirement implies officebearers’ first signings are invalid, something synod can’t rightly determine for “each and every officebearer in the denomination.”
- » A request from Classis Toronto to study the possibility of adding a category of “Formal Act of Confessional Submission” to the Church Order’s instructions on agreement with the Covenant for Officebearers. This could be an alternative to resigning from office if an officebearer cannot resolve their intellectual difficulties with an aspect of the church’s confessions, the classis suggests.

—Kristen Parker



Photo by Christians Uniting in Song and Prayer

**A choir rehearsal took place Jan. 26 at Second Reformed Church in Zeeland, Mich., in anticipation of the service in observance of the International Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.**

Christians Uniting in Song and Prayer invites people from various faith traditions to joint worship services to promote unity within the larger church.

About 125 people came to its observance of the International Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in late January. Hosted at Second Reformed Church in Zeeland, Mich., the event also marked the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed.

Christians Uniting in Song and Prayer is based in Holland, Mich., and its board includes several members with ties to the Christian Reformed Church, including two retired pastors.

Board member Gerrit Haagsma, a retired CRC pastor, said confessing the ecumenical creeds with people from different Christian traditions is important to him. “I think that the Nicene Creed is especially powerful, since our services are focused on Christ, who unites us,” he said.

Christians Uniting in Song and Prayer began in 2017 with a joint service commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Since then, the group has hosted several services each year that feature singing and reading of Scripture.

A choir of singers from more than 15 West Michigan churches led singing at the January service. “Many churches no longer have large choirs as part of their services,” Haagsma said. “Three times a year CUSP brings together people who love to sing.”

Mary Johnson, a Roman Catholic who chairs the CUSP board, said that division in the church is rooted in our sinfulness. We tend to cling to our own beliefs and see those with different views as not being trustworthy or having ill will, she explained.

“We have this calling to be witnesses to the good news, to spread the good news,” Johnson said. “When we’re fighting with each other and disrespecting each other, that compromises (our witness) and inhibits our effectiveness.”

Haagsma hopes CUSP can expand its reach to young people and to people from culturally diverse churches.

The group will host a Taizé prayer service in Holland, Mich., the Monday of Holy Week in April.

—Greg Chandler

# Pastor's New Jersey Homestead Takes Community 'Back to the Garden'

The parsonage of Unity Christian Reformed Church in Prospect Park, N.J., has become an important part of commissioned pastor AJ Santino's mission in his neighborhood.

Santino, his wife, Larissa, and their four children, whom they homeschool, tend the land and promote a shared community as Mission Living Homestead, a name inspired by their garage gym ministry, Mission Gym.

The property includes a backyard chicken coop and garden, a deck covered with pots and planters, and a driveway filled with plants in grow bags, a soft-sided alternative to plastic or ceramic pots. "We want to maximize every square foot of sunlight that we can," Larissa Santino said.

The Santinos' shift to becoming more reliant on the Lord and the work of their own hands began in April 2020 when a neighbor offered them some of his blackberry bushes. "He was just sharing," Larissa said. In 2022 they acquired five young chickens, and by 2024 the family was also growing green beans, peppers, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, and corn, as well as composting on site. "He (Santino) needs



**A surprising bean harvest.**



**AJ and Larissa Santino's four children work in Mission Living Homestead's enclosed garden.**

more space and is asking God for 10-20 acres," the September 2024 minutes of Classis Hackensack note.

Mission Living Homestead is about doing life with people in the community. "Self-sufficiency is not sustainable," AJ Santino said. The homesteading space attracts people looking for healthier food options and those looking to share what they have with others. Some are learning to make natural skin care products, others are baking sourdough bread, and one person is making their own ice cream. "We want to get to a place where we can barter and teach each other," Larissa said.

It's about recapturing a little bit of Eden, Larissa realized one afternoon while AJ was working on a sermon and she was in the chicken coop: "This is about being back in the garden. It's about teaching people how to walk with the Father. It's about how the gospel changes lives. This is about teaching people how to walk with God in the garden."

—Callie Feyen

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Gary Peter Hutt*

1937-2025

Gary Hutt, who died Feb. 22 at the age of 87, often said he was just a farm boy whom God made into a pastor.

Born in the Netherlands, one of 14 children, Gary was 10 when the family immigrated to the U.S. He left high school at age 16 to help run the family farm, but later graduated from Calvin College (now University) and taught for two years at Grand Rapids Christian High School. Following the unexpected death of his and his wife's first baby in 1964, Gary felt called to ministry.

Graduating from Calvin Seminary, Gary was ordained in 1969, then served a total of seven congregations in Arizona, Illinois, Minnesota, Oregon, and Utah, four of them with Christian Reformed Home Missions (now a part of Resonate Global Mission). Concentrating on helping churches grow, Gary led 30 Summer Workshop in Missions teams, was involved in four church-building expansions, and championed ecumenical cooperation through events such as a combined Palm Sunday service with 26 churches.

Gary passed down his love for God, fishing, and pancakes to his children and grandchildren.

Predeceased by son David, Gary is survived by Roberta, his wife of 62 years; five children and their spouses; and 11 grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

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**Christian  
Reformed  
Church**



# Building Community Through Media

By Brian Clark, ReFrame Ministries

**I**n a world increasingly connected through digital platforms, the role of media ministry has never been more critical. For millions of people who live in remote areas or places with limited access to churches, media ministry offers a lifeline—a way to hear the gospel, grow in faith, and connect with other believers.

That's why, for more than 85 years, the Christian Reformed Church has been sharing the gospel through its international media ministry, ReFrame Ministries (formerly known as Back to God Ministries or the Back to God Hour).

Through radio broadcasts, printed devotionals, YouTube programs, and online communities, ReFrame's 10 language ministry teams bridge geographical, linguistic, and cultural gaps to share the transformative message of God's love. These efforts not only bring spiritual nourishment to individuals, but also foster deeper connections among families and communities—often in regions where open worship is met with opposition. As the following stories from India and Indonesia show, media ministry is a vital tool for discipleship, offering hope and renewal even in the most challenging circumstances.

#### Ambatoli in India

Some members of the village of Ambatoli, located deep inside a dense Indian forest, greeted their guests with excitement, while others were fearful.

The visit from ReFrame staff in late 2024 came at the request of the village's 13 Christians, who had been meeting in a villager's home to watch ReFrame's Hindi ministry program on YouTube. The group wanted to hear more from the program producers. When they received that visit, it came with a special surprise.

While members of the small house church speak the Hindi language they were hearing on the radio, their heart language is Mundari. And as a result of their initial request, this meeting marked the official launch of a Mundari translation of the program they had been watching on YouTube: *Jidan Daru*, or *Tree of Life*.

"Around 50 people attended the meeting," ReFrame's Hindi Ministry team leader\* said, "including members of the house church as well as believers from other churches who live in nearby villages."

While in Ambatoli, the Hindi ministry team shared a biblical message similar to the content offered on the YouTube

**A ReFrame listener group in Indonesia comes together for fellowship.**



Residents of Ambatoli are presented with a new program from ReFrame's ministry partners in India.

program and had a time of fellowship with the Christians and seekers who had gathered. They also shared additional resources to allow the villagers to continue accessing God's Word online. These resources are especially requested because of a rise in opposition to in-person Christian gatherings.

"Many groups and committees have been formed to attack gospel work," ReFrame's Hindi ministry leader said. "Churches and mission workers are targeted, attacked, and falsely accused. Sometimes groups come and attack suddenly where people are gathered and doing worship and prayer in homes."

In response, ReFrame's Hindi ministry team has been conducting online discipleship groups on WhatsApp, a secure messaging app. The groups allow seekers to ask questions and access materials safely.

#### Yakobus in Indonesia

Yakobus once believed his spiritual strength surpassed that of the people who came to him for guidance.

As the leader of a prayer fellowship in Indonesia, Yakobus was diligent in his devotion to the Christian faith. Day after day, he prayed fervently for others, offering comfort and intercession to people in need. Other Christians in the area looked up to him, and he grew accustomed to being a spiritual anchor for his community.

But pride had quietly crept into Yakobus' heart.



Yakobus shares how his faith and family have been renewed through the support of ReFrame Ministries.

resented the time Yakobus spent serving others. They argued frequently, and their relationship suffered.

Yet as Yakobus and his wife joined the listener community together, their relationship dynamic began to change. The lessons and reflective questions discussed in the group provided a framework for meaningful conversations at home. They started to pray and meditate on Scripture as a family, setting aside time to grow in faith together.

"My wife now understands the importance of ministry," Yakobus explained with gratitude. "She no longer complains when I divide my time between work and service. Instead, she supports me wholeheartedly."

For Yakobus and his family, the impact of the listener community has been extraordinary, he said. Their faith has grown, their understanding of God's Word has deepened, and their family relationships have strengthened.


"We are so grateful to God," Yakobus said. "Through this YKB community we have received incredible spiritual blessings—not just me, but my entire family."

#### Why Media Ministry Matters

These stories are just two examples of how media ministry is helping to change lives across Indonesia, India, and the world. In areas where churches are few and far between, listener communities offer something invaluable: a space for believers to connect, grow in their faith, and support one another.

Through radio broadcasts, YouTube programs, and small community gatherings, people like Yakobus are discovering God's grace in new ways. They're learning that faith is not about pride or comparison, but about humility, love, and reliance on God.

Prayers and support for ReFrame Ministries allow local partners to create and distribute gospel-centered content that reaches even the most remote areas of Indonesia and India. It helps to establish listener communities where families are transformed, relationships are healed, and faith takes root.

"When you give to ReFrame Ministries, you're doing more than funding a program," added Joseph W. Curtis, ReFrame's director of advancement. "You're helping people like Yakobus and his family experience the life-changing power of God's Word. You're planting seeds of faith in communities where the gospel is desperately needed." 

*\* Names have been left out for security.*

"I felt that my faith was greater than the faith of those who sought my help," Yakobus admitted.

Then Yakobus joined a listener group established by YKB, a local partner of ReFrame Ministries. This group, led by a pastor named Meshak, gathers weekly to discuss God's Word, guided by ReFrame radio broadcasts and YouTube programs created for communities where churches are scarce.

For Yakobus, the turning point came through the group's reflections and discussions of God's Word. These messages reached him in a way that sermons or prayers never had.

"We watch and hold the discussions every Friday in the community," Yakobus said. "Through the reflections, I realized that I am nothing without God."

The listener community—made possible by faithful supporters in the CRC—helped Yakobus see his prayer life differently. Today he understands that prayer is not a sign of superiority, but an opportunity to connect with God and show care for others. This profound shift in perspective has humbled him, deepening his faith and his understanding of God's grace.

This has had a ripple effect. For years, Yakobus' dedication to church ministry created tension at home. His wife, overwhelmed by their household's financial pressures, often

# How Indigenous Ministries Live the Gospel

## “WELCOME TO OUR CEREMONIAL

garden,” boomed Bert Adema from an outdoor stage set up at the Indigenous Christian Fellowship in Regina, Sask. This vibrant space was once an abandoned lot but now contains benches, a fire pit, and murals that tell stories of resilience and reconciliation.

Adema, director of ICF, was on stage welcoming Indigenous Christian musicians to open the ceremonial garden with an evening concert. Moments like this, when cultural identity and Christian faith come together, are what led to ICF’s founding.

The Christian Reformed Church supports urban Indigenous ministry centers in Regina, in Winnipeg, Man., and in Edmonton, Alta. Each shares the gospel by caring for vulnerable people and meeting urgent needs for food, clothing, and counseling. Yet the CRC’s Indigenous Ministry goes beyond addressing immediate struggles to also include celebrations of resilience and taking pride in Indigenous culture. Christian worship in the new ceremonial garden was one example of this.

The Indigenous Family Centre in Winnipeg also exists to create gospel hope for the families it serves by investing in the faith formation of parents. This summer the center offered family activities such as a trip to Bird’s Hill Provincial Park. For many, this was a rare opportunity to experience a natural setting, as limited funds often keep them confined to the Selkirk Street neighborhood.

Due to the legacy of residential schools run by churches, there can be distrust in Indigenous communities about church outreach. The services offered at Indigenous ministry centers allow volunteers to develop relationships with and regain the trust of Indigenous communities before sharing the good news of Jesus.



Indigenous dancers and musicians led a time of worship and celebration at the opening of a new ceremonial garden in Regina, Sask.

“Repentance is a change of mind, a change of heart, and a change of hand,” said Adrian Jacobs, the CRC’s senior leader for Indigenous justice and reconciliation. “You have to do something different with your hands (before you can expect reconciliation).”

Hearts Exchanged is one way the CRC is having a conversation about changing minds, hearts, and hands so that people are equipped to share the gospel in relationship with Indigenous people. Hearts Exchanged is an eight-month learning and action journey designed to help Reformed Christians go beyond the headlines to wrestle with how churches can become places of belonging for Indigenous people. It does this through exploring the history and theology that led to residential schools and other injustices. Learning from this material helps non-Indigenous Christians be more aware of different cultural expressions of Christianity.

Reflecting on this topic at a recent Interdisciplinary Student Conference at The King’s University in Edmonton, Jacobs said, “At the heart of love is respect and doing what is right. If you don’t respect someone and treat them right, then you do not love them.” This is what living the gospel means in Indigenous ministry. **B**

—Victoria Veenstra,  
CRC Communications



Watch a short video from a concert celebrating the ceremonial garden at Indigenous Christian Fellowship in Regina, Sask.

## The View From Here

## Living Out Our Collective Calling

**IN NORTH AMERICA**, we have automated solutions for labor-intensive work. A cement mixer with a couple of operators, for example, can quickly pour a massive concrete slab. In contrast, much of the world works on the principle of the ant. There is a Haitian proverb *Men anpil, chay pa lou* (Many hands make light work). In Haiti I've witnessed a team of 100 people pour cement for an entire building in one day with only shovels and buckets.

One critical reason for the existence of a denomination (or a community of churches) such as the Christian Reformed Church in North America is to “live out a collective calling” (Church Order Art. 39). Together, our churches can provide more resources for thriving ministry and can spread the gospel farther than we could on our own.

Our CRC forebears established agencies and educational institutions because they recognized that no one congregation (or classis) can provide all the resources our churches need to thrive. Today, we have four denominational agencies (ReFrame Ministries, Resonate Global Mission, Thrive, and World Renew), two educational institutions (Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin University), and three uniquely

Working together,  
we Christian  
Reformed “ants”  
get a lot done.

Canadian justice ministries (Centre for Public Dialogue, Indigenous Ministries, and Intercultural Ministry). These organizations assist CRCNA congregations in their work of educating young people, forming leaders, sending missionaries, planting churches, discipling believers through media, supporting congregations, and providing relief and community development globally. Working together, we Christian Reformed “ants” get a lot done.

Living out a collective calling also means aligning our resources to go further together. Collectively, CRCNA churches and members created the Our Journey ministry plan with four milestones we wish to work toward:

cultivating practices of prayer and spiritual practices, listening to the voices of every generation, growing in unity in diversity, and sharing the gospel. (Check out Our Journey at [crcna.org/OurJourney](http://crcna.org/OurJourney) to learn more.) These four priority areas were discerned through a broad listening process with church leaders and members across our denomination. CRCNA staff members support the ministry plan by continuing to listen to, consult with, walk alongside, and create resources for CRCNA congregations to live out their collective calling. Walking together, ants can go a longer distance.

CRCNA regional bodies (classes) help member churches live out their collective calling through resourcing and walking together. Classes support regional work such as campus ministry, church planting, community mission, leadership development, and church and pastor health. Our classes also have ministry plans that help their churches do more together.

Living out a collective calling can be complex. Churches minister in very different contexts. There are CRCNA congregations from the concrete canyons of Manhattan to the gravel intersections of the Great Plains. We are a binational denomination, with churches in Canada and the United States (and a few in Venezuela). The languages spoken in our denomination include Korean, Spanish, Navajo, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Khmer, Tagalog, and many others. While maintaining our common convictions, we make space for our churches to minister in their contexts—Canadian or American, Indigenous or immigrant, urban or rural.

Finally, living out a collective calling can be difficult. Sometimes through conversation we discover our convictions aren't as aligned as we hoped.



People work together to construct the CRC church of Jaquet, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.



## Pray for Synod 2025

**ALL MEMBERS** of the Christian Reformed Church in North America are invited to join in prayer for Synod 2025.

For 40 days before synod begins, prayer participants will receive daily emails with a Bible text, a prayer, and suggested questions for reflection or conversation. All of these prayers will reflect the theme of Synod 2025, "Journey with Jesus," based on the Emmaus Road story of Luke 24, the theme also used at the 10 Gather events throughout Canada and the U.S. in the past year.

"The 40 days of prayer are written by CRC members, missionaries, pastors, and staff," explained Jon Hoekema, the denomination's prayer shepherd. "They are written by young and old, in various languages, with English translations for all, reflecting the beautiful diversity of the CRCNA."

Writers include pastors, chaplains, church planters, missionaries, university and seminary students, young adults, and people with disabilities from CRC congregations and ministries around the world.

"What these writers have in common is a commitment to the themes of the Emmaus road story," Hoekema said. "They reflect on where we have had disappointments or unmet expectations, the times we've failed to see God at work or didn't trust what he was doing, and also a celebration of those times when we did recognize Jesus in our midst and have been clothed with power to share the good news with others."


The 40 days of prayer will begin May 4 and will conclude as delegates gather in Ancaster, Ont., on June 12 for Synod 2025. During synod there will be focused times of prayer by delegates and morning prayers with anyone who wishes to participate. For those who aren't delegates, Hoekema will offer daily opportunities to pray with a prayer guide during 30-minute prayer vigils and with daily prayers on Facebook.

To learn more about how to participate in prayer for synod, to receive a free prayer guide as a weekly PDF or as daily emails, or to sign up for the 30-minute prayer vigils, visit [crcna.org/pray](http://crcna.org/pray).



Sometimes we speak to each other in ways that grieve our Father. We are sinful people living in sinful cultures, and we soak in media that can divide us and foster distrust. Our great enemy and accuser has been busy fracturing and separating our churches. It is so much easier to tear down than to build up.

Nevertheless, Scripture shows that we can live out a collective calling. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 is a great example. It explains the principle of the ant: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. ... If two lie down together, they will keep warm. ... A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." In Acts, we also see the early church living out its collective calling by sending missionaries and providing for people in need (Acts 4:32-37; 6:1-7; 11:27-30; 13:1-3).

Living out our collective calling has never been easy, and it seems to be getting harder. But it continues to be a way that we can resource our churches and go further in ministry. It is not just about learning from the wisdom of the ant (Prov. 30:25). It's about obedience. "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:3-6). May God empower us to live out our collective calling. 



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](http://TheBanner.org).

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Prayer volunteers Jodi Gillmore and Eileen Christofferson were on site for Synod 2024 to offer prayer support.

## Starting a Christian School in the ‘Right Place’

**KIDS IN THE LUCKY SUMMER** neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya, have big dreams, and one Christian school is giving students there a shot at achieving their goals with help from Resonate Global Mission’s Educational Care training.

Resonate Global Mission missionary Mwikali Wambua says that many people consider Lucky Summer only a tiny step up from Nairobi’s expansive slums. The air is full of dust and exhaust from buses, trucks, cars, and motorbikes that squeeze down rutted roads. Apartment buildings—some half-finished and vacant—tower over the streets, and electricity and water services are unreliable.

Some of the kids in Lucky Summer daydream of being professional soccer players someday. Others aspire to be doctors, nurses, or journalists. Many want to make a little more money and live in better conditions than they do now, and they want to be able to support their families.

The reality for these children, however, is that they face many barriers to their dreams—starting with their education.

Even though Lucky Summer has 50 public schools, classrooms can be overcrowded and resources can be scarce. Teachers are often overworked, and many have limited training. This makes it tough for students to get the education and support they need in order to grow, learn, and pursue their dreams.

But when Lucy Otieno, a teacher who was working in a nearby neighborhood, participated in Educational Care training led by Wambua, God gave her a vision to start a Christian school in Lucky Summer.

Educational Care provides biblically based training to equip teachers such as Otieno with a biblical worldview and Christ-centered teaching practices. Through the training, teachers come to see their work as not only a job, but a calling from God to care for and disciple children.

Just a few years after Oaknest Christian School began, it has become a safe haven in Lucky Summer. Located along one of the neighborhood’s narrow side streets, Oaknest’s colorful gate welcomes students and their families into a playground surrounded by classrooms built from brightly painted shipping containers. It’s a small space tucked between apartment buildings, but it is making a big difference in the community.



At Oaknest Christian School, children in the Lucky Summer neighborhood receive a good education while they are also disciplined by adults who care for them and see their jobs as a calling from God.

“We help the children to see everything through the lens of God,” said Otieno. “Oaknest is a ‘shalom’ community where everyone can find peace.”

At Oaknest, children receive a good education, but they also are disciplined by caring adults who see their jobs as a calling from God. Children in Lucky Summer need cheerleaders, and Oaknest’s teachers know each student by name and will boast about some of their emerging special talents, from dancing and singing to math and Swahili. Otieno said she has seen students grow in their self-esteem and in their identity as children of God.

That gospel transformation ripples out from Oaknest throughout the Lucky Summer neighborhood. Several students have asked their families to pray with them and attend church. Even people who don’t have children at Oaknest know that this school is a safe space; people often drop in to talk with Otieno and to ask for prayer and advice.

Dorine Daisy Adhiambo, one of Oaknest’s teachers, said that Educational Care opened her eyes to how a Christian school should be.

“Oaknest is the best,” she said. “This school is in the right place.”

—Cassie Marcionetti,  
Resonate Global Mission

## Supporting Students' Learning in Honduras

**IN MANY SCHOOLS** in our own neighborhoods, support for different abilities and learning styles is expected. But in other schools around the world, students with learning difficulties are overlooked, often because teachers have such full classrooms that resources and time are in short supply.

Genesis Garcia Baquedano is 8 years old and lives with her older brother, Anderson, and their parents in Honduras. Her parents work hard to support their family. Genesis's father is a painter who struggles to find consistent work, and her mother is a street vendor who spends long hours away from home.

According to her teachers, Genesis is a collaborative and committed student who participates well in class, but she was struggling with reading, writing, and math. Her teachers recommended that Genesis attend an educational intervention program farther from home. The family could not afford to pay for transportation to the program or for Genesis's mother to take time away from work to accompany her.

Through God's grace, Genesis and her family were able to join the Strong Communities program facilitated by World Renew's local partner, Association for a More Just Society (in Spanish, Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa, or ASJ). Through the program, Genesis attended academic support sessions, where she impressed her tutors with her perseverance and enthusiasm. Now her teachers praise the program for the significant progress Genesis has been making at school.

Genesis's mother also appreciates the impact the program has had on her daughter. She says Genesis is very motivated when doing her schoolwork,



Genesis and her family have renewed hope in the promise of education.

and the improvements in her grades are a testimony to her hard work. "I feel very happy that the program has reached the community," she said. "I wish that in my time there had been programs like this that help families be able to be better."

—*Karina Guevara and Elmer Salinas,*  
*Association for a More Just Society*

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## Decomposers, Resurrect!

**HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT** about decomposers? Without decomposers such as fungi, mushrooms, and bacteria, our world would be littered with the remains of every plant, animal, and person who ever died on Earth.

But because God is so good, God has orchestrated creation to take care of its own dead bodies through decomposers.

If you buy bananas from a store on a Monday, they might be starting to turn brown and icky by Friday. In the back of your refrigerator you might find a strawberry with mold on it. Both of these fruits are being broken down by decomposers.

When fruit is picked, it's dead. It's not rotten, but it will never grow anymore because it's been picked from its living plant. And it's only a matter of time until the decomposers in your kitchen—microscopic bacteria and fungi—find the fruit and start to rot it on a quest to return everything dead on earth to dirt in which new things

can grow. With your parents' or guardians' permission, try this fascinating experiment:

Put some lunch leftovers on a disposable plate into a large plastic zipper bag and seal it. Write the date on the bag. Allow the bag to sit undisturbed for several months. You will be able to watch the decomposers at work. Your potato salad will turn green, then white. Then it will turn into dirt and perhaps even sprout a mushroom. It has returned to the earth. The same will occur with your turkey sandwich and your string cheese. Decomposers are amazing!

God uses decomposers to sustain and multiply other life using the materials provided by dead things. God brings new life through things that have died.

Jesus died on the cross on Good Friday, but the story doesn't end there. Jesus arose to new life, defeating sin and death! We serve a resurrected Savior, and we can look forward to our own resurrections someday!

We rejoice because Jesus arose to new life. Nothing amazing stays dead because our God is a God of resurrection. Nature tells this story every day. Decomposers remind us that God will never give up on creation and that God constantly renews beauty and life on earth.

Think about these Bible verses and rejoice in God's resurrection power!

Ecclesiastes 12:7: "And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

John 11:25: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." **B**



Amy Kinney is originally from Michigan but now lives in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. When she is not teaching, she can be found singing or exploring God's creation.





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# Prepared or Ready?

By Chris deWinter

**W**e weren't prepared. COVID-19 restrictions were just winding down, and we weren't yet getting very many drop-in visitors at the church offices. Besides, it was spring break for school families, so we weren't counting on seeing many people.

But the doorbell rang—and we weren't prepared for the way what happened next would set us on a completely unknown and unexpected path.

At the door on this warm spring day, backlit by bright sunlight shining on new buds on the cedar hedges of our parking lot, stood a young man next to a family of four. "Is this a church?" the man asked. He explained that he had met this family at a bus stop and that they didn't speak English. With help from Google Translate, he learned they were refugees from Colombia. They had been picked up crossing the border into Canada at a park. Their passports were confiscated, and they were told to appear at a processing hearing three weeks later. They had been given one night in a local hotel but were left to fend for themselves after that.

Through reasons I can only guess were given to him by the Holy Spirit, he thought a church might be able to help. Our church, Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Langley, B.C., was the top internet search result and just 500 meters from the bus stop.

Opening wide the doors to the church, I invited them all in. I asked Matthew, the young man, if he wanted to join us too. His reply was a straightforward "No, thank you. I think I've done my part." Turning around, Matthew walked away, disappearing into

the afternoon sun. To this day I still wonder if he was an angel sent to help this family find us.

With obvious fatigue clinging to their frames, this young family of four timidly entered our church. What we weren't prepared for was how they would enter our lives. At this point, my colleague, Pastor Kevin, joined us as we brought out some water and a light snack to share. Providentially, Kevin can fumble his way through a Spanish conversation because of Immanuel's 25-year history with mission partners in East Tijuana and Rosarito, Mexico. We learned the family's names: parents Andrés and Laura, Natalia, almost 12, and Angie, still cradled in Laura's arms.\* We learned they fled Colombia through Mexico, crossed into the United States, and used the last of their money to fly north to Bellingham, Wash. After walking across the U.S./Canada border, they were picked up by Canada Border Services and brought to a refugee processing center. At the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada office there was no Spanish interpreter available to help Andrés and Laura understand what was going on or what would happen next.

Amazed by their story, we wanted to learn more and find out how we could help. For that we called Maria, a member of our congregation who speaks Spanish fluently. Over speakerphone she translated for us. The comfort and familiarity of the language produced a visible sigh of relaxation as Andrés and Laura eased back into the soft chairs in the church lobby. As we listened, it became clear we needed to help them with more than just a listening ear.

As I said, we weren't exactly prepared for this. We didn't have protocols

or procedures in place for a refugee family showing up at our door. This sort of thing doesn't ordinarily happen in our neighborhood. Immanuel does have a refugee sponsorship committee. We have worked in the past to bring two different families from different countries and are well on our way to bringing in a third. But that work has procedures and denominational support staff and clear governmental requirements. That work takes years to organize and can move at a manageable (and sometimes unbearably slow) pace. Andrés and his family were here now. The need was immediate, and we didn't have time to make plans. We had to respond.

I called a member of the refugee sponsorship committee and explained what was happening. Within an hour, Andrés, Laura, and the girls were heading over to John and Pearl's house, moving into guest rooms for an unknown length of time. Just a week earlier, John and Pearl had prayed together and felt God laying on their hearts a need to prepare for refugees. In their minds, they were preparing for emergency refugees from the war in Ukraine because Canada was receiving thousands fleeing that conflict. Yet John and Pearl opened their home and their hearts to this unexpected family, finding a way to communicate with broken English, a little Spanish, Google Translate, and a lot of gesturing. But sharing meals and traveling to legal appointments has a way of bringing people together.

We weren't prepared. But we were ready, and we were willing.

A nurse from our church family came to visit with a bag full of health care supplies for the whole family. Pearl, already a tutor in the school system,

began tutoring 12-year-old Natalia in English and worked to get her into the school system. John, a cut-flower grower, provided work for Andrés so he could provide for his family.

In our gathered worship we started bilingual greetings: “*El Señor esté contigo*” (“The Lord be with you”) and “*Bienvenidos a nuestra iglesia*” (“Welcome to our church”). Members who had done mission work in Mexico and Costa Rica dusted off their Spanish and intentionally sought out Andrés and Laura each week. At the end of the service everyone was charged with one voice: “*Vaya con Dios—Go with God.*”

During those weeks that turned to months, Pearl said, “Is this hard? You bet it is! But it’s also stretching us, teaching us hospitality. ... They have arrived at our church for a reason. They are truly a delight, and every evening at supper we find something to laugh about.”

We weren’t prepared, but we were ready—ready to go where God called, ready to trust when we didn’t know, ready to work on behalf of those in need, and ready to love and live with whomever God brought to our doors.

On Easter Sunday we opened our worship service with the following declaration:


**We weren’t  
prepared. But we  
were ready, and  
we were willing.**

“Christ is risen! *Cristo ha resucitado!*” That year, the church family responded just a little more boldly: “He is risen indeed! *En verdad ha resucitado!*” Together we sang a bilingual version of Hillsong’s “King of Kings / *Rey de Reyes.*” At the communion table we received Christ crucified and risen; serving Andrés and Laura the body and blood of Jesus, we tasted resurrection together that day. From fatigued and timid to hopeful and loved, we sang as one: “*Gloria al Padre, nuestro Dios; Gloria al Hijo, el Salvador; Gloria al Santo Espíritu. Rey de reyes nadie hay como tú*”—“Glory to God our Father; glory to the Son, our Savior; glory to the Holy Spirit. King of kings, there is no one like you.”

Andrés, Laura, and the girls have moved to Vancouver to be closer to the Immigration Settlement Services

Welcome Centre and the worker assigned to their file. Andrés is working full time, and Natalia is in school finishing eighth grade. However, they visit with John and Pearl every few months, and every once in a while they join us for worship on Sundays. Their story isn’t over. Border Services still has their passports, but they are safe and happy, ready for what comes next.

And so are we. We can’t prepare for everything, but we can be ready to go when God calls. One thing I’ve learned is that a God who raises the dead can do everything—and because of that, I can be ready for anything.

*\*Refugee names have been changed because their story is ongoing. Church members are identified by their real names.* 



Chris deWinter is the lead pastor at Immanuel CRC in Langley, B.C. He enjoys watching his son’s soccer and hockey games, losing to his daughter in board games, and spending the spring playing softball and the summer hiking mountains.

1. Have you or your church been involved in sponsoring refugees? Can you recall the experience?
2. Can you share an occasion where you were not prepared but still ready?
3. Have you experienced a multilingual worship service? How did you feel during and after the service?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)



## God's Red Mittens

I began our familiar ritual, knowing what to expect—or so I thought.



Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer and a member of Covenant CRC in St. Catharines, Ont.

**CATHY SAT ON A BENCH** by the library, smoking a cigarette and clutching a cup of coffee. Tiny, wizened, and perennially distraught, Cathy looked up when I called her name.

Over the past several years I would occasionally see her on my walks. One of my first encounters with her was as she stood near the entrance of my bank. When I exited the building, she asked me for cash. I told her I didn't hand out money, but I asked if I could take her to Tim Horton's next door and buy her some breakfast. She agreed.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Cathy," she replied.

Whenever I saw Cathy after that, I called her by name. Each time, she looked startled. It was one thing I could do for her: say her name and listen to her story, which was always the same treadmill of anger, frustration, and hopelessness.

"There's no heat in my building," Cathy complained. "There hasn't been heat for the last year. And my landlord doesn't care. And they put in new windows, but the draft still comes through." And on and on.

I'm not sure how often I heard her litany.

I saw Cathy again by the library on a bright, cool autumn day. Bundled up in her winter coat, she struck me as fiercely frustrated, yet achingly vulnerable.

I began our familiar ritual, knowing what to expect—or so I thought.

"Hi, Cathy."

"There's no heat in my building. There hasn't been heat for the last year." And on and on. But suddenly Cathy changed course.

She glanced at my thin, red mittens, perfect for cool autumn days.

"Those are nice," she said.

*Oh, yes, I like them, too,* I thought.

As Cathy looked admiringly at my mittens, I felt a nudge: "Give them to her." I recognized the Holy Spirit's prompting.

"You want them?" I asked.

"Sure!" Cathy exclaimed. "You don't mind?"

"No," I answered. Well, I did a bit, but the Holy Spirit's urging was clear. They were, after all, God's red mittens. Not mine.

"But do you have another pair?" Cathy asked, all concern now—or so it seemed.


"I do," I said, handing her the mittens. I had another old pair of thin, red mittens in my gardening toolbox. I could give them a wash and use them.

Recently I met Cathy again outside the library. She launched into her litany. As she talked, I noticed she wasn't wearing the red mittens I gave her even though there was a chill in the air. Where were they?

I was wearing my second pair of thin red mittens, washed and reclaimed from my gardening toolbox. But Cathy didn't ask for them.

As her litany concluded, I wanted to be on my way. "Jesus loves you," I said. "Do you know that?"

Without hesitation, Cathy smiled broadly and exclaimed, "I've been baptized!" I gave her a thumbs-up and walked away.

I don't know if Cathy still has my red mittens—God's red mittens, really—or if they've been lost. But it doesn't matter. Despite all appearances, Cathy's not lost. She's been found by Jesus, and I'm glad Jesus asked me to help keep Cathy's hands warm—for a day, or two, or three. 

## Monday Morning Mission

Each of us has an important part to play in God's big story of redemption.

**AT 4:31 P.M. FEB. 20, 2018**, billionaire Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, posted this Instagram message for his millions of followers: "Installation has begun—500 ft tall, all mechanical, powered by day/night thermal cycles, synchronized at solar noon, a symbol for long-term thinking—the #10,000YearClock is coming together thx to the genius of Danny Hillis, Zander Rose & the whole Clock team!"

Along with the announcement, Bezos posted a video from inside a 12-foot-wide hole descending into darkness from a high point in the Sierra Diablo mountains in West Texas, where construction crews aided by heavy machinery were carefully lowering enormous steel gears into the dimly lit depths.

The social media post and video point to a curious and complex project currently under construction: the Bezos-funded Clock of the Long Now. The clock is an enormous \$42 million mechanical timepiece housed inside a mountain and designed to keep accurate time for the next 10,000 years.

By measuring time in centuries rather than minutes, months, or years, the project hopes to inspire long-term thinking resulting in practical action for a more sustainable and responsible future. The Long Now Foundation was established in 1996 to oversee the clock's construction. Board member Stewart Brand summarized the project's goal: "Once you hold these longer timeframes in mind, you start to raise the question of what you do on Monday. Does your behavior start to reflect this larger frame?"

Designed to attract visitors, the clock will accomplish its Monday-morning mission in three unique ways.

First, its remote location will allow people making a pilgrimage to the site time to reflect on personal and

communal actions related to sustainable practices. The strenuous journey over rugged terrain will mirror the effort and stamina needed to make the changes necessary for a better future.

Second, carved into the mountain are five anniversary chambers to mark one, 10, 100, 1,000, and 10,000 years. Inside the one-year anniversary chamber, an eight-foot-tall model of the solar system will display the moon, the six planets visible from Earth, and the interplanetary probes launched in the 20th century. Ideas for the 10-year chamber are being considered, but the other chambers will be designed by future generations. As benchmarks for progress, the chambers and corresponding dates will draw attention to the clock and generate ongoing conversation.

Third, visitors will be able to interact with the clock's mechanism by manually winding its main gear. When fully wound, once per day, clock hands will spring to life to display the precise time while a chiming mechanism with 10 bells rings out one of 3.5 million melody combinations. The chime will never repeat so that each day's visitors will have a truly unique and powerful experience that will echo in their memories for years.

Psalm 90 is clear that heaven and earth measure time in very different ways. In verse 4, the author writes, "A thousand years in your (God's) sight are like a day that has just gone by." As the psalm continues, verse after verse pushes and pulls at our imagination, stretching our limited understanding to the breaking point.

In contrast to the way eternity measures time, the psalmist, grasping for metaphors, describes human life as windswept dust, withering grass, and a faint dream. With these striking images, the psalmist highlights the intense brevity of human



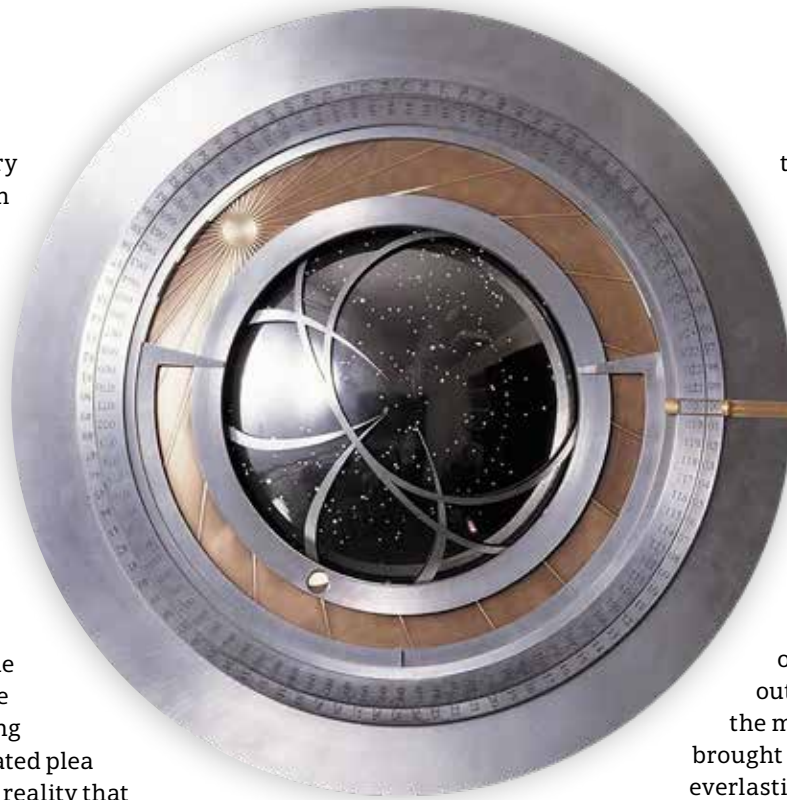
Sam Gutierrez is the associate director at the Eugene Peterson Center for the Christian Imagination at Western Theological Seminary. More of his creative work can be found at [printandpoem.com](http://printandpoem.com).

existence and places every living person in a position of complete and utter dependence on God.

Feeling fragile, the psalmist cries out to God with a series of rapid-fire petitions: Have compassion. Satisfy us. Make us glad. Manifest your power. Show us your favor. Establish the work of our hands. All six petitions are infused with urgency, but only one is repeated: “Establish the work of our hands.” Ending the psalm with this repeated plea emphasizes the sobering reality that sits distressingly at the margins of everything we do—that our work will quickly fade after we die. It would be easy for the psalmist to give up at this point, but instead, the author arrives at the same conclusion as Steward Brand: on Monday morning, we get up and get busy because the future depends on it.

Repeating the petition for God to “establish the work of our hands” reinforces the truth that while we are utterly dependent upon God, each of us has an important part to play in God’s big story of redemption. Because God’s desire is to partner with humanity, our small contributions matter. We work faithfully while trusting in God’s ability to oversee the whole and shape our work toward something positive, lifegiving, and lasting.

For many, the Clock of the Long Now will be an important symbol reminding us to act for a more sustainable future, but for Christians, the call to responsible stewardship has been ringing for thousands of years through the command God gives in the second chapter of Genesis. Immediately after



God creates humans, God gives them a good reason to get up on Monday morning: to “work it (the garden) and take care of it” (v. 15). To “work” and “take care” go hand in hand and function as the gas pedal and the brakes. For generations, humanity has diligently worked to develop creation’s potential without much thought to protecting it. The result is polluted air, soil, rivers, and oceans. Some ecosystems are on the brink of collapse. Scientists are sounding the alarm as global temperatures rise, glaciers melt, and weather systems intensify.

Given these immense challenges, the future is uncertain. The Clock of the Long Now team, hoping for the best but realistic about the difficult road ahead, built a contingency plan into the clock’s design. In the event of war, pandemic, environmental catastrophe, or societal collapse that prevents anyone from winding the clock, it can work independently for more than a century by harnessing energy from the naturally occurring heat and cold cycles of the high desert. But to keep

the clock ticking for 10,000 years, humanity will need to be healthy and the planet habitable.

Although straining toward a more sustainable and responsible future is critically important, our ultimate hope has never been in the human ability to work hard and engineer better solutions. The opening of Psalm 90 directs our faith: “Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

With our hope firmly established in God, we repent of our greed, wastefulness, and mindless consumption. Then we faithfully labor at the task of stewarding the earth—working it and watching over it. We do this believing that our world belongs to God and that God is faithful to work God’s resurrection power even in the gravest circumstances.

When completed, the Clock of the Long Now will tick for the next 10,000 years in the remote mountains of West Texas. As it marks centuries and inspires long-term thinking, we get to work on Monday morning, praying the words of Psalm 90:12: “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” **B**

1. When was the last time you planned for something “long term”? What was the time frame?
2. What “work of your hands” would you want God to establish? Why is this important to you?

[READ MORE](#) [ONLINE](#)

# A Multiethnic Bible Commentary Highlights the Revelation 7:9 Vision

**IN A FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND** volume, *The New Testament in Color: A Multiethnic Bible Commentary* offers biblical commentary that is multiethnic, diverse, and contextual. This resource is edited by New Testament scholar Esau McCaulley and co-edited by Janette H. Ok, Osvaldo Padilla, and Amy Peeler.

In the introduction, McCaulley explains the circumstances that led to the creation of this significant resource for the Christian church: “I was sitting in a coffee shop, books taking up too much space on the tiny table in front of me, bemoaning the lack of attention the academy paid to the Black church and the distinctive interpretative habits of African American church leaders and scholars. My time in religious higher education had signaled in ways large and small its belief that the tradition that shaped me had little to say to the rest of the world. The important ideas and trends arose in Europe or North American spaces.”


As McCaulley lamented his experience, he was struck by an idea that led to this commentary: “I often complained about White scholars neglecting African American voices, but I knew little about Asian American biblical interpretation, its theological and historical developments, and the gifts it offered to the body of Christ. The same was true regarding Latino/a interpretation and the Bible-reading habits of First Nations and Indigenous peoples.”

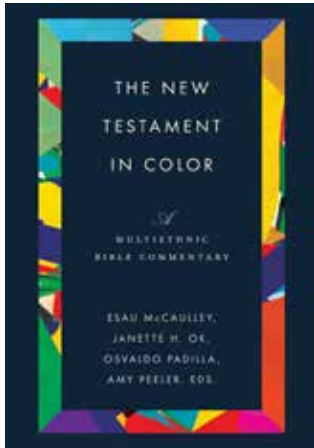
McCaulley invited three scholars from various ethnicities—Ok, Padilla, and

Peeler—to join his project as co-editors and recruited a diverse team of contributing writers.

This insightful commentary includes biblical interpretation from Black, Asian American, Hispanic, Turtle Island, and majority-culture perspectives on topics such as “Gender in the New Testament,” “Resources for the Mental Health of the Oppressed in the New Testament,” “Multilingualism

in the New Testament,” and “Immigrants and the Kingdom of God: Do They Have a Home in God’s City?” All of the commentary’s contributing writers flesh out the foundational idea of this resource: “The Bible is never read from nowhere, but always from somewhere.”

This is an excellent resource for clergy and lay people that highlights the heavenly vision portrayed in Revelation 7:9: “There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” (IVP Academic) 



Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer and a member of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ont.



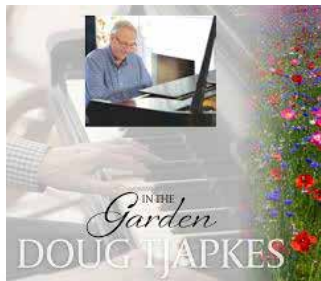
## So God Made a Grandma: Caring, Faithful, Creative, Devoted, Wise, Generous, Resilient—Just Like You

By Leslie Means

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In her follow-up to *So God Made a Mother*, author Leslie Means shares her experiences of her grandmother and invites other women to relate theirs, too. Some of the contributing authors are grandmothers, others are granddaughters writing about their grandmothers, and some talk about having an adopted grandmother.

In brief essays, contributors repeatedly return to the theme of God working through their grandmothers or through the experience of being a grandmother to plant the seeds of faith in children. Contributor Hadassah Treu sums up this truth, writing, “God is a generational God. The seeds in one generation become mature plants in the next, bearing fruits in even more generations ahead.” Recommended as an encouraging, meaningful gift to show love and appreciation to grandmothers and mothers on Mother’s Day. (Tyndale Momentum)

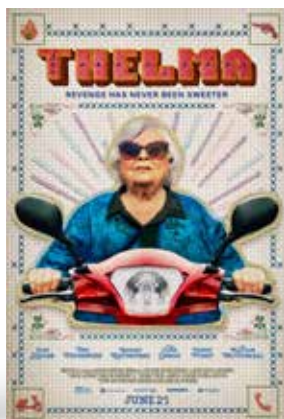


## In the Garden

*By Doug Tjapkes*

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

For this anthology album, Doug Tjapkes sits down at the piano and records a number of hymns he has loved over the years. The 88-year-old Tjapkes plays freestyle, changing keys and chords as he plays through hymns and gospel songs old and new. His renditions include melodic references to other songs, such as “I Love You, Lord” in his version of “My Jesus, I Love Thee” or a line from “It’s a Wonderful World” at the end of “This Is My Father’s World.” Tjapkes knows the songs and his instrument well enough that he plays around with the songs, adding color and interest to each one. You can get a free CD by making a donation of any size to Humanity for Prisoners in Grand Haven, Mich., and then emailing Tjapkes at [thedouger@comcast.net](mailto:thedouger@comcast.net).



## Thelma

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

Thelma (June Squibb) is 93 years old. Her daily routine is filled with hearing aid adjustments, solving word puzzles, brewing Keurig coffee, and slowly watching daylight fade while she relives fond memories of her recently deceased husband.

When Thelma becomes the victim of a scammer, she decides to take matters into her own hands. Taking inspiration from a Tom Cruise *Mission: Impossible* movie, she decides to track down the scammer herself.

Thelma is a movie that stays light, even when exploring heavier themes. Much of the humor comes from subverting the action movie genre with slow-motion set pieces performed by actors in their 90s. In the end, the movie can be summed up with the single line flashed across the screen during one moment in the movie: Asking for help is a sign of strength. (PG-13, Disney+)



## Good Dirt

*By Charmaine Wilkerson*

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Perfect for book clubs, this wise and enthralling novel from the author of *Black Cake* weaves between the present—a young woman mysteriously jilted at the altar—and her ancestors’ past as enslaved people paving the way for her with courage and ingenuity. I didn’t think I would like this as much as I adored *Black Cake*, but Wilkerson has done it again, hooking me early and keeping me turning pages until the book’s hope-filled resolution. Though this is a mainstream novel, notes of faith appear, and the content is PG except for a couple of brief nongraphic yet sensual scenes. Riveting and brimming with truth. (Penguin Random House)

## The Lowdown

**From the author of *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*:** In *Becoming the Pastor’s Wife*, Beth Allison Barr draws on her experience of being a pastor’s wife for 25 years and her academic expertise to trace the history of the role of pastor’s wife, showing how it helped and hurt women in conservative Protestant traditions. (Brazos Press)

## **Season 2 of Star Wars**

**Prequel:** *Andor*, also known as *Star Wars: Andor* and *Andor: A Star Wars Story* for its second season follows thief-turned-rebel spy Cassian Andor during the five years leading up to the events of *Star Wars* (1977) and *Rogue One* (2016). (April 22, Disney+)

## ***The King of Kings*:**

This animated film for Easter is loosely based on Charles Dickens’ short story *The Life of Our Lord*. In the film, Dickens shares the story of Jesus Christ with his son, Walter. As his father narrates, Walter becomes captivated with the events of Jesus’ life. (PG, in theaters April 11)

## **New Book Celebrates Jane Austen’s 250th:**

Sisters Henrietta and Charlotte Stevenson strike up a correspondence with Jane Austen’s last surviving sibling, 91-year-old retired admiral Sir Francis Austen, and then invite themselves to visit.

## The Most Underrated Book of the Bible

I would argue that no other book of the Bible puts this life in its proper perspective as does Ecclesiastes.

**THE MOST UNDERRATED BOOK** of the Bible would have to be Ecclesiastes. While it contains deep wisdom on life, the book is sometimes passed over because of its unsavory negativity. Its unpopularity is understandable.

The opening is a drag:

“Meaningless! Meaningless!”  
says the Teacher.  
“Utterly meaningless!  
Everything is meaningless.”

This wet blanket won't win many fans. Declaring that all efforts are as empty as “a chasing after the wind” will not inspire any motivational posters.

In chapter 2, the teacher continues: “So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. ... So my heart began to despair” (2:17, 20).

If you are looking for a happy ending, you will need to look elsewhere. The teacher's words end the same way they began (12:8):

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says  
the Teacher.  
“Everything is meaningless!”

So why study Ecclesiastes? Some might say it deserves its negative reputation. However, I would argue that no other book of the Bible puts this life in its proper perspective as does Ecclesiastes.



Rev. Aaron Vriesman has been the pastor of North Blendon Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Mich., since 2006. Follow him on YouTube and Substack.

In Ecclesiastes, the teacher's biggest stumbling block in life is death. Chapter 2 outlines the teacher's experiences pursuing all the usual things we think will give us pleasure: laughter, wealth, sex, and possessions. “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired” (2:10). The result was dissatisfaction. All of it was “meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (2:11). Even wisdom itself is “meaningless” (2:12-15). Death puts an end to all our hopes and accomplishments. Eventually, we

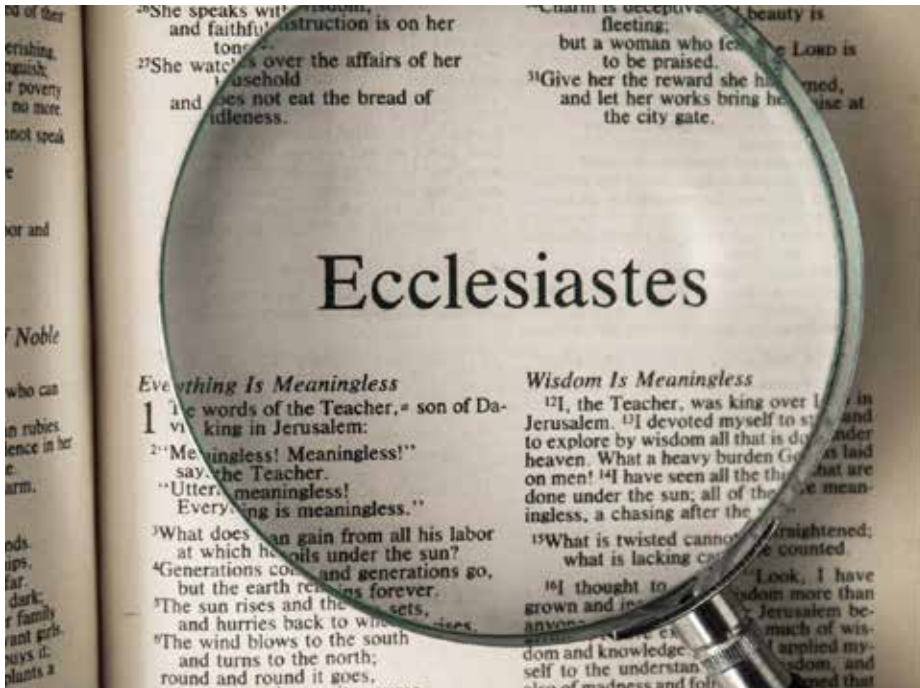
will be only a name on a headstone (if that), or a mysterious, long-forgotten name in a genealogy chart.

This adds a new dimension to the consequence of eating from the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. Death means not only the cessation of life, but the fleeting significance of all activities in life. Death means our lives' imprints will eventually be lost to the winds of time. Death renders life meaningless. Our work, efforts, gains and achievements will eventually disappear. All that we worry about and work toward will someday vanish. The teacher puts it this way (9:5-6):

For the living know that  
they will die,  
but the dead know nothing;  
they have no further reward,  
and even their name is forgotten.  
Their love, their hate  
and their jealousy have long  
since vanished;  
never again will they have a part  
in anything that happens  
under the sun.

Reading Ecclesiastes instills a sobering view of life. The worries we have today are not worth the worry. Winning the rat race of life is not worth the time and energy. Most of what we think is so important will be inconsequential in the fullness of time.

I find that Ecclesiastes has a calming effect on me when I am anxious about the ongoing demands of life. According to Ecclesiastes, meeting deadlines and demands is less like walking a tight-rope and more like a friendly game of cards. Instead of trying to be the best or to please everyone, we can choose to see stressors as fun. Then we can focus on enjoying God's gifts: spending time with family and friends, savoring tasty food, or taking a deep breath. The Teacher repeatedly recommends taking joy in life (2:24; 3:22; 5:18; 8:15;




9:7-9). Work is for putting food on the table, not for proving one's worth. Possessions are for using and enjoying, not for keeping score. When it comes to living life, enjoyment is better than anything we could brag about.

Sometimes we need to be told to settle down and enjoy the simple pleasures of life. However, in light of the whole of Scripture, life is more than something to enjoy.

Ecclesiastes illuminates a whole new aspect of our salvation. Under sin, life is meaningless, and all efforts are for vanity. Death means we will vanish into history, forever forgotten. But Jesus Christ brings meaning to a meaningless world.

Jesus joined this meaningless life. All but a few of his years on Earth are undocumented, lost to history. Scripture records only one incident from between his infancy and his few years of ministry about 30 years later. All the rest of Jesus' work and words of those decades fell into the "meaningless" category of Ecclesiastes. He

In Christ, the ordinary tasks of life are now valued service to the King of kings (Col. 3:24). In Christ, taking our last breath no longer renders life meaningless, but is the beginning of a tremendous gain of heavenly glory (Phil. 1:21, 23).

Don't let the dismal notes of Ecclesiastes keep you from this underappreciated part of Scripture that sets our sights on things above instead of merely on what is under the sun. 

became like us in every way so that he would save us in every way. He entered our meaningless existence to give it eternal significance. When the Son of God himself opts to walk the meaningless road, the pathway blooms with purpose. Of all the ways he could have entered this world or lived his life, he chose the common life, bringing heavenly value to what is otherwise meaningless. By his resurrection from the dead, life now lasts forever. The defeat of death is also the defeat of meaninglessness. While the things of this world continue to pass away into oblivion (1 John 2:15-17), there is an eternal life in which we already participate that will never pass away (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

# MISSIONS UPSIDE DOWN



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*Digital Media Production  
students helped film the Missions  
Upside Down series!*

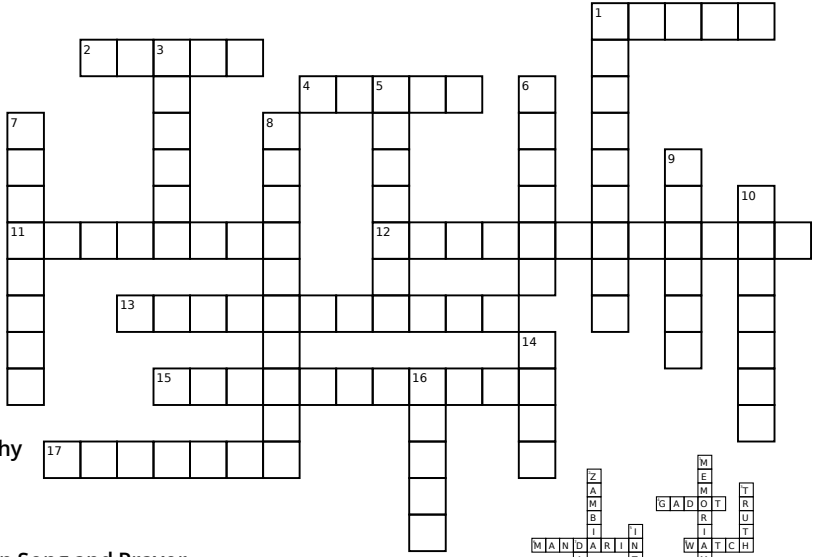




Find the answers to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions in the next print issue. (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

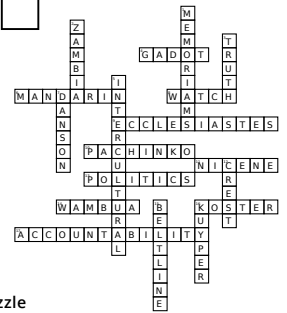
**Down**

- 1. World \_\_\_\_\_ of Reformed Churches
- 3. Athens (Ont.) CRC began hosting \_\_\_\_\_ Zone in September 2024
- 5. This Christian school is a safe haven in Lucky Summer
- 6. A pastor's family sees homesteading project as "teaching people how to walk with God in the \_\_\_\_\_"
- 7. A Christian Reformed Church in Langley, B.C.
- 8. The Christian Reformed Church supports three of these ministry centers in Canada
- 9. \_\_\_\_\_ *at Sea* celebrates a certain Jane's 250th birthday
- 10. This 8-year-old lives in Honduras
- 14. \_\_\_\_\_ McCauley is general editor of *The New Testament in Color*
- 16. A feeling more toxic than guilt that makes us feel unworthy



**Across**

- 1. A woman in need of mittens
- 2. A Holy Week prayer service hosted by Christians United in Song and Prayer
- 4. This is being built in the Sierra Diablo mountains
- 11. This village lies deep in an Indian forest
- 12. An underrated book of the Bible
- 13. A discipline that is more than just numbers and equations
- 15. God uses these to bring new life
- 17. Doug \_\_\_\_\_ plays freestyle piano versions of hymns and gospel songs old and new



Solution to the March 2025 puzzle



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**LIVING HOPE CRC** (Sarnia, ON) is seeking a dedicated and compassionate pastor to lead our congregation in worship, spiritual growth, and community outreach. The ideal candidate will be deeply rooted in Reformed theology, passionate about preaching and teaching God's Word, and committed to pastoral care. To apply or for more information contact Living Hope at [churchoffice@livinghopeccr.com](mailto:churchoffice@livinghopeccr.com)

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## Congregational Announcements

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## Retirement

**REV. EDWARD C. VISSER** The council and congregation of Cutlerville East CRC congratulate Rev. Edward Visser on his retirement. Over the past thirty-eight years Pastor Ed and Lorinda have served Calvin CRC (Le Mars, IA), Fellowship CRC (Big Rapids, MI), Webster CRC (Webster, NY) and since October of 2018, Cutlerville East CRC in Grand Rapids, MI. Pastor Ed's last services will be the AM and PM worship services on Sunday, April 27. Congratulations and well wishes may be sent to Pastor Ed Visser, c/o Cutlerville East CRC, 501 68th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49548.

## Obituaries

**DEVRIES, ERNST**, of Ponoka AB, passed to glory last November. He is survived by his wife Winnie, and his children, Peter, Miriam (Andrew) Aukema, Mathias, Hendrik (Kim), Roger (Michaela) as well as eight grandchildren.

**JONKER, BETTY (BOUMA)** May 13, 1929 Jan 30, 2025 Age 95 of Inver Grove Heights, MN. Betty played piano & organ for her church & a piano teacher. She had unwavering faith in her Lord & Savior. Survived by Loren Leanne Karen Kurt Brad. Preceded in death by husband Leo

**RADIUS, DAVID A.** of Grand Rapids, MI, 86, turned the final corner on his long journey through Alzheimer's Disease and ran into the arms of Jesus on February 8, 2025. Dave is survived by his wife of 67 years, Rosemary; children Mark (Karla) Radius, Stephen (Laurel) Radius, and Cheryl (George) Felton; his sister, Ruth; and a host of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews and other extended family members. David considered it all joy to serve the Kingdom for many years with a deep passion for supporting the spread of the gospel through several roles at Christian Reformed World Missions. He considered himself blessed beyond measure. Dave's full obituary is available at [zaagman.com](http://zaagman.com).

**VANDERZEE, CHESTER** age 93 of Volga, SD began celebrating Jesus fully on February 14, 2025! Chester is survived by his wife, Betty; children: Karen (Ron) Knutson, Darrel (Carol) VanderZee, Thelene (Mike) Tornow, Sheila (Brian) Kruis; 11 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren. Chester served in the Korean War and was a teacher for 34 years. He also served Jesus faithfully through CRWRC World Relief, Habitat for Humanity, Lions Club, Hope Haven Wheelchair Ministry, Gideons, American Legion and various prison ministries.

**WIERENGA, RUTH E** (80) of Grand Rapids MI passed away on 2-12-25. She lived with acute myelofibrosis for 3.5 years, causing severe nosebleeds. Ruth was a med tech in hospitals in MI, Rehoboth NM & CO. She is survived by her sister Gladys Wierenga, 2 nieces & 2 nephews. Her parents John & Theresa B Wierenga and brother Dr Art Wierenga predeceased her.

## Anniversary

**WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS**

**ZEVENBERGEN, LARRY-SYLVA (VERBRUG-GE)** 81662 St Hwy 251 Hollandale MN 56045

celebrated their 60th anniversary on Feb. 26, 2025. Children: Chad-Jan, Kent-Tami, Kurt-Sheila, Carla-Matt Eenigenburg. 12 grandchildren. Prov. 3:6

## Birthday

### BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS



**HOGAN, ANNIE (LAUT-ENBACH)** celebrated 100 years on January 24, 2025. Celebrating with her are her 5 children, 15 grandchildren, and 21 great-grandchildren. Annie is thankful for God's many blessings in her long life. Birthday greetings can be sent to her c/o Artesia Christian Home, 11614 E. 183rd St., Artesia, CA 90701

ings in her long life. Birthday greetings can be sent to her c/o Artesia Christian Home, 11614 E. 183rd St., Artesia, CA 90701

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## 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!

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# BANNER

## Celebration and Grief

There are no words you can say to mend a child's truly broken and mourning heart.



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

**THE PARTY BEGAN** when the pizza delivery guy arrived. That afternoon, we'd joyfully met with social workers and signed papers to finalize the adoptions of our youngest children—the last step before a judge would stamp the documents and make them legally Hoffs.

Now, alongside a dear friend and her children, it was time to celebrate. For the rest of the evening, the walls echoed with laughter. Between slices of pizza and bites of cake, the kids made crafts, swung on the swings in our living room, and had a minor Nerf gun war using umbrellas as shields.

Everyone from my friend's littlest toddler to my 28-year-old son was in on the fun as we feted the near ending of our younger kids' eight-year odyssey in government care and their adoptions into a family to whom they had come to mean everything.

But then came the next night.

As I tucked one of our younger kids into bed, tears began to fall. Sometimes a joyous occasion such as signing adoption papers can bring up tremendous grief for a child who has already lost everything that most mattered to them—their first family.

For the next few hours, I held this child as they sobbed. There are no words you can say to mend a child's truly broken and mourning heart other than to let them know that in their sorrow, you are beside them. It's OK to cry.

It doesn't mean they don't love our family—they do. They were genuinely eager and happy to sign the adoption papers. Love isn't a competition, and it doesn't occur in isolation. Love and grief can coexist in juxtaposition.

It took me a while to understand this. For me, adoption is the most joyous of joys through which God brought my children to me. Adoption, to me, is pure celebration.

But over the 15 years since our journey in older-child adoption began, God has shown me that my perspective differs from my kids'.


For them, adoption was born of the most heart-wrenching, brutal losses. That this loss of their original families came after very difficult, tumultuous years isn't a factor in their heartbreak. God created little kids to bond with and love their parents, and when they are taken from them, their hearts often shatter.

The way grief is expressed isn't always clear-cut either. It was a very challenging parental learning curve to realize that some hard things our family faced, including years upon years of intense defiance, blasting anger, behavior issues, or significant attachment struggles, were actually expressions of profound grief. When I finally made that connection, a deeper sense of empathy and compassion grew in my heart.

This is something that God, our loving, tender Father, consistently and perfectly shows to us, the children God adopted.

Psalms 147:3-5 tells us, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit."

Many are familiar with the part about the Lord healing the brokenhearted and binding their wounds. But it's the word "understanding" that leaps out at me.

When we go through the hard things of life—and feel the resultant very big feelings—our Father isn't just there to bring healing and slap a bandage on our wounds. He understands the hurt, sorrow, and losses behind those wounds. He gets it, whispering, "Go ahead and cry. I'm here." 

# Safer Churches in Every Language



Every church should be a safe church. That's why Thrive's abuse prevention work is so vital to building communities where everyone can safely worship and grow in faith. Thrive has many resources currently available to support congregations—but most of these tools are only available in English.

The important work of abuse prevention has been going on in the Christian Reformed denomination for over 30 years. This is something to celebrate! We are eager to continue this work of ensuring the value of each person is honored and justice and healing are promoted in every congregation and in every language.

Will you partner with Thrive to help us translate our wealth of safer churches and denominational resources?

**Donate at [crcna.org/Thrive](https://crcna.org/Thrive)**



## A Couple of Women

They  
approached  
the tomb.

“Let us go then, you and I, to the place our Rabbi lies.”  
They clung together,  
Women’s faces that could not smile,  
Ravaged by death, defiled and lost in grief.  
They approached the tomb,  
Morning darkness  
Greeted them, but the stone, hid from sight,  
Was not there. Stealthily they moved,  
Approached the tomb, empty,  
Dark as the maw of a fish. Where a stone  
Had rolled away, the ghastly, empty sepulcher  
Promised greater grief. One of the Marys,  
The Magdalene, deigned to take a furtive glance  
Into the place her Teacher lay.  
She saw a great light,  
Heavenly illumination!  
White as bleached linen—no, whiter—  
Adorning a being so blithe, so sweet, filled  
With utter peace, who beckoned her inside,  
She stumbled in when God’s messenger  
Announced the truth, incredible truth,  
“He is not here. He is risen.”



Agnes Fisher is a writer and teacher who was born in the Netherlands and grew up in New Jersey. She attends Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, Mich.



Mouth agape, eyes transfixed, filled with fear,  
filled with joy she believed.  
Mary laughed. The news too great to  
Keep, told the others. “Let us go, then, you and I,  
To where the disciples wait,” she cried.  
The women ran. “Our Savior lives!”



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